

# Arthur Gredington and the mystery of the Beswick 190 Rearing Horsemen

By Sophie Jackson

'Arthur Gredington's range of 190 Rearing Horsemen is one of the most popular ever produced by the company.' So states the new John Beswick Ltd website. The quote is easy to take at face value, but delve a little deeper and it seems the '190 rearing horsemen' are something of a cyber-myth that has infiltrated the Beswick collector's market.

Arthur Gredington is arguably the most famous sculptor to work with Beswick. He joined the company in 1939, having just finished studying at the Royal College for three years. He was 32 and there is little information on his life pre-Beswick, or even how he came to win a national scholarship to the Royal College in the first place. His drawing skills were superb. He had a special affinity for animal subjects, able to capture the spirit and nature of a horse, dog or cow in a quick sketch. When he translated this into pottery he created ornaments that seemed ready to spring off their plinths and come to life. It is not surprising he quickly became the first resident modeller at Beswick. His job was to sculpt the subjects the designer chose, sometimes using drawings the designer had already created.

## The Mystery Unmasked

But what of his 190 rearing horsemen? Arthur produced 430 unique models, including collaborative work, 74 were horses, the largest series he produced, followed by birds of which he sculpted 72. The total Beswick horse designs is about 150, making the 190 rearing horsemen, including variations, unfeasible. Taking into account the number of colourways many of Arthur's models were produced in, but discounting those produced after he left the factory a figure of 190 horses can easily be arrived at, and more besides. It seems this is the core of the confusion - it is possible to collect 190 Gredington horses, in fact it is more like 200+, but the rearing horsemen are only a small fraction of the range. A further clue as to how the myth arose comes on another website where it is remarked Gredington's 190 rearing horsemen were the founding pieces of the Beswick horse range. This is accurate in one regard. Gredington did produce the first realistic horse for Beswick, which was a lifelike model of the racehorse Bois Roussel, model No. 701, winner of the Epsom Derby in 1938. He was a brown horse, but this did not prevent Beswick from issuing him in a range of colours including blue and rocking horse grey! Bois Roussel was issued in 1939 followed by several Foal designs, models No. 728, 763/1421, 766, 815/F815 and 836, then a shire mare, model No. 818/H818, and a jogging mare, model No. 855/1090/H855. Finally in 1940 model No. 868 was issued, called Huntsman (on rearing horse).

There were two versions of 868, one with the jockey in an orange-red or scarlet jacket cut away at the waist. The rider looked placid on the violently rearing horse, his back straight, his arms almost restful as his hands gripped the reins. In the second version introduced in 1952 Gredington gave greater animation to rider and horse. Now the huntsman is flung back by the motion of his steed and has to take a firmer grip on the reins. The horse has a more fluid line and looks more accurate in its motion. Other alterations included giving the horse's head an Arabian appearance and giving the rider a full jacket. The commonest model of version two with a brown horse can be found for around £175. These have fallen in price from around £250 a few years ago. Colour makes a difference, a version two in grey can sell for £650, while a version two in chestnut with damage to an ear sold for £2,124 in January, and a version two in rocking horse grey, the most sought after colour, sold for £2,588. Version one is harder to come by, but the price for a brown horse of this version does not often exceed £500. Bargains can be had at times as not all sellers are aware of the style change, particularly on sites such as ebay. Finding version one in any other colour but brown can prove quite challenging. Version one was discontinued in 1952, grey was the rarest of the colours produced, being only available between c1948 and 1952, and today, finding a grey version one Huntsman for less than £1,700 is a feat in itself.

## The Welsh Cob

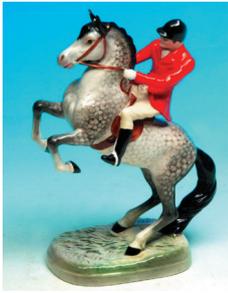
Gredington's second, and last rearing horse was the Welsh Cob model No.1014. The first version in black appeared probably about 1943, and was followed by a version in brown. Over the years various colourways were introduced with rocking horse grey appearing in 1945 and white and palomino appearing in 1961. The Welsh Cob was very popular and was slightly redesigned in 1967, after Gredington had retired, to feature a loose flying tail, rather than one attached to the body. The Welsh cob does not fetch the high prices of the rearing huntsman. A version one in brown sold for £65 at auction, while on ebay the same model is available for £20. Interestingly the second version of the model with loose hanging tail often fetches greater prices, probably because the figures were quickly discontinued, for instance version two in black was only available for about a year. Version two Welsh Cobs are usually priced around the £85-£125 mark with the rarer colours, white, grey, black and chestnut, going for more. One particularly rare model is version one in piebald. So little is known about it that even the official Beswick catalogue fails to list a price. It is not even known when it was issued or discontinued. If it does exist it would be the holy grail of Beswick rearing horses.

## Fakes and Frauds

It is said that prior to the outbreak of war a representative of Beswick travelled to the Hertwig ceramics factory in Germany to get some ideas for the company - bear in mind this was before Beswick had produced any horses. On his return to England a range of horses was produced with rather marked similarities to the Hertwig models. Gredington came to Beswick in 1939, so we can presume he was not the representative sent to Germany, but he may easily have been given sketches to sculpt his designs from, that were based on the Hertwig horses. Certain early Gredington models are similar to Hertwig designs. Foal 728 looks almost identical to Hertwig's braced bay foal. For those collecting Gredington's rearing horses the real interest is Hertwig's rearing horse figure, in production around the same time as the Beswick design. The two horses can appear identical but a closer assessment shows the Hertwig model is less detailed and the painting less precise, but the key is the ornament is often stamped 'foreign' or has the Hertwig stamp. But Hertwig's are being offered at online auctions as Beswick horses, the seller often covering themselves by putting 'Beswick?'. The novice collector needs to beware of a 'bargain' which is actually a Hertwig, especially as some sellers are now even describing the Hertwig rearing horse as a Welsh Cob!

Beswick offers itself to a great deal of fraud. In many cases people buy broken Beswick horses, restore them and then over-spray to mask repairs. In some cases the over-spraying is obvious and a comparison with a genuine Beswick horse shows the change, but in other cases the re-spray is successful. Recently a rare piebald version of the Welsh Cob was offered on ebay and sold for several thousand. It caused a great deal of controversy as many had the suspicion it was a normal Welsh Cob that had been re-sprayed. The seller claimed it was the genuine item, but the fact they he often bought broken Beswick horses raised alarm bells. Genuine or not, the Welsh Cob sold well and it now seems the door is open for opportunists who see a market in re-spraying common colour Beswick's in a rarer shade.

Everything surrounding Gredington's rearing horses has a hint of the mysterious to it, from the man himself who was erroneously listed in a collector's guide as dying in 1971 when he actually died in 1976, to the myth of the 190 rearing horsemen and the quest for the rarest and possibly non-existent colours. If you do want to collect rearing horses by Gredington there are actually 33 variants, and you can expect to spend as little as £20 on one and as much as several thousand on another, and if you happen to spot a piebald Welsh cob make sure to inspect it thoroughly before parting with any cash.



Beswick model of a rearing horse in the Rocking Horse colourway, impressed No 868 to base. *Wotton Auction Rooms, Wotton under Edge. Mar 08. HP: £2,200. ABP: £2,596.*



Beswick Huntsman, on rearing horse, style two, chestnut, 868, gloss (tiny nibble to horse's right ear). *Charterhouse, Sherborne. Jan 12. HP: £1,800. ABP: £2,124.*



Beswick huntsman on rearing horse, model 868, 10in. *Louis Taylor, Stoke on Trent. Sep 03. HP: £700. ABP: £826.*



Group of five Beswick horses and a hound. *Gorringes, Lewes. Feb 06. HP: £320. ABP: £377.*



Beswick horse and jockey, light dapple grey, 1827, gloss. *Charterhouse, Sherborne. May 09. HP: £280. ABP: £330.*



Beswick Huntsman on rearing horse 686 and three foxhounds. *Boldon Auction Galleries, Tyne & Wear. Sep 05. HP: £220. ABP: £259.*



Two Beswick horse models. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Dec 04. HP: £200. ABP: £236.*



Beswick model of huntsman on a rearing horse, 10in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Aug 06. HP: £170. ABP: £200.*



Beswick Huntsman, rearing horse, No.868, brown. *Richard Winterton, Lichfield. Jan 08. HP: £150. ABP: £177.*



Beswick huntsman on rearing horse, mould 868, second version, brown horse (9.5in.), and a Beswick wall-hanging huntsman on horse-back, mould 1505 (6.5in. high), some restoration to each. *Gorringes, Lewes. Jan 05. HP: £140. ABP: £165.*



Beswick horse, modelled as a hunter, grey colouring. *Bellmans, Wisborough Green. Sep 09. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



Beswick horses, cantering shire in glossy bay, No. DA45, horse in glossy bay, No. DA51, Shetland pony in mottle bay, No. DA47, Shetland pony foal in mottle bay, No. DA79 also donkey & donkey foal in grey, range from 3.5in to 8.75in tall. (6) *A F Brock & Co Ltd, Stockport. Aug 10. HP: £105. ABP: £123.*



Beswick figure of a rearing Palomino Horse, base marked Beswick England 1014, 11in. *Denhams, Warnham. Oct 04. HP: £100. ABP: £118.*



Beswick huntsman on rearing horse, No. 868, second version, brown, 25cm high. *Richard Winterton*

*Auctioneers, Lichfield. Jul 10. HP: £90. ABP: £106.*



Eight various Beswick horses. (8) *Rosebery's, London. Aug 06. HP: £90. ABP: £106.*



Beswick model of a prancing horse, model no.1014, round mark with a Beswick model of a cantering shire, tallest 10.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 08. HP: £90. ABP: £106.*



Beswick figure of a Welsh Cob (rearing), brown gloss, model No 1014, designed by Arthur Gredington, 10in high. *Golding Young & Co, Grantham. Feb 06. HP: £55. ABP: £64.*



Beswick Horse 701. Arab Horse 1771. and Foal 1813. *Potteries Specialist Auction, Stoke on Trent. May 09. HP: £55. ABP: £64.*



Two Beswick horses. *Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Feb 08. HP: £50. ABP: £59.*



Collection of 2 Beswick horses and a Beswick? horse and a Beswick? donkey, the Beswick horse carries oval Beswick mark to underside and original green & gold Beswick label. (donkey, back leg AF) *Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Apr 05. HP: £45. ABP: £53.*



Two Beswick horses, one brown gloss, one piebald (both AF). *Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Oct 05. HP: £45. ABP: £53.*



Beswick Horse figurine, stallion brown gloss with white glaze. *Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Dec 06. HP: £45. ABP: £53.*



Beswick rearing cob 1014. *Stroud Auctions Ltd, Stroud. Aug 12. HP: £38. ABP: £44.*