Battle of the Plough Kings


The most coveted categories apart from the overall champion were "best strike-out", "best crown", "best ins and outs", "best formed land" and "best finish". Events were also staged for the women drivers, best horse, best horse and sulky, and best driver. Prizes were always presented at a banquet after the ploughing had finished and a dance lasting long into the night would conclude proceedings.

Charles Pratt always believed there was more to driving a plough than yelling at a team of horses. He saw ploughing as an art form.

Indeed, Pratt's trusted horse, Toby, was almost as well-known as Pratt himself. Toby, said to be particularly intelligent, was capable of leading the other horses in the team without Pratt needing to use the reins.

Pratt could complete his work without leaving a mark on the ploughing. To do this on the final round, he hooked his team in single file and put away the reins, the leader (Toby) taking a wider circle, to bring the plough on to the land at the exact point. None of the horses tramped or disturbed the smooth even lines so essential to a good finish.

For the final ploughing match in 1908, the "Champion of Champions" received a gold medal and prizemoney of £55, which was a good deal of money at the time. All the regular competitors attended except for one – Charles Pratt had lost interest in the matches due to the deaths of two of his children three months earlier.

A jeweller in Coolamon presented Charles Pratt with a silver miniature of the Pratt plough as a memento of his role in establishing the ploughing matches.

Compiled by Wayne Doubleday. Special thanks to Geoff Haddon for supplying the information used to compile this article.

References: The Daily Advertiser, August 15, 1907; Back to Coolamon Souvenir – 1956, pages 47-49, Down the Wide Road - A History of Murray & District by Alby Armstrong, Pages 31-32