

**NORTHERN LONGHORN BREEDERS' GROUP**  
**HERD COMPETITION 2020**  
**Judge: Clive Davies**

Judge's remarks

It was a great honour and to be invited to officiate as judge of this event. To be able to accept was a tremendous pleasure and as time went by and plans firmed up, the tour was filled with anticipation, especially given that so few livestock events have been held during 2020 and that never previously had I visited any of the participating herds. I was very grateful to everyone that did so much to get the cogs turning, offer the hospitality and be involved in any way that enabled things to take place.

My first memories of seeing Longhorn cattle compete would have been at the English Royal Shows of the mid 1970s. Then the breed was noted for its scope and length even if it did not carry such conformation as the more popular choices of the time. But things rapidly changed. The stretchy cattle became more the fashion and together with the work that has developed since, the Longhorns have formed into a very desirable option for today's beef production.

Since undertaking the judging of the Longhorn herd competition of the south west area of England in 2008, I have much followed the Breed's progress and certainly the cattle that would be viewed on this year's trip were going to form some lasting impressions of the standards that the Longhorns have now reached.

In order to evaluate the herds, I use a scale of marks. This has been tried and tested over many years and is used for sheep and cattle, pedigree and commercial. I entrust its guidance. Up to thirty-five per cent of the available marks are awarded to, in this case, the cow herd. It is they that are the engine of all that goes on. 20% of the marks are available for the herd replacements, first calved heifers, in-calf heifers and senior heifers. They should demonstrate improvement over the previous generations. 15 marks can be given for the young-stock, their uniformity and performance. A further 15 points are allowed for the choice of herd sires, whether used by AI or natural service. It should also be realised that their influence will also have been observed in the previous sections. The cattle, the land that they utilise and the available infrastructure all needs a degree of management and 10 marks are set aside for this whilst the balance of 5 marks to total 100 are dedicated to the marketing of the herd asset. It is of little use if the production cannot find a market place and all actions to best help do that, whether showing, or using social media, or breed society platforms, health and performance schemes or direct sales of breeders or meat and other produce, should be identified and measured. Finding the individual animal winners is a fair bit less formalised. More, the way animals stand out in the general sense or indeed with-in the herds of which they are members.

The British beef industry has been under scrutiny in many ways for most of the time I have worked in it. It is now, what with the market requirements, the means of production, the challenges of animal health, world-wide competition and the pressure that exists to leave any financial margin for the primary producers. In addition to all of these areas, experienced by both commercial and pedigree producers, the pure-bred sector is always up against it because within the livestock industry there is no more difficult activity than developing pure-breds. Therefore the visits would give a great insight into how Longhorn breeders were attempting to overcome all of these tests to ensure a future for the Breed and the people following in the current footsteps. It would be fascinating to see how breeders in different parts of the region develop their cattle, use the available genetics, fit into their surroundings, find their customer base and express their ambitions for the future.

So with all of the plans firmed-up, the six day trip was eagerly anticipated and with the Country's weather forecast set fair, excitement mounted.

**THE REPORT**

**MILTON BANK**

A very warm welcome was extended in all senses of the word. The Rigbys were hay making during that Monday afternoon. In fact, it was a feature of the trip that there were many acres of grass being harvested for valuable late season fodder supplies. Simon, Victoria and family use pockets of land around their area of Cheshire to keep a productive herd to raise cross-bred cattle using the Longhorn cow. This is a great test of the breed's ability to carry out this work. They are doing it well. The Rigbys also breed Piedmontese cattle and it is this bull that acts as the terminal sire. The offspring of these two docile breeds find ready takers through local marts. The farm also raises Zwartbles sheep. The cattle are managed in a sensible commercially sensitive way and ticks many boxes. Clearly the challenge is how best to source replacement breeding females. Perhaps if another pocket of land became available it would be a good option to ensure a nucleus of pure Longhorns were developed?

**KIRKLAN**

There was some procedure to gain access to the next host but more to the point Graham Walker was mostly concerned that I might not be let out! HMP Kirkham is such an interesting place. With a potential workforce of the 670 inmates, these people are fortunate to a point in having their surroundings and especially the herd of Longhorns. With bloodlines tracing back to establishment in the mid 70s, this herd has uniformity and Keith Burrell and his colleagues have the management sorted to a tee. Together with the flock of Hebridean sheep and some great infrastructure, especially the cattle's winter housing, this is a sensibly managed farm. Additionally the grassland takes tack sheep during the winter months. The breeding lines here are tried, tested and well established. A successful herd by all measurements. The challenge emerges that to do all that those involved might wish for, can this be conducted in this most obviously confined area?

## **GALE FARM**

In travelling to the next destination and driving through housing situated on the edge of Lancaster, there emerge straight ahead a group of Longhorn cattle. I had found the animals and just round the corner I met with Stephen Horrocks and his granddaughter, Jessica. It would be difficult to find two more enthused Longhorn fans than this couple. We were soon travelling between their various plots of rented grassland in the area and viewing quality stock. Stephen, with a long link with the breed has various standards that he wishes to adhere to and one of the main ones is cattle of docility. With young people and others with not too much stock handling experience joining in with herd activity, this is a sensible approach and indeed for them all, what an opportunity this is to be able to be so hands-on. Improving the standards of the animals is also a cherished breeding aim and clearly this is on track. There are many great herd replacements and youngstock. The ambitions of this herd are easy to detect, the main challenge is, even if the energy levels remain, will there be time for everything?

## **ELLWOOD**

First thing Tuesday morning it was great to meet-up with Revd. Chris Blackshaw and his wife Jan. They have both had a long standing ambition to get into farming and what a job they are making of it. There is proper mixed enterprise of Dorset Horn sheep, Gloucester Old Spots and Oxford Sandy and Black pigs and of course, Longhorn cattle. The herd was established in 2016 with well chosen foundation stock. It is also clear to see that the couple are building a sound reputation for their farm produce with regular customers returning for supplies. The herd is well managed, using a sound commercial attitude. As everything settles there is strong ambition to build the profile and get more involved with breed activity and the showing. Young herds like this just need to keep-up the positive progress of investing and building the genetic base will be important to furnish the aims. Setting the criteria for the next sire choice must surely be near the top of the list of future tasks?

## **MANDATHORN**

Travelling in a westerly direction the next visit was to Mawbray where Amanda Dixon and her family run coastal land. This clearly brings challenges what with micro climate, flooding and at many times of the year, usually holiday makers. I was guided around the livestock by Amanda's parents, Keith and Susan and much enjoyed learning of the wide range of enterprise. For instance, in addition to the cattle farming the holding keeps at least ten breeds of sheep! The overriding message relating to all of the stock was that honest commercial principles were to the fore and the Longhorns would be of no exception. There would be no pampering and none of the outfits would survive long if they didn't perform. Being an ex dairy farm there is plenty of knowledge available for grass growing on what is exposed land. The majority of production from this near 10 year old herd is into regular commercial outlets and clearly that reputation is building fast. Sound genetics have helped found this herd and the sire choices are making progress. Both the senior and junior herd sires are suited to their jobs. The challenge here will be to retain enough young females for herd advancement rather than to be half tempted by a lucrative sale!

## **HOUGHTON**

Next herd up for a visit was east of Carlisle and a call on Susan Aglionby who interestingly had cattle in the parish of Aglionby! But wherever they were kept they looked well. Breeding for twenty years, this herd was founded and has been developed using top breeding lines and are managed using extensive, easy-care methods. At some times of the year some stock are dispatched to land run by Cumbrian Wildlife Trust to aid management. The livestock, which also include a Grey Face Mule flock are organically ran and much of the produce is marketed through the on-farm shop. Some animals were situated on some well appointed land in the Vale of Eden with some strong steers grazing herbal leys. It was very encouraging to view some impressive youngstock which clearly augers well for the herd's future. Whilst the management system is tried and tested and relatively straightforward, the distant land-blocks may offer a challenge of efficiency has time goes by?

## **BEAUFONT AND PARAGON**

Two herds shared the next farm and in arriving at Teasdale Cottage I interrupted Stuart Mullan who was making winter housing preparations. However, we were soon viewing the cattle, some of which were owned by John Pennie. This co-operative arrangement was excellent with both herds thriving on this ancient and permanent pasture-land. The farm is at over 700 feet above sea level and clearly a healthy spot for stock management. The bloodlines that have helped found both herds are of top calibre and producing very encouraging results for forward traction. John's Beaufont Herd is slightly the longer established but the time has been well spent by Stuart in developing the Paragon Herd to its current level of quality. Both breeders are interested in testing the waters of some cross breeding activity and producing some tempting results. The confines of the land available may well be the limitation of even more breeding ambitions but there is no doubt that the arrangement of working together is very beneficial and adds a spark of competition every day!

## **BROOMFIELD**

The next herd to visit gave a very strong look into the commercial attributes of today's Longhorn cattle. The Willey family are busy with among other activities a dairy herd, sheep flock, heavy and light horses, donkeys, green composting site and a beef suckler herd of which the Longhorns are an integral part. Whilst the Longhorn herd has been in existence for some 25 years, founded on sound breed lines, there is a willingness to add breeding lines when the opportunity arises. But, clearly once again it is the commercial efficiency that reigns supreme with little preferential treatment to any individuals. The cross breeding opportunities, often featuring Charolais genetics, are also a measure of what the Longhorn cows in particular can achieve. It was very impressive to view about 100 strong store cattle in one enclosure and to see the improvements made to some recently acquired land and how it is that the cattle can greatly assist in this. Also impressive is the knowledge and enthusiasm of the next generation of the Willey family, Sarah and her brother Harry who will undoubtedly help drive this herd onwards! A challenge may exist in the finding of enough time to get all the potential into view?

## **MARINDIN**

Early Wednesday morning and for the following day too, it was the Scottish based herds to be enjoyed. First up was the herd of Rita Adam. Rita had kindly warned me that my car may not manage her farm drive. Correct!! The heavy rain of recent weeks had made its impact and this gave a fair indication of farming with the elements in these parts. The land, at around 1000 feet is home of the cattle and a flock of Soay sheep that much look after themselves. The cattle are kept similarly and look well on it. Rita's first choice of cattle breed was Shetland. Some remain there now. I had not seen specimens of this breed previously but they were certainly more solid and weighty than may have been envisaged. Certainly the progeny from the cross breeding programme should be much heralded. The cattle were viewed in two fields and all were doing well. The senior breeders from very sound bloodlines were performing very adequately. With the grazing available, a few more numbers may be an advantage? However, a couple of winter evenings sometime in February might demonstrate that Rita has things just right! Whatever, it might be advantageous to develop the use of some electric fencing thereby allowing more management of the cattle and the land?

## **ABERDEEN**

In heading towards the coast I was looking forward to seeing the next herd. Back in 2008 I well remember viewing a bull called Aberdeen Granite on a farm on the Devon-Cornwall border. He was a different type to most and in that he had been purchased for some 3600gns, quite a head-liner. The Lennox family have maintained this impressive herd and developed its long history and again have the challenge of coastal farming, this time being against The North Sea. Back in the celebrated days of cattle farming, the 1950s to 70s, a number of leading herds from the south of England, especially of the breeds most associated with Scotland, relocated to this part of the World, not only to be in the social mix of this great stockland area, but also because the cattle's hair would grow more. It works with Longhorns too! There was another striking observation and that was the uniformity of the cattle. Each generation had that stamp and a good type it was too. It hasn't happened by fate or accident. It is clearly all to do with the genetics and the astute use of sires whether bought-in or home-bred. Can anything be done better within this Mecca of the breed? Well, not a lot except it is vital that more people know of what is ongoing here with this great bovine resource.

## **BIELDSIDE**

On the western side of Aberdeen city I met with Beverlie Welo and herdsman David Killingback. Hillhead Farm has been redeveloped and modernised into an outstanding livestock holding. The layout, infrastructure and land improvement has been well thought out and will provide for sensible management of the estate's animals. Originally Belted Galloway and Highlanders were the chosen residents but clearly, whilst some of these still remain it is the Longhorns that are impressing the most. The cross breeding, using the Longhorn bull has a terminal sire is to be commended. However, the pure-bred herd is much on the move. Top genetics have been selected as foundation breeders and the homebred herd sire is certainly pulling his weight in that his first five calves are all daughters! It is almost sure that there are many plans earmarked for the successful development of this fledgling operation but as always within the early years, the choice of follow-up sires will not only be important but exciting to follow.

## **LOGIE**

I was grateful for the very hospitable welcome of Panny and Alastair Laing late into the evening in readiness to view their herd during the next morning. The family have run this wonderful estate for nearly one hundred years but the astute methods currently employed demonstrate sound business sense. During the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century dairy farming of Ayrshire cattle was the main enterprise but the outstanding model farmyard layout now hosts Logie Steading, a superb collection of art, craft and retail outlets. Within the farm shop it was especially pleasing to see cider vinegar products made from the apples grown in Herefordshire by my son, Tom! The cattle around the grazing lands are honest, practical and doing a great job. Studying their breed lines, this reads like a Who's Who of Longhorn ancestry. Over the forty five years since the herd's foundation great attention has been given to maintaining the type that suits this straightforward system of land management. Yearling heifers grazing the meadows against the River Findhorn were a level lot so much so that if they are not selected as herd replacements they could certainly grace any developing outfit, already halter broken and fit to go. However, the main sales from the herd are made through supplying beef to the farm shop and cafe and as such find real added value in any case. With out-wintering practised this is yet another example of the benefits which a British native breed can muster. Using summer grazing to add condition which can then in turn assist maintenance during the winter. Simple! Logie is a busy place so it is hoped that time can be found to further keep this practical herd in the limelight?

## **FISHWICK**

This next destination took four to five hours to reach. It was a great journey, down through central Scotland that looked magnificent in the great weather enjoyed that week. I have met Peter Close on many occasions at livestock events and such around the country but was much looking forward to viewing his scene at home. With livestock breeding, I feel it is fascinating studying the long established operations because within them one would hope to see a strong element of consistency and also the traits for which they would have become well known. This is such an operation. It would have been one of the herds regularly exhibiting at the early Royal Shows I recalled. That length of body back then has been retained. It was very evident in the cows. This herd has also bred strong and influential bulls and the current herd sire, all be it having been used elsewhere until recently, was definitely an eyeful. Field after field, the herd looked very well grazing the banks of the Tweed. Within the 150 acres of land farmed with grass and forage maize, there was room for Peter's continued experiments: work in cross breeding. After all, it was this sort of activity that got Fishwick into Longhorn cattle back in the late 70s: looking to develop a better suckler cow. Since then the farm has had several other breeds to nurture but undoubtedly the current offering of Aberdeen Angus, Irish Moiled and especially the Longhorns look great options. However, the work can never be finished and fine tuning for even better results will be ongoing, I'm fairly sure?

## **GARFORD**

Continuing in a southerly direction and through Northumberland into County Durham, the next herd was fairly new by comparison to most of the recent ones enjoyed. But, what great work is being developed by Denis Metcalf and his family. By leaving dairy farming behind in 2013, they have brought the great experience of grassland management into play to operate this Longhorn herd. The holding didn't look like land at 600 feet compared to the scenery seen during the inward journey but it was spot-on as a stock farm and the cattle looked most content. A sensible budget has been used to acquire value for money foundation stock and the results are beginning to flow. Every facet of developing the herd is moving in the right direction but without doubt one of the most memorable sights of the whole trip were a bunch of male feeding cattle, bulls and steers, still running at pasture, but with exceptional condition that would have butchers queuing-up. They have been well fed but in a business sensible way and clearly demonstrated what can be achieved with the best husbandry decisions. The family are very enthused about their herd and should be. Let it be hoped that they can further their ambitions and get more involved with Breed activity to fly the Garford flag.

## **RABY**

Moving just a few miles on, I was grateful to meet Robert Sullivan in the village street of Staindrop. We drove just around the corner and what an entrance we made to view the next herd on the list. Right through the main gates of Raby Castle, we travelled. I wasn't the only visitor that day. Many people had shown up to enjoy the splendid location and activities of the estate. Moving on around the roadways the cattle came into view. Virtually the whole herd occupied one field, or to be more precise, The Deer Park. Indeed, the Longhorns share their accommodation with two herds of deer, Red and Fallow. Closer inspection of the cattle soon revealed the quality of the breeding females. Cow after cow impressed. They stood out because of the excellent construction, the strength of spine and hind leg make-up. But, more than that these females had great character and were rearing strong calves. This is certainly another of those long established herds, the oldest on this trip, that clearly have a type that is their hallmark. Elsewhere the estate farm 2500 acres of arable land and let other stockland to tenants. The co-operation with these stock farmers ensure that they are on hand to assist with the cattle management. This is clearly a straight forward system that ensures the continuation of this great herd. There could be moves considered to complicate this somewhat and ensure that the herd's strengths are given more of a profile and get it out and about to events and such. But, maybe, with the links of the High Force Hotel and the Raby Castle platform, it could be that the Raby Longhorns become something more of the flagship within?

## **HAROLD**

It was only a few more miles to travel to the historic settlement of Piercebridge. It is well reported that the Romans had a great deal to do with the development of life in these parts. But, that being the case, I would not think that even they would have seen such enterprise as currently goes on right in the village confines than that of the Hodgson family. I met with Harry and we had a good look around parts of this 500 acres stock farm. The sheep farming is dynamic, picking breeds to do an efficient job. New Zealand type Suffolk and Texels are used as terminal sires and a goodly proportion of lamb is sold through the busy organic farm shop. Beef is also offered here and this is supplied by the Aberdeen Angus and Longhorn cattle that graze these long farmed pastures. Some very interesting developments are ongoing with the Angus but so too with the Longhorns. The Hodgsons have brought together a herd, somewhat started by the chance purchase of a cow at Carlisle, and since added other genetics including, very wisely, bloodlines from Raby. Sound genetics are vital but only if the management is worthy. Here it is spot-on! A paddock grazing system is used. This ensures that there is nutritious bite almost continually. The adult stock thrive and so do the youngsters from these milky dams saving on the need for creep feeding. More efficiency is being employed by calving down heifers at 30 months of age. The prospects here are encouraging. It is also great that the following generation, Billy and his sister Hetty are much involved with herd decision making. Many people would benefit from studying events here but undoubtedly the progress of this less than ten year old herd will depend on the sires used. This is where Fishwick Philanderer has left a positive mark and this herd is really moving on. For the future: CRITICAL: the next two sire choices!!

## **BRIAR MEAD**

The next visit was to a herd of 18 cows and followers on seven and a half acres. This wasn't so much an attempt at increased stocking rates and efficiency but a forced situation. Looking for suitable land availability is such a difficult task. It is especially galling when travelling around, except for within north Britain, of course, to see land that isn't being best utilised: and I won't mention 'wilding' but might encourage the debate about extensification! Anyway, back to the Longhorns. Vicki Hopkinson is working very hard to keep the wonderful genetic mix of her herd in motion. There were some superb cattle on show, from some great breed bloodlines, and particularly the youngsters, but again some stood out specifically. It was another case of a type from a particular strain within the breed and this time the celebrated cattle of Gorse. These animals were great cows, feminine and elegant. The sire choices were fitting too. The current pairing of well bred bulls looking exciting prospects. It will be fascinating to watch their work in tandem. Vicki practises a test and vaccinate health system which is probably a wise decision given the circumstances. Once the cattle comfortably get through this next winter, let's hope for a bit more space for this worthy herd?

## **SETTRINGTON**

Getting over towards Malton, it was good to meet-up with Ruth Russell and see her family's herd. This set-up certainly has a strong genetic base, some suited well-managed stock and a strong marketing policy. Most of the production serves The Ginger Pig, a top-spec London based food retailing outfit. This certainly gives a strong focus to the sensible production methods. Running at some 600 feet above sea level this herd is healthy on its well managed grazing areas of the farm. Founded in 1996 the uniformity of the cattle is a feature. It was encouraging to see heifers being prepared to calve down at 30 months of age. This arrangement is sensible in an outfit that requires sales throughout the year and providing the winter month's accommodation is available, can help with more efficient output. But as well as the keeping of cattle, Ruth is kept busy in spreading the farming word and especially about food and particularly meat consumption. Her audience is often children through time spent with schools but also more of the population at various events. There is

also a celebrity status about the cattle in that the homebred bull, Quest appeared in the Dad's Army film and after his passing one of his horns has made up the full compliment for the Ripon Hornblowers. 300 acres of cereals are also grown in addition to sheep farming. As I left, a lorry load of recently acquired ewe lambs arrived and a smart lot they were too. Clearly, this well established herd has a strong future, especially through how it best looks after its marketplace.

### **NEWTON**

Whilst David and Graham Walker are based near Huby, the first of their stock viewed on Saturday morning were somewhere north of there. I'm still not sure where, but with Jim Courts and Diane who I have known for some years within the primestock show circuit. It was good to see their set-up and view the Longhorn yearling heifers that were in good form. Back at the home base, the rest of the successful Newton Herd carried some very worthy animals as an integrated part of the family's farming system. It is a busy place. Cereal growing, forage and grass crops, 40 cow commercial suckler herd, running sheep and doing everybody else's jobs through contracting. The Longhorns have been at Newton Farm since 2005, in the main utilising permanent pasture and through a great deal of hard work and planning have attained great results. Again, much of this success has come through the selection of sound genetics within the foundation stock but the successive breeding programme has paid dividends. It is likely that when selecting herd additions and particularly the future sires, much homework is done to attempt the seeking of best results. It appears that the main selection policy is based on phenotype in an effort to produced the most desirable offspring. There are some important young females in the pipeline and surely by maintaining the current policies this herd's future is much secured?

### **SOUTHFIELD**

In reaching the final destination it was good to enjoy the hospitality of the Blockley family. It is almost certain than farming on the urban fringe has its challenges but as well as the time with the stock the team are well positioned to the road network to fulfil their busy lives working with motorists and heavy haulage. The infrastructure here is well geared for efficient cattle management and its fairly sure that the near neighbours have a fascinating insight, compared to most of the population with how proper farming is carried out. It's nearly 30 years since the Longhorns came to these parts and that time has allowed for a very uniform type to emerge. The cows are a sensible blend of scope and conformation. It is no wonder that great success has been achieved at events and in the supply of bloodlines to other breeders. Some embryo work is currently being used. They consistently supply young sire prospects and had summer shows been available during 2020, it is fairly sure that the youngster, Southfield Topgun would have had a look-in. What is also of interest in his case, is that he is well bred from a number of different line-bred ancestors. This topic is often difficult to explain to breeders of little or no experience and I can get very annoyed at so called industry experts, most of whom have never bred livestock, indicate that close breeding is wrong. It is correct to do it and in history some of the greatest performing livestock have come from this method, indeed that is how breeds were created originally. Anyway, possibly more of that on another occasion. Suffice to say that it is almost certain that this herd has most of its members bred in similar pattern to Topgun: I rest my case!! This 75 acres of grassland provides a great home for the herd and hopefully the Blockleys can maintain their important breed involvement at this Bradford base?

And Associates:

### **FIELDHEAD, MOORSIDE, SOUTHLANE**

Harry, Zara and Clark, respectively, are the next generation of Blockleys to involve themselves with this great art and science of cattle breeding. They are more fortunate than most to have the chance of foundation stock that are nearer the top on specification than most of us could hope for but clearly their knowledge and dedication will help them along the way. All of their herd representatives were serious contenders and I wish them all well with their future breeding decisions and results. Involving a younger generation within breed circles is critical and it has been a strong feature of the visits within this herd competition that the next generation are showing such interest and enthusiasm.

Clive Davies, October 2020