

LONGHORN CATTLE SOCIETY AGM WEEKEND, 6-8 NOVEMBER 2009

Over 70 members attended the Society's AGM weekend held on 7 and 8 November 2009. This year the location was Lancashire and members had the opportunity to view two very diverse herds.

On Saturday the visit was to the Kirklan herd at HMP Kirkham which is a category D Resettlement Prison, occupying the site of a former RAF training camp, which was acquired by the Ministry of Defence following the outbreak of the second World War. The Kirkham Prison estate covers an area of over 200 acres, including 60 acres of amenity land, sports fields, a conservation area and 120 acres of land used for arable cropping and grassland for the herd of Longhorns.

Kirkham is a working prison and inside the fence is very much industrial based, with several workshops available for the prisoners to work in such as a large industrial laundry, a timber workshop, a food processing plant, industrial cleaning shop as well as a large education centre. The agricultural and horticultural enterprises at the prison play a major part in ensuring full employment for all whilst 'inside', with over 150 inmates out of the 560 held working in land based activities at Kirkham.



Stock bull Blackbrook Quidditch

Six staff and 80 prisoners look after five acres of glass and 20 acres of market garden that produce a large variety of cropping and bedding to supply the prison kitchen, farm shop, other prisons, and external contracted customers, with the surplus going out to the wholesale market.

25 acres of land at the prison has been developed into a conservation area with the main aim being to protect and enhance the wildlife living there and at the same time sympathetically open it up to the public as a managed conservation area, with walks, sites of specific interest and picnic areas. As well as looking after the conservation area, the stockman and his 12 prisoners have responsibility for the herd of Pedigree Longhorn cattle. The Longhorns play an important part at Kirkham by not only keeping the grass short and enhancing the bird and particularly the bat populations, but most important of all, they play a major part with some of the long term and life sentence prisoners in helping them resettle back into the community once released and thus help reduce re-offending. As each new man joins the team, prison staff initially have him working in the conservation area until he can prove his worth – if he does so then he is allowed to work with the Longhorns, having two animals that are his full responsibility.

After going through security checks at the prison we were split into groups, each group being led by a member of staff and a couple of prisoners. We were given a very thorough tour of all aspects of the prison including the workshops and finally the Longhorns. The herd totals around 15 cows with two stockbulls, Blackbrook Quidditch and Southfield Renegade. The females are either kept in the herd or are sold via the Society's sales and the steers are reared for sale in the Prison's Farm Shop. There is a huge demand for the Longhorn beef and there is always a waiting list! After the tour the groups met up in the Chapel for coffee and cakes before a short question and answer session and a vote of thanks.



Kirklan heifers

The Society AGM was conducted on Saturday afternoon. After the main business the awards were presented. The Paul Lockett Memorial Award for the Best Newcomer to Showing was presented by Nicky Lockett to Emma and Adrian Rockey. The Maydencroft Perpetual Trophy for the Bull of the Year was presented to John and Pat Stanley for Blackbrook Rochester and the Leebarn Award for the Cow of the Year was presented to John and Joshua Brigg for Gorse Jonquil.



Frank Sutton (left) receives the Presidents Award from President John Warner

John Warner, the Society's outgoing President, awarded the Presidents Award to Frank Sutton. The Presidents Award is made at the end of each President's term of office to the Society member who in the eyes of the President has made an outstanding contribution to the Longhorn breed. Frank's selfless work within the Society was recognized by John Warner in his speech.

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On Sunday the visit was to the Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust site at Martin Mere. The SSSI occupies part of the former lake and mire which extended over some 3000 acres of the Lancashire plain in the 17th century. In 1972 the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust purchased 363 acres of the former Holcrofts Farm – mainly rough damp pasture – with the primary aim of providing grazing and roosting opportunities for wildfowl. Martin Mere now covers an area of around 536 acres (of which 40 acres is Waterfowl Garden) 1½ miles from Bur-scough in Lancashire. It welcomes around 160,000 visitors each year.

Martin Mere decided to go into Longhorns at the time of the transition from IACS to Single Farm Payment. It was something that had been discussed many times over the years – previously tenant farmers had grazed the land with cattle and sheep but the grazing regime was never really to Martin Mere's satisfaction for conservation and biodiversity. Longhorns were chosen for a number of reasons, including their docility, capability to do well on rough grazing and be outwin-



Cattle at Martin Mere

tered (albeit with open fronted barns to shelter in if they wish), easy calving and good selling potential

23 females with 10 calves at foot were bought at Chelford in May 2005 when the Heyworth herd was reduced, and stock bull Cholmondeley Frederick was bought in 2006. Carreg Herod from Bernard Llewellyn joined the herd in August 2008. The herd now totals about 80 animals including followers. The cattle are used primarily for conservation grazing on about 300 acres of the 535 acre reserve, creating a sward ideal for breeding waders such as lapwings, snipe and red-shank; passerines such as skylark and reed bunting in the spring and summer and grazing wildfowl such as pink footed geese, whooper swans and widgeon in the autumn and winter. The grazing is also beneficial for a much broader array of fauna and flora. The low-lying peat bog hay meadows of Martin Mere are a rare and very special habitat in their own right. Females are retained in the herd and males are sold finished through Chelford Market. It is hoped in the future that the beef can be marketed through the Trust's shop on site. After a vote of thanks the group broke up – some to head home and some to repair to a local pub for a superb lunch before going home themselves.

Other winners at the AGM



Joshua Brigg receives the Leebarn Trophy for the Best Cow from President John Warner



Pat Stanley receives the Maydencroft Trophy for the Best Bull from President John Warner



Nicky Lockett (left) presents Emma Rockey with the Paul Lockett Newcomers Award