



This month Vanessa Depré talks to the recently resigned BHS Volunteer, Joyce Bellamy MBE – the defender of urban riding

Vanessa's Volunteers

Joyce Bellamy MBE

Volunteer profile:

Region: London

Volunteer Status: Regional Access and Bridleways Officer (RABO) Greater London

Goals: Getting more respect and attention for urban riding instead of the focus always being on the country side

Hobbies: The study of open spaces and horses

Favourite rider: Victorian riding masters

Favourite horse: Her own horses

Top quote: "You can build the best bridleways in the world, but there have to be horses and riders to use them."

The history. Joyce was born just before the Second World War in London. "Back then" horses were still very much the main form of transportation in the capital, with horses and carriages all over the place.

Joyce says: "I wasn't born into a horsey family, however, thanks to the many carriage drivers in London, I learnt a lot about horses and horse care. During the war I remember my mother used to take water out for the milk horses.

"After the war there were few riding schools left in London, but at my Grammar School I set up a Riding Club during my early teens. We explored London on horseback and used the facilities available."

Later when Joyce had her own horses, she did mainly Mountain and Moorland classes. These are showing classes both in-hand and under saddle. She says: "I had two wonderful Dales that did very well in the classes and I had quite a bit of success with them.

"My last horse was an Irish mare called Molly. Unfortunately she passed away recently. I will be looking for a new horse soon."

The British Horse Society. "My work for the BHS began when I was on the District Committee of the South London branch of the Pony Club. In those days

you needed to be a member of the BHS to be on the Committee. I joined the BHS in the early sixties, I think, and became a Life Member in the nineties.

"Later I was co-opted to the old Development Sub-Committee of the BHS. When the BHS structure changed, I was allocated to do general access work. Later when Katie Oates passed away I took her place as RABO for Greater London."

Joyce Bellamy MBE. In 2004 Joyce was awarded a well-deserved MBE for her study of open spaces, historic parks and gardens. She says: "Essentially it was awarded for my work into the evolution of open space systems and how parks and commons have evolved.

"I was delighted and honoured to be awarded an MBE. My friends were very cunning and I didn't have a clue. When the letter arrived my husband was waving it around under my nose insisting that I open it. He of course knew all about it."

Urban riding. Joyce explained to me that London has always been a busy and happening city. Yet there has always been room for horses. Joyce says: "The roots of horses lie in towns, so why are large cities always forgotten when discussing bridleways? The focus is too much on the countryside but the majority of people live in cities. These people need to be exposed to horses as well and not excluded."

These strong opinions on urban riding have been a great inspiration in Joyce's life and work, and she has even published two books on the subject: *Horses in Suburbia* and *Hyde Park for Horsemanship*.

Joyce continues: "I believe that the emphasis on countryside riding is damaging riding in general. The people that live in cities need to see horses too. A lot of people live in cities and riding needs to be achievable for them as well without them having to travel to the countryside.

"Riding schools need to encourage ordinary urban people to take up riding. In some parts of London there are great riding opportunities, however, there are defi-



Above: Noel with Joyce Bellamy
Below: Journey for Access 2000 at Rotten Row, London

cient areas too that need to be worked on." Public transport has made it easier to get to riding establishments in London and Joyce would advise anybody interested in riding in London to make good use of it: "Travelling through London by car is too much of a nightmare."

Joyce says: "London is a great place to ride in. A lot of credit is due to the old Greater London Council and Lee Valley Regional Park Authority for providing open spaces for horses and riders.

"London has a great track record for horses and riders. Not so much for rights of way, but they treat riding and driving as they would any other sport like football or cycling. These achievements are often not appreciated enough."

Vicky Allen, Regional Access and Bridleways Officer for the East Midlands, said: "Joyce has done sterling work for horses and riders in the London area."

Olympic Games. Joyce is a retired government officer and has recently resigned from her post as RABO for Greater London, but her work is far from finished. She is continuing her academic studies of open spaces and is now focussing a lot of her attention on the potential that the 2012 London Olympics hold for riding in the capital.

She says: "The Olympic Games will bring us the opportunity to bring urban riding into the 21st Century. London is a marvellous place to hold the games as riding will really be in the public view, as it should be."

Joyce believes we need to look more at the survival of the horse in the future: "You can build the best bridleways in the world, but there have to be horses and riders to use them."

For me it was a pleasure to interview this very intelligent and knowledgeable lady. Rarely have I heard anybody speak so passionately about rights of way for horses and I wish her all the best for the future. On behalf of The British Horse Society, I would like to say that Joyce Bellamy will be sorely missed as a Volunteer.

