

THE PUREST FOUNTAIN OF CANLEY BLOOD

The name of John Webster has been associated with the Longhorn breed since the 18th century. His cattle are acknowledged as the foundation stock of many of the Longhorn herds of that time but who was he and where did he come from?

His grandfather, Thomas Webster, lived at Caldwell near Burton on Trent and married a widow, Isabel Aston. In the inventory of his possessions made in 1680 his five kine and one calf are valued at £16.10s.0d, two heifers (twinsters) and a steer £8.0s.0d, two stirk bullocks at £2.10s.0d and five weaning calves £4.0s.0d. However, the chattles and cattle that came into his possession when he married Isabel, were to remain with her and her children.

Thomas had two sons by his first marriage, Thomas and John. The elder remained in Derbyshire but the younger, John, took land in Canley, near Coventry in 1713. The Websters were butchers in Coventry and he may well have had connections there. This John married Sarah Davill of Stoke Golding, Leicestershire, whose grandfather, an apothecary of Canley, had established the Symcox Charity for the poor of Stoneleigh in 1705. John and Sarah had two daughters Mary and Hannah and two sons, John and Joseph. Mary married William Gilbert and had four daughters one of whom married John Turton of Rowley Regis and owned a wire mill. She inherited £500 from her father from a house in Norrington (Normanton?) on Soar, Nottingham. Hannah inherited the School Land and House in Caldwell and Joseph, a farm in Rosliston and a house and land in Burton. John, the son, inherited lands in Coton in the Elms, Derbyshire and the lands in Canley after the death of their mother.

This John was born in Stapenhill, near Burton on Trent in 1699 and took over the Canley farm in 1729. It is understandable that he took cattle from his neighbour Sir Thomas Gresley of Drakelow House, Derbyshire in order to establish his herd there. He farmed 100 acres in Canley, which can be still identified although his house was rebuilt in the 19th century.

John Webster's stock were famed for their large frame and constitutional powers, their inclination to fatten and large bones. A great head was considered an excellence and not a defect. His stock were remarkably wide over the loin and hips, and deep in the chest but what seemed most to attract the notice of some of the visitors was, their remarkably long crooked horns, and their fat rumps. Apparently, Webster could keep his stock from degenerating, when there was no other breeder in the kingdom to which he could go for a cross or a change of blood, or for any improvement; yet he gradually kept improving them both in form and size. His farm at Canley was considered good land to increase young cattle to a greater size. His calves were always nursed on the cow until they were seven or eight months old, then they were fed with hay and herbage in the best manner the farm would afford, and by this



A map of 1766 showing John Webster's land in Canley

method his females increased in size in proportion to his large males, and thence his cattle attained the high constitutional powers which they possessed. At that period they were considered to be the most perfectly formed large breed of stock in the island.

In 1733 he married Sarah Plampin, of Shawell, Leicestershire and had a son John who seems to have died young and a daughter Hannah, who married John Russell, of Lillington, Leamington Spa. Some of Webster's stock became well known, such as his bull "Bloxedge" so called because he was sold as a calf to Mr. Bloxedge, but when it was realised that he was such a good producer of stock, Webster bought him back. "Bloxedge" was considered to be of "the purest fountain of Canley blood". Another of his cows, "Old Comeley" was the mother of "Twopenny", Bakewell's prize bull of 1771. "Old Comeley" was aged 26 when she died in 1791, and Bakewell preserved pieces of her carcase in his own museum.

John Webster also had an interest in thoroughbred horses. He owned "Foxhunter" and also "Bonny Batchelor", a chestnut stallion. In June-September 1739 the "Racing Calendar" reported that "Bonny Batchelor" ran in six races, winning three and being placed in three, with £230 in prize money. He died of "Mortification in his bowels" and was buried at Stoneleigh. A wall monument in Stoneleigh Church commemorates him. His widow survived until 1784, dying in Warwick at the age of 84.

**" Near this place lies interr'd the body of
JOHN WEBSTER of CANLY in this parish Esqr.
High Sheriff for this county in the year 1754
He died November the 20th 1768 – Aged 69"**

References
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