

## Shorthorn Bulletin: Volume 3 Issue 6

Farm Update: November 2018

The rain has finally arrived but too late for any fall pasture. Continual warm dry weather persisted through the normal fall period resulting in a transition from summer to winter. Unfortunately the cows have been on hay since early August with no prospects of returning to good pasture until next March. Anticipation is building for the arrival of the first calves in early February. With all the old Heritage Shorthorn bulls utilized in our breeding program this year we are expecting quite a selection of interesting Heritage Shorthorn calves. Many will be sired by famous Shorthorn bulls that have not sired off-spring in 30-40 years.

Bi-Monthly Topic: Shorthorns In England and Scotland

Overview:

Shorthorn numbers have been increasing in England & Scotland (E & S) for the last several years as interest has rebounded thanks to changing styles, heightened promotion, and the Morrisons Shorthorn Beef Scheme. I had the opportunity to visit with 6 different Shorthorn breeders in E & S each with varied approaches to raising Shorthorns. They encompassed Traditional Shorthorns, Dairy Shorthorns, and Beef Shorthorns. Information gleaned from each herd will be presented on an individual basis.

Both English and Scottish Shorthorns, on average, are now much larger than Shorthorns in the USA. Emphasis is placed on muscling in the hindquarters with carcass yield being a prime consideration. With the introduction of Continental Beef Breeds into E & S Shorthorns had to adjust to the new realities of the market place. This was done by selection and the opening of the herd book to allow the introduction of other cattle breeds to produce “improved Shorthorns”. Certainly Maine Anjou played a large role in the “evolving Shorthorn”. In Dairy Shorthorns genetic additions came from Illawarra and Holstein/Friesians.

Frequently, as herd books are opened to facilitate the introduction of outside bloodlines, new genetic and trait related problems arise. Certainly this has been true in the USA and E & S. Two problems that were constantly brought up by breeders in England and Scotland were double muscling and a high percentages of twins. Double muscling has become more of a world wide Shorthorn issue as breeders in Canada, Australia, and the USA are coming to the realization that double muscling is causing real problems in the breed. Based on discussions with numerous Shorthorn breeders in E & S the twins may be at the 10% plus level leading to significant problems. As a comparison twinning problems in Holsteins in the USA have reached epidemic proportions so it is not just a Shorthorn problem.

Shorthorns in E & S have the luxury of spending much of their lives on quality pasture in an idyllic setting although winters will find them in barn enclosures. There is some calf creep feeding but most breeders do not have their herds on Total Mixed Rations (TMRs) or corn based rations like many breeders do in the USA. Quality grass hay is the main winter substance. The feeding of cake (grain) is not a routine practice.

I was quite impressed by the proactive approach to Cattle Health. All calves must receive a government ID tag at birth to facilitate traceability. The importance of this can be seen as commensurate with the BSE and Foot & Mouth problems that led to the destruction of many British beef herds in the last 30 years. Traceable ID's are only a small part of the overall health

emphasis in E & S Shorthorns. A much broader approach is seen with generalized health schemes that have the support of the government. In 1999 the “Cattle Health Certification Standards” (CHeCS) were established. This was done to promote disease management programs that facilitate the control and eradication of the main endemic cattle diseases in the UK. Examples would be the “Hi Health Herdcare” and “Premium Cattle Health Scheme”. These programs are concerned with the following cattle diseases: BVD, IBR, Leptosporosis, Neosporosis, Johne’s Disease, and Tuberculosis (government mandated). BLV (Bovine Leukemia Virus) is not a known problem in the UK. Three diseases demand additional comments. Neosporosis may not be known to many cattle producers in the USA but it exists. Neospora are abortion causing protozoan parasites often carried by dogs. In E & S many breeders believe abortion problems are exacerbated by dogs taken on hikes along the many public trails that permeate the countryside. Johne’s Disease was often brought up in discussions with E & S Shorthorn breeders because of the growing belief that it may be connected to Crohn’s Disease in humans. The opposite track taken by many USA Shorthorn Breeders seems to be an Ostrich approach (putting their heads in the sand). Perhaps at some point in time USA beef cattlemen will wake up to the insidious, toxic nature of Johne’s Disease. At least the Dairy Industry is starting to see the light. Lastly Tuberculosis continues to be a real endemic concern in cattle throughout E & S. This stems from the fact that badgers, a protected species in E & S, are the reservoir for tuberculosis much as bison in Yellowstone National Park are considered a reservoir for Brucellosis in the USA. Cattle Breeders in E & S approach their annual TB tests with much trepidation because a “suspect”, let alone a reactor, can spell disaster. If anyone is interested, there is a large amount of detailed information available on the internet regarding British Cattle Health Schemes. What is most remarkable is how the Beef Shorthorn Society has embraced the concept of health by instilling strict testing requirements at their sales rather than the “buyer beware” approach taken in the USA. The inculcating of health standards in USA herds would help set Shorthorns apart from other beef breeds and help eliminate the “buyer beware” stigma attached to many sales.

For the EPD enthusiasts that read the Shorthorn Bulletin I must mention the British EBV’s (Estimated Breed Values) that are being used by many Shorthorn Breeders to “upgrade” and promote their herds. As in the USA and Australia there are believers and non-believers. Suffice it to say that many of the same parameters are being measured in E & S Shorthorns with more of an emphasis on rate of gain. This is different from the USA where most breeders seem to believe that the Calving Ease and Birthweight Weight EPDs are the magic formula for producing quality Shorthorns.

One of the biggest difference between Shorthorns in the E & S and the USA is the availability of the Morrisons Supermarkets Shorthorn Beef Scheme (MSSBS). It is similar to JBS’s Thousand Guineas Shorthorn Beef Promotion in Australia. The MSSBS has certain criteria that must be met before an animal qualifies for the “Traditional Shorthorn Beef Brand”. The premium paid for Shorthorn steers that qualify for this program may reach 25 pence/kg (approximately 15 cents/#). This program was initially started in 2010 and was officially launched in 2016 with Shorthorn labeled beef in Morrisons stores. All the details of the program are available on the Beef Shorthorn Society website ([beefshorthorn.org](http://beefshorthorn.org)). The most eye catching line in the promotion is that “Shorthorn Beef is globally renowned for its eating quality”. This is the exact approach JBS is taking with its Thousand Guineas program. Obviously there is a paucity of interest in promoting this type of quality branding by Shorthorn Breed Societies in the USA except by the Heritage Shorthorn Society.

I should point out that the “invasion” of the Continental beef breeds throughout the E & S cattle industry has precipitated change in E & S Shorthorns. The emphasis on carcass yield quickly increased demand for double muscling type cattle. To compete Beef Shorthorns had to change and the most expedient way to accomplish that was through the opening of the herd book. Never was it clearer to me than when I attended a weekly commercial Livestock sale in

Thirsk and watched several hundred cattle sell. Cattle with Continental Beef characteristics, especially heavy muscling, consistently brought the highest prices.

The Herds:

A discussion of individual herds will be presented in the order my wife and I visited, in the interest of fairness.

Redhill Beef Shorthorns

Owner: Brenda Wear

Location: Windover, Butcombe, Bristol, North Somerset, England

Brenda Wear is a renowned breeder and judge of Beef Shorthorns and Polled Dorset Sheep. She became involved in the Shorthorn breed in 1989 and has devoted many years to building the quality now seen in her herd. She maintains a much smaller herd now that she has sold part of her herd to downsize and reduce her work load. As her circumstances change she may yet rebuild her Shorthorn numbers.

It is quite interesting to get her perspective on judging given her experience with and proclivities for larger Shorthorns. Her present herd mimics her thinking as a judge. They are functional large Shorthorns that exhibit sound udders with wide tops and square rears which can lead to high carcass yields. She has a preference for roans as do many breeders in E & S versus the preference for red color by many pedigreed USA Shorthorn breeders.

She maintains her herd in a grass fed environment with hay in the winter. Other supplementation is provided at times especially if they are to be shown. Calm dispositions were present throughout her herd. Even though her herd is small in number it is big in quality.

She was very helpful in connecting us with other breeders and her cheerful personality was ever present which I am sure contributes to her being in demand to judge cattle and sheep shows.

Horethorne Milking Shorthorn Herd

Owners: Kevin & Pam Moore

Location: Clare Farm, Sowell, Sherborne, Dorset, England

The Horethorne Milking Shorthorn Dairy is my type of dairy farm as it reminds me of the dairy I grew up on in the 50's and 60's. Kevin and Pam Moore put the health and welfare of their cows above the blind pursuit of profits that is so pervasive in modern dairy farming. It did not take long for my wife and I to sense the Moore's love for their cows. It almost permeates the fresh air and green pastures that their cows inhabit.

The Horethorne Milking Shorthorn herd is a “blended herd” in the sense it combines cows that are 100% Dairy Shorthorns with Dairy Shorthorns that may contain some additional blood from another Dairy Breed. The Moorses are trying to maintain the purity of their 100% Dairy Shorthorns through selective breeding. They have a rolling yearly herd milk production of 13-15,000 pounds/cow. The cows are out on pasture during the grass season and then in tie stalls during the winter. The Moorses try to maintain low cost feed input through the utilization of grass, hay, and minimal grain. They find their Milking Shorthorns to be feed efficient with high quality milk that goes into cheese production.

Kevin & Pam eschew many of the production doctrines used in most modern dairy farms. Their emphasis is on low cost production through less modern equipment, lower feed cost, low maintenance cows, and cow longevity. It was interesting to note that LDAs (left displaced abomasum so common in modern dairy cows) are virtually unheard of in their herd. Longevity was noted in that they had recently put down their oldest producing cow who was 19. Their equipment is functional, in a utilitarian fashion, but would never be classified as the latest and fanciest—again, lower cost. The Moorses are in the dairy business for the long term and strongly believe that Milking Shorthorns are the key to success.

I can not say enough about their positive approach to the their dairy business and Milking Shorthorns. Their enthusiasm is only matched by their dedication. Many people could learn a lot from Kevin and Pam about life and cows in the modern world.

#### Stonmour Shorthorns

Owners: Stephen Hamilton & Helen Hewlett Hamilton

Location: Old Barn House, Wharf Farm, Kingston-Seymour, Nr Clevedon, Somerset, England

Stonmour Shorthorns consist of the last remnants of pure Beef Shorthorn bloodlines in E & S. The Hamiltons, working with the British Rare Breeds Survival Trust (BRBST), are trying to resurrect long forgotten valuable Beef Shorthorn genetics. Richard Broad, a field officer for BRBST, was present during our visit to the Stonmour herd providing insight into how BRBST functions and the methodology it uses in working with breeders such as the Hamiltons. He also provided us with a list of Shorthorn bulls BRBST has stored semen on that is considered to be from pure Shorthorns, which is unfortunately limited in scope. Part of the revival process involves utilizing this semen to produce offspring that can contribute to the rebuilding of pure Beef Shorthorn genetics.

Originally Stonmour made its name on the Stonmour Thunder Cloud bull who had his semen distributed worldwide. For those Shorthorn history buffs he traces back to Scottsdale Tradition who many readers would be familiar with. Thunder Cloud was 100% Shorthorn and in many ways was ahead of his time hence the worldwide interest in his semen. Over 14,000 straws were sold. Today the Hamiltons are just trying to build up cow numbers in the 4 cow families they have. From these cows they hope to expand their genetic base through AI and improve quality. The task is daunting but given the enthusiasm and persistence of Stephen Hamilton he might just pull it off. The potential is there but selecting the right bull to breed to them is the big question given the limited pure Shorthorn bulls available. It would be fascinating to see some of these cows bred to Mandalong Super Elephant who I will bring up in a later discussion.

Hopefully the Hamiltons and BRBST can move the herd forward in both numbers and quality and ultimately be a contributor to surging interest in Shorthorns in E & S. Particular thanks is given to Richard Broad for coming down to be at the Old Barn House during our visit.

### Willingham Beef Shorthorns

Owners: Alan Haigh with his daughters Lois & Alice

Location: Ashgrove Farm, North Willingham, Market Rasen, Lincolnshire, England

The Willingham Beef Shorthorn herd is truly a family affair with Alan and his daughters, Lois and Alice, all involved. The Willingham herd is a relatively young herd started in 2007 although they have been breeding Limousines much longer. They are strong believers in EBV's which are emphasized in their herd selections. In addition to their Shorthorns and Limousines they also farm crops.

For a young Beef Shorthorn herd they have been very successful at the Stirling Shorthorn sales which is the replacement for the original Perth sale. They had the October, 2016 Stirling Champion, Willingham Jagersfontein. In addition they have had the high selling bull at the Stirling Spring Sale. Several significant cow families are represented within their herd with most Willingham cows being large with length to match. Currently they are contemplating a move to Scotland to expand their Shorthorn and Limousine herds along with their other farming endeavors.

The diversity of their cow herd lends itself to the production of Shorthorns that can be utilized in various types of cattle production systems. They certainly are very attached to the show side but believe in practical Shorthorns.

Lois Haigh was extremely helpful in providing guidance and contact information on several other Shorthorn breeders. We would be amiss in not mentioning the sumptuous lunch that Alice provided for us. She can cook for us anytime.

### Upsall Polled Shorthorn Herd

Owner: Hon. Gerald Turton

Location: Upsall Castle, Thirsk, North Yorkshire, England

The Upsall herd was started by Gerald Turton's great uncle, Sir Edmund Turton, with the purchase of 4 pedigreed Shorthorn heifers with the first bull out of this group being registered in the Coates Herd Book in 1909 when Shorthorns were at the height of their glory. Gerald Turton took over the Estate in 1960. It is my understanding that the Upsall herd is currently the oldest Shorthorn herd in the UK.

It would take a long time to list all the awards and accomplishments of the Upsall herd but suffice it to say that the quality of the cows matched or exceeded everything I read about them. They are big, long bodied cows that have strong rear ends and large heads with classic ears and muzzles. Gerald believes in correct locomotion and a hardy bovine constitution.

Currently he is using 3 main herd sires, Fire Fox of Upsall (Mandalong Super Elephant son), King David of Upsall (Mandalong Super Elephant grandson), and Dingo of Upsall sired by another Australian bull: Broughton Park Thunder. It was especially interesting for me to see the Fire Fox bull as I have a strong interest in Mandalong genetics. All of these bulls have qualities that can be utilized in Modern Shorthorn herds. When seen in person the Fire Fox bull is very impressive, especially given he is 7 years of age.

Wandering through the extensive cow herd I saw many outstanding calves that fit the type many E & S breeders are looking for. Upsall breeding continues to be utilized in many E & S Shorthorn herds because "they work". Gerald Turton exemplifies what it means to be a breeder of Shorthorns versus a buyer of Shorthorns.

It should be noted that both Gerald Turton and Major John Gibb, who's herd I will discuss next, were recently named as Honorary Directors of Beef Shorthorn Cattle Society for their many contributions to the Shorthorn Breed and the Cattle Society.

As a side note, Thirsk is the home of Dr. Alf Wight, better known as the author James Herriot who wrote "All Creatures Great and Small" plus many other books. Dr. Wight was the Veterinarian for the Upsall herd until he retired. Gerald was a long time personal friend of the Wight family and Gerald had insightful comments about Dr. Wight. There is a great museum in Thirsk that was Dr. Wight's original home and practice facility. If one ever gets the chance to visit Thirsk I would strongly recommend a visit to the James Herriot Museum. What I would have given to go on some "house calls" with Dr. Wight.

Glenisla Shorthorns

Owner: Major John Gibb

Location: Glenisla House, by Blairgowrie, Perthshire, Scotland

It was with great anticipation that I visited the Glenisla Shorthorn herd, as it was the last stop on our Shorthorn journey and every previous breeder we visited mentioned the quality of the herd. We were not disappointed.

The Glenisla herd is situated in a picturesque mountain valley that most of us would visualize as exemplifying Scotland where hardy people and hardy cattle live. The heather and rock strewn mountain hill sides are home to Glenisla Shorthorns and a large Scotchish Blackface ewe flock (650) that is part of Glenisla. Glenisla House, which consists of 3000 acres, has been in the Gibb family since 1918 with John Gibb taking it over in 1966. Along with his wife, Ann, and daughter, Catriona, Glenisla House is definitely a family enterprise. In addition to his other duties, Major Gibb was twice the President of the World Shorthorn Conference.

Glenisla Shorthorns are selected for vigor under often trying conditions. Performance recording has always been a part of the Glenisla story as seen with their continuing membership in Breed Plan. Glenisla heifers are bred to calve at 2 years of age which contrasts with most Shorthorn breeders in E & S who breed their heifers to calve at 2 1/2 to 3 years of age with their second calf being at 4 years of age instead of 3. No creep feed is fed. All Shorthorns are wintered out as long as possible to glean as much pasture driven growth in

the herd as possible given the short growing season in this part of Scotland. Turnips are planted to provide winter nutrition for the herd. Grass silage is the main diet in the winter with no concentrates added. Calving commences in March as the winter dissipates. Glenisla cows are not overly large but have the rear ends and length so desired in E & S Shorthorns. Roans were the dominant color.

Major Gibb was one of the main proponents of the October Perth Shorthorn Heifer Sale now called the Stirling Shorthorn Heifer Sale. Glenisla consistently sends a large consignment. At the October 22, 2018 Stirling Sale the 11 heifer Glenisla offering averaged \$3425 US with the high seller at \$6900 US. This is a testament to the demand for Glenisla stock.

During our visit we were privy to seeing several Scottish Highland cattle and some Luing Cattle which are a Highland Shorthorn cross in addition to Shorthorns at Glenisla. Seeing the Highland cattle intermingled with the Shorthorns in an idyllic setting was worth the trip alone.

Summation:

I apologize for the length of this article. I considered breaking it into 2 Issues of the Shorthorn Bulletin but decided it would lose some of its continuity in the process. I could have easily written another 10 pages on the nuances of Shorthorns in E & S. If anyone has additional questions on what I observed please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

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Shorthorn Topic For Volume 4 Issue 1: