

# The Osmington White Horse

The Osmington White Horse was carved into the chalk of the South Dorset Ridgeway in 1808 to commemorate the visits of George III to Weymouth. The image of the King on his favourite grey charger has long been the subject of local myth and legend, many commentators have argued over dates and details of the construction.

A Working Group, including Dorset County Council, The Osmington Society, Dorset AONB, Natural England, English Heritage and local councillors has been working on a plan to restore this chalk hill figure since 2008. The condition of the White Horse was of major concern after earlier attempts at restoration had led to unforeseen problems. The process has been long. There have been many issues to consider, not least that the White Horse is legally protected and is both a Scheduled Ancient Monument and a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

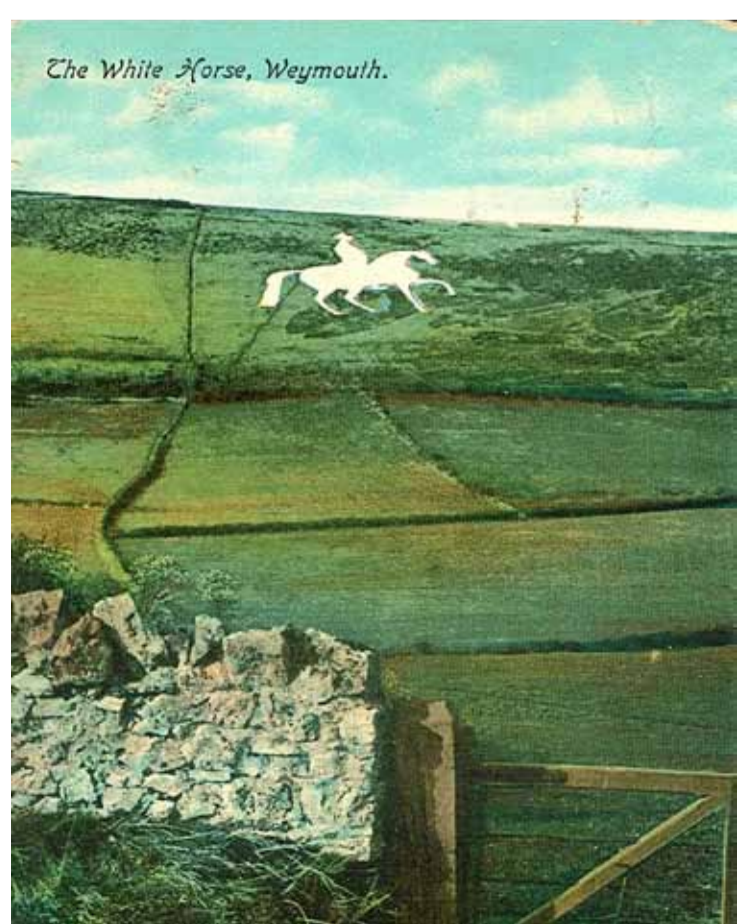
The condition of the horse is not a new problem as this commentator of 130 years or so ago states:

*The owld White Harse wants zetting to rights,  
If some un ull promise good cheer,  
They'll gee un a scrape to kip un in zhape,  
And a'll last for many a year.'*  
Jarvis Harker c1877

More recently volunteers, Scout groups and Army cadets amongst others have tried to keep the horse presentable. In 1956 Colonel Alan Parkes was serving with the Royal Tank Regiment and based at Chickerell TA Camp whilst awaiting orders to leave for Suez. He recalls his own involvement with the White Horse:

*"We had been to the Officer's Mess at Bovington for lunch one day and on the return we came past the Horse and the Squadron Leader of the day remarked:  
"That horse is a bloody mess, we've got nothing to do waiting here why don't we clean it up."*

*He immediately knocked on the door of the Town Hall where a man with a top hat on... let us in to see the Mayor who looked surprised to say the least, but welcomed the chance and made the usual arrangements to supply the equipment... but most importantly the brewer from Dorchester would supply a barrel of beer per day in order to keep us adequately suscitated [sic]... my responsibility personally was the tail and I had no idea until we stood and looked at it what a huge thing it was that we'd undertaken. The rest of the regiment, the squadron was to do the rest of it... but the tail was my main concern, I would've thought for the best part of a fortnight."*



Postcard published by Welch & Sons, 1905 to 1918



Osmington White Horse, 2007  
Photograph by Steve Fookes



Colonel Alan Parkes  
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Colonel Alan Parkes, 1946