Hands On Learning
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READING MUSEUM SERVICE

HORSE DEALER H192

This figure represents a nineteenth century horse dealer. Horses were an essential part of nineteenth century economic and social life in England and trading in horses could be a profitable business. It is estimated that in the late nineteenth century there were 3.3 million horses in Britain. Horses were used for a wide variety of purposes. They were still the chief means of power on most farms. In addition they were also used in the countryside for hunting and racing. In the cities they were essential for the transportation of people and materials. Horses that were no longer in a fit condition to perform any of these roles were sold to the knackers yard, where they would be slaughtered and made into pet food and glue.

Horse dealers existed at many different stages of the process of horse breeding and selling and often horses were passed between numerous owners and dealers within their lifetime. Dealers would often congregate at large fairs and markets all over the country, where horses were put up for sale.

This figure obviously represents a well-to-do dealer, as his clothes imply that he is fashionable and wealthy. Gentlemen in this period would not go out unless properly dressed with their hat and cravat (scarf) around their neck. His bushy whiskers were also the fashion for men for most part of the late nineteenth century.



Horse dealers often had a dubious reputation. They were often known to mislead the buyer about the condition of the horse in order to gain a good price or a quick sale. A common tactic apparently was to make the horse look older than it actually was and therefore better prepared to cope with hard, intense labour.

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