

BOOK REVIEW

How the Herefords made their mark

The breed with the white face — a story of man and beast through three centuries

When the great Hereford bull, Cotmore, competed at the first Royal Show, in 1839 in Oxford, he walked the 85 miles there from his home in Pembridge, Herefordshire. Though weighing 1½ tons he took the journey in his stride and took the prize for the best bull.

So says E Heath-Agnew in *A History of Hereford Cattle and Their Breeders* (Duckworth; £25). At the same show the best cow in milk for dairy purposes was the Reverend J R Smythies' Hereford, to the annoyance of Shorthorn breeders. Hereford cows are not usually deep milkers yet a famous milking herd of Herefords was sold at Zeals, in Wiltshire, as recently as 1938.

Such is the epic story told in this important and comprehensive new book. It is a story of courage, often in the face of poverty and adversity, and reveals the faith, vision, genius, comedy and tenacity of those who bred these wonderful cattle which that great Longhorn breeder, Robert Bakewell (1724–1795), considered could not be improved by cross-breeding.

The book touches on the pro-

vision of mediaeval plough teams, usually each of eight oxen, so necessary to till the soil; it took a considerable number of cattle to breed the oxen.

Various colours

From Queen Anne's time Hereford cattle, as distinct from cattle in Herefordshire, began to appear. It may surprise some today to discover that Herefords were of various colours: roans, whites, browns, greys, yellows, light reds, dark reds with mottled faces, red with white faces and ones with white lines (known as 'finching') down their back bones. Now the Hereford bull transmits to all its offspring in the first generation its own unmistakable trade mark, the white face.

A breed of pedigree cattle of no standard colour exists today, the Longhorn, mentioned here as an early rival of the Hereford. Standards, imposed through herd books and through shows, exerted pressures to produce a uniform type of Hereford animal. Some, among them the herd of William Galliers begun in 1745, continued until the 1920s with mottled red faces. Vigilance is required even today.

The book includes enthralling biographies of families who have loved and kept Hereford cattle in the past 200 years. It is full, too, of biographies of cattle families. Herefords were exported round the world. Yet the story keeps coming back to the farmers and farms of Herefordshire, especially those beside the tributaries of the Wye, the Lugg, Arrow, Pinsley and Frome.

Famous names recur in the roll call of Hereford breeders. The book records them in full. Here there is room to mention few.

Related herds

John Haywood bred Herefords before 1713. So did Richard Tomkins of King's Pyon. The book records that in 1780 William Walker became the tenant of Burton Court but does not add that it is adjacent to the Haywood family's farm or that Walker's grandfather bred big, dark red Herefords before 1733. The herd still flourishes under Mr D Walker at Knightwick and under his brother, Mr E Walker, at Hill Top, near Martley, six generations on, with the seventh generation helping.

The Leen herd, farmed by Mr

Frank Smith and before him his father who have owned it since 1918, descends directly from James Turner's herd of 1780. In 1880 Thomas Carwardine, of Stocktonbury, sold a close bred bull, Anxiety 4th, to Messrs Cudgell and Simpson of Missouri, whose farmers would not breed cattle "agin the Prayer Book".

The book quotes the late Captain R S de Q Quincey, of The Vern, who mentioned that a breeder's thoughts and ideas are often intangible instinct. He may mate unpromising looking bulls and cows and yet produce outstanding progeny. This is because he sees in his mind the qualities of the sires' and dams' whole past families, stretching back over generations.

Inevitably in a book that is such a vast quarry of facts disagreements arise on points of emphasis. A few inaccuracies have crept in. Nevertheless this work is an invaluable survey of 300 years of Hereford cattle and of their dedicated breeders. Well chosen illustrations of cattle and of breeders, of today and of long ago, include five in full colour, plus one or two of paintings not published before.

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