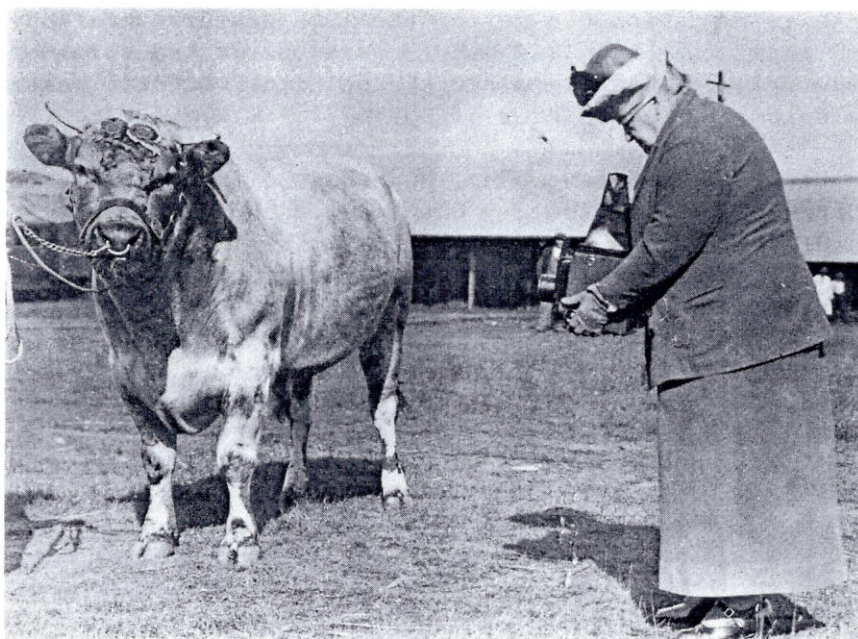


Staffordshire County Museum Service

Shugborough Information Sheet

Blue Albion Cattle

THE BLUE BREED OF BAKEWELL



The Hon. Mrs Smythe, Ashton Court, Bristol, photographs Mr. Charles Webster's First Prize and Champion Blue Albion bull, "Ivonbrook Admiral", at the 1936 Royal Show which was held on her ground.

Blue cattle have long been in demand in the Midlands because of their attractive appearance. Many years ago it became common to hear a farmer say, "you've never seen a bad blue 'un", possibly because early blue cattle, like many of those seen today, were crossbred, and exhibited hybrid vigour which improved performance in comparison with their parent breeds.

"Blue", really a bluish grey, is unfortunately not a colour which breeds true, though it is more pleasing to the eye than black, white or black and white, which may also be produced when two blue animals are mated. The same difficulty occurs with the attractive strawberry roan colouring found in the Shorthorn breed. Shorthorn cattle may be white, red or red and white as well as roan. Provided animals are of good quality little distinction is made, though there has sometimes been prejudice against white animals and a slight preference has always been given to roans, particularly in the Northern Dairy Shorthorn breed.

Until the late 1940s the Shorthorn was the dominant dairy and dual-purpose breed in the United Kingdom and this position had been maintained for very many years.

Derbyshire and Staffordshire were not exceptions and most of the animals in the dairy herds of the two counties were Shorthorns.

From the early 19th century onwards, Welsh Black cattle had found their way to the Midlands in considerable numbers, both as animals for dairy use and stores for fattening. The Welsh Black is now well known as a hardy beef breed but at that time it was a dual-purpose animal. The trade continued for many years and Welsh cattle were still being advertised for sale to "Derbyshire Boys" by Bob Parry of Caernarfon in the Bakewell Show catalogue of 1922.

Some of these black cattle were undoubtedly crossed with white and light roan Shorthorns in the Bakewell area to produce blue animals which were noted as "good doers". It is also possible, though there is little evidence for this, that there was some crossing of Shorthorns with the Kerry, a rather small Irish dairy breed. This would have produced an animal similar in colour, rather smaller than the Welsh Black cross, and of distinct dairy type.

"Dutch" cattle, which were to form the basis of the British Friesian breed, had been imported in quite large numbers during the 19th century. They were noted for their milking ability and by 1914 there were one or two breeders of pedigree "Holstein" cattle in Derbyshire. A black and white "Dutch" beast crossed with a Shorthorn would also have produced blue offspring.

Whatever her parentage may have been, Hugh Rose of Bakewell entered a four year-old blue cow at Bakewell Show in 1901. She was shown in the class for "Best Shorthorn cow, four years old and upwards, combining in the greatest degree milking and grazing properties, having calved in 1901, or having a calf within eight weeks from the date of the Show".

We do not know if Hugh Rose won a prize with his cow, which was certainly not a pure Shorthorn. However, increasing numbers of blue cattle continued to be shown in the Shorthorn classes at Bakewell Show until 1922.



WILLIAM J. CLARK, *Secretary and Editor.*

The Secretary of the Bakewell Show, and of the Bakewell Farmer's Club, at the time Rose showed his blue cow was W.J. (Will) Clark of Alport. He was a remarkable man.

Will was born on February 11th 1871, the son of William Clark, who was employed in a senior capacity in the estate office at Haddon Hall, the property of the Duke of Rutland. Young Will's mother died when he was fifteen and he went to be looked after by his grandmother, whose husband, like Will's father, was involved in the organisation of Bakewell Show.

Will and his brother Charlie were educated at Longstone Grammar School, travelling there each day on ponies. Though ponies for transport and a few fowls, sheep, pigs and a house cow were the only farm stock Will or his father ever kept, he was to develop an absorbing interest in livestock.

On leaving school he was apprenticed to Vickers of Sheffield. He could "not even knock a nail in straight", was certainly not fitted for engineering work, and was soon back in the Bakewell area. He married and settled at Riverside House, Alport.

He became Secretary of the Show and of the Farmers' Club, which at that time was a very flourishing organisation. The members once visited Windsor to view the Royal Farms and were met at the station by forty carriages and pairs!

As a result of his contacts with local farmers, Will founded a flock book for the indigenous breed of sheep, the Derbyshire Gritstone, the first volume published being for sheep entered in 1907. Will was also instrumental, with his father, to whom he appears to have been very close, in forming the Haddon and Chatsworth Coursing Club, which organised two meetings a year, one on each of the two great estates.

In the 1909 Bakewell Show catalogue Will advertised his "Stock Breeders' Private Sale Register". It cost one shilling per entry form to put an animal on the register and he would try to put buyer and seller in touch, without actually handling the stock, taking on anything from a duck to a Shire horse.

The same year he and his father went to the Royal Show at Gloucester and there, at a meeting presided over by Mr. Radcliff and also attended by Mrs Brown of Hedges and Messrs. H. Brown of Colton, the British Holstein Cattle Club, now the British Friesian Cattle Society of Great Britain and Ireland, was formed to cater for the imported "Dutch" cattle. Will was elected Secretary and soon drafted the rules and the breed standard, which at that time allowed dun, blue, and red and white cattle to be entered as well as black and white ones, and published the first volume of the Herd Book.

By 1911, he had relinquished the post of Secretary; his reasons for doing so are not entirely clear. His wife was certainly unwilling to move to a place more convenient for an office for the rapidly growing Society and it appears there may also have been some disagreement over money. Clark's first volume of the Herd Book was withdrawn.

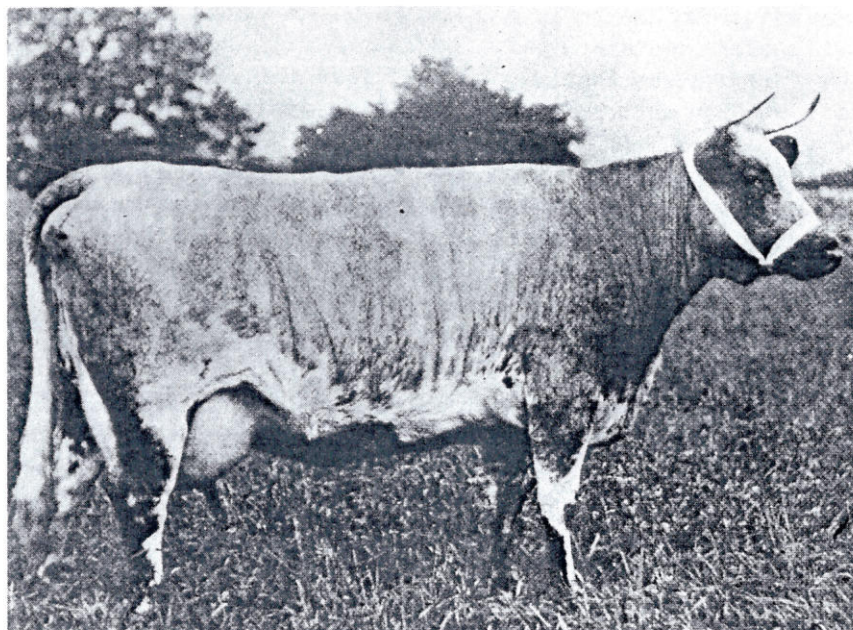
At some time in the period 1900-1914, Will had also founded the British Trotting and Galloway Stud Book for light general-purpose horses. This was short-lived and we know nothing about it; any information would be gratefully received. Will must have had a keen interest in horses as he used to handicap the races at Bakewell Show.

While he had been so busy the blue dual-purpose Shorthorn type cattle had been developing and multiplying in the Bakewell area and must have become a common sight. On October 11th 1916, Clark formed what was to be his fourth, and last, breed society, Clark's United Breeders. As all records of the Society have apparently been destroyed we have little detailed information but we know that by 1919 he had organised a show and sale of blue cattle in the field behind the Station Hotel, now the Grouse and Claret, at Rowsley, a few miles south of Bakewell.

In 1920 the breeders of blue cattle were sufficiently numerous and organised to found the Blue Albion Cattle Society which officially came into existence on January 1st 1921, and purchased the Blue Albion Herd Book from Will Clark for £250. The time seemed right.

The launching of the breed coincided with the boom following the cessation of hostilities and the Blue Albion was in fashion. In 1921 the Royal Show was held at Derby and classes were provided for Blue Albions. Great interest was excited and the Society soon had members from all over the country. It is perhaps slightly surprising that, though the bulk of the membership was concentrated in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and adjacent counties, there were, by 1923, 29 breeders in Essex. There were probably plenty of blue cows suitable as foundation stock in that area because of the influence of "Dutch" cattle and some of Clark's contacts in the Friesian world, who included representatives of Lord Rayleigh's farms, took up his newly introduced breed. Most of these southern breeders, of course, came north for their bulls, which was a great help to the Derbyshire men.

Interest continued to increase and at the Annual Show and Sale, held at Rowsley in delightful weather on September 1st 1922, Mr. J.W. Purseglove, of Megdale Farm, Matlock, refused a bid of £390 for his winning cow, Megdale Duchess.



*"Megdale Duchess",
owned by
Mr. J.W. Purseglove.*

*Champion Cow,
Blue Albion Cattle
Society's Show and Sale,
Rowsley, 1922.*

In May of that year "best milch cows" at Bakewell Market "had a good enquiry and made from £25 to £38". The Blue Albion boom had arrived and was even more amazing than recent rushes to buy Texel sheep or newly imported continental cattle breeds. It should be borne in mind that the immediate price surge following the end of the War was over. By June 1921, there were 2,171,288 unemployed and farms were being offered for sale at ridiculously low prices. The average price for Shire horses sold at the London Show auction was £434 in 1921, £269 in 1922 and £140 in 1923. The general fall in demand for livestock was to have a dramatic effect on the Blue Albion.

Volume III of the Blue Albion Cattle Society's Herd Book, containing the 1922 registrations, was edited by Sydney J. Clarke of Irongate, Derby. Will Clark's wife had become seriously ill and, combined with other pressures, this had forced him to give up the Secretaryship of Bakewell Show in 1918. In 1922, after overseeing the publication of the first two volumes of the Herd Book he broke his connection with the Blue Albion breed, though he had been proud to see the blue and white and black and white marquees of the two cattle breed societies he had founded standing next to each other at the Royal Show. The post of Blue Albion Secretary was advertised in the Agricultural Gazette.

The Council appointed Sydney Clarke, who became known as "Sam the Smiler" among cattle-men to distinguish him from the apparently less cheerful C.H. Clarke, who was Secretary of the Red Poll Society! Clarke, who had trained at Wye College, had worked during the War for the Ministry of Agriculture Costings Committee covering the East Midlands. When this was wound up he was transferred to the Ministry of Health, Local Government Audit Section and, as he wanted to get back into agriculture, the Blue Albion post seemed an ideal opportunity.

The third volume of the Herd Book contained the registrations of 117 bulls and 162 females - animals whose sires and dams were known - and of 3237 foundation cows. When Will Clark had drawn up the rules and breed standard, he had done so by amending the ones he had designed for the Holstein Club. The rules said, "Animals which are not the produce of both registered Sire and registered Dam.....may be registered, but such animals must be inspected and passed as 'Foundation Stock' by an Official Inspector of the Herd Book". Initially he only specified colour and conformation to the breed standard but volume III states that a foundation animal shall be "a really good example of a Blue Shorthorn".

Though most of the vast number of cattle entered as Foundation Stock in 1922, and those entered later in the Special Register, had little effect on the breed, they made a lot of money for the members. A good number of the early members were dealers who quickly saw potential for profit in the Blue Albion. An indication of the incredible demand is given by Herd Book entries showing that Messrs. Eardley and Furnival of Market Drayton entered 59 cattle as foundation stock and transferred 55 to other breeders between August and November 1922. There was even some foreign interest and Mr. J.W. Purseglove sold a bull to the Argentine for £250.

Some of the founder members realised that the boom would not last. George Axe of Bank House Farm, Newhaven, Hartington decided to sell his herd and Arthur Trafford of Bradbourne - the Trafford family are now well known for pedigree Charolais cattle - put some stock in the sale, which was very successful, so much so that Trafford decided to have a sale of 80 animals at Bradbourne. Then disaster struck.

In 1923/4 there was a serious outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease which resulted in the slaughter of several important Blue Albion herds and severe restrictions on movement and sale. Trafford's sale had to be abandoned and by the time he was able to move his stock the high prices had gone; the boom was over, and blue cattle were worth £20 or £30 each.

Everything had gone wrong at once. The economy had continued to decline and the country was in the midst of a dreadful depression. A member or members had been expelled from the Society for buying blue calves in Haslingden Market and falsely entering them as pedigree animals in the Herd Book. There was an increasing emphasis on milk production and the Friesian and Ayrshire were gaining in popularity at the expense of breeds of more dual-purpose character like the Shorthorn and Blue Albion.

To make matters worse there remained the problem of colour; if a bull calf of any colour other than blue was born its only future was as a steer. If the calf was a heifer it had to be discarded, until 1924 when it could be entered in a "Special Register", its correctly coloured progeny being eligible for full registration.

This, of course, was nonsensical. If the breeders had adopted the Shorthorn policy of allowing dark, light and roan animals to be registered and had concentrated their efforts on breeding good quality stock of hardy, dual-purpose type, the Society might well have survived in spite of the economic situation, the profiteers, Foot and Mouth disease and the Friesian. It is quite plain that, at least in the early years of the breed, many people were not aware that blue could not be made to breed true. In 1922, the Ashbourne News reported that "the colouring of these blue albions is gradually becoming more correct, but the aim of the breeders is to produce one of China blue and white and it will take some years before a perfect blend is obtained"!

There is no doubt that much of the Blue Albion foundation stock was of excellent type and well worthy of use as the basis of a new breed. Much of it was in the hands of farming families who were, or were to become, very successful with other breeds. Lord Rayleigh's "Terling" prefix is now well known in Friesian circles, the Tory family of Dorset are famous for pedigree sheep, Harry Goodwin's "Crossfields" prefix became well known in the Shire horse world and Gerry Dobson, whose "Ridgwardine" blood is in many of the best Friesians today, gained some of his earliest show experience with his father's Blue Albions at the Newcastle Royal Show of 1923.

In that year a Blue Albion herd in the Peak Milk Recording Society achieved an average yield for 17 cows of 8700 lbs, at a time when the national average was probably 5000-6000 lbs. J.D. Seals of Snelston, Ashbourne, won the Silcock Gold Cup for the best dairy herd in the country with his herd of Blue Albions and Shorthorns in 1926 and 1927. In its history since 1920 this competition has been won once by Guernseys, twice by Jerseys and on every other occasion by Friesians or Ayrshires. Seals' herd must have been outstanding. In 1924/5 his Blue Albion cow, "Pike Kitty" achieved a lactation of 2000 gallons.

However, all these achievements came too late. Though Blue Albions continued to be shown and had classes at the Royal, Derbyshire, Staffordshire, West Midland, Great Yorkshire, Essex and Hertfordshire Shows, as well as at several local shows in Derbyshire, Staffordshire and the South-East, the profit seekers lost interest when the Blue Albion went out of fashion and membership declined. The few breeders who continued had animals of a very definite breed type and by the early 1930s some of those animals had quite long pedigrees.

Sydney Clarke had established himself as an accountant in Derby and left the Blue Albion Cattle Society to run his business in 1934. Charles J. Blore of W.S. Bagshaw and Sons, the Uttoxeter firm who had been auctioneers to the Society for some time, was appointed to preside over the decline of the breed. He edited the last volume of the Herd Book, volume XI, which contained details of 50 bulls and 120 fully registered cows born in 1934 to 1937, roughly a third of the number of registrations in the one year 1924.

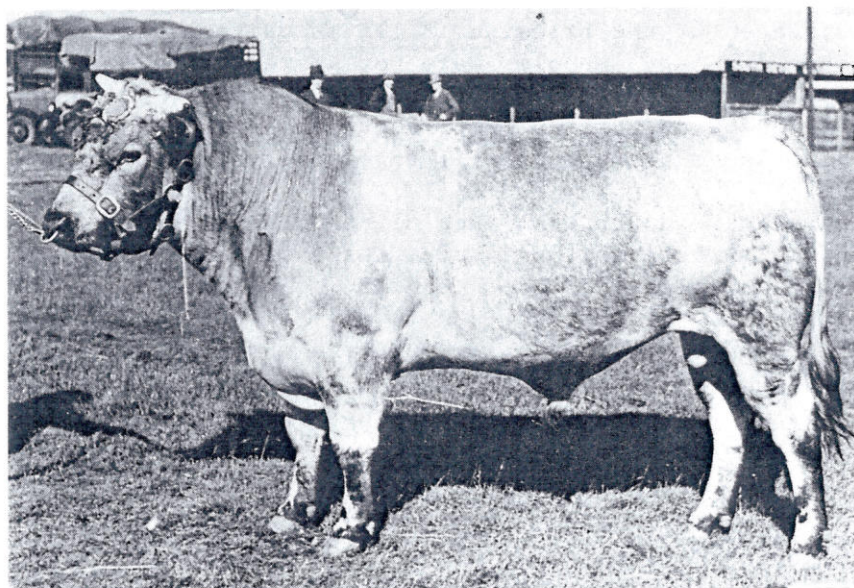
On Thursday, August 10th 1939, at Bakewell Show, the four most dedicated breeders, who had presumably continued to send registrations to Mr. Blore, were exhibiting. They were W.E. Glover of Snarestone, Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Miss E. Bassett of Ashover, Harry Goodwin of Walton-on-Trent and Charlie Webster of Grange Mill. It was now all over, bar the shouting, for the Blue Albion Cattle Society. On September 3rd, war was declared.

The last Annual General Meeting of the Society, held on May 24th, 1940, must have been a sorry little gathering. The Glovers and Miss Bassett had by now given up their cattle and Harry Goodwin soon followed suit. He had been having trouble getting his cows in calf and, with no prospect of continued interest in the breed, switched to Ayrshires.

He did, however, continue to pay his subscription to Mr. Blore and remained the only paid-up member of the Society when it was officially wound up in Chancery Division before Mr. Justice Cross in May 1966. Its property was divided equally among those persons who had been members at the date of the last annual meeting and were still surviving. The Blue Albion was officially defunct.

*"Ivonbrook Admiral",
owned and bred by
Mr. C. Webster.*

*First and Champion,
Royal Show,
Bristol, 1936.*



POSTSCRIPT

Charlie Webster, the fourth exhibitor at the 1939 Bakewell Show, was not beaten. He continued to breed Blue Albions and after the War he succeeded in getting two new breeders interested; they were Howard Parker of Mugginton and Arthur Matkin of Idridgehay. Unfortunately both their herds were short-lived.

Howard Parker had 50 cows slaughtered as a result of an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease nearby. Though he started again with Blue Albions, he never really got over the loss and died soon afterwards. The cattle which remained were eventually crossed with Friesians. Arthur Matkin was using a Shorthorn bull on his cattle by the time tuberculin testing was introduced and he decided to sell his herd, which was auctioned by Richardson and Linnell on April 14th, 1954.

All was still not lost. P. Henshall of Alderley Edge had established a herd of blue cattle by the early 1920s and when the Blue Albion Cattle Society was formed he soon entered 37 females as foundation stock and purchased the bull Derwent Hero (289) for use in his herd. After that he only entered one heifer in the book but continued to breed Blue Albions.

W.H. Dennis of Albion Farm, Moreton, Thame, Oxfordshire, had started his herd in the 1920s and Mr. Arthur Broad of Castletown House, Farndon, near Malpas, had founded another pure-bred Blue Albion herd in the 1930s.

Finally, just before war broke out for the second time Mr. J.C. Fawcett of Garstang, Lancashire, travelled down to see Harry Goodwin and purchased a yearling bull with which he began to grade-up his blue cross-bred cattle.

Mr. Raymond Fawcett,
Heald Farm, Barnacre,
Garstang, Lancashire,
with a Blue Albion
heifer calf, March 1980.



While registered or pedigree bulls were available the breeders bought them and when official breed activity ceased, and then Charlie Webster gave up, they kept their stock pure by exchanging bulls. The first herd to be dispersed was the one at Albion Farm; Mr. Dennis died in 1953 and his cattle were sold.

Fortunately Arthur Broad's son-in-law, Mr. Probin, had stock from Mr. Broad and began a herd, and the Blue Albion continued quietly. Then disaster struck yet again. The Broad herd was wiped out in the Foot and Mouth epidemic which decimated the dairy cattle of Cheshire and North Shropshire in 1967 and 1968. Mr. Probin's cattle survived but movement restrictions made it difficult for him to get a new bull and he started to cross his cows with a Hereford bull.

Geoff Henshall, the son of P. Henshall, still had Blue Albions, and his cattle escaped the epidemic, as did the Fawcett herd, which survived with the use of inbred bulls. These two herds now contain about 200 Blue Albion cattle. A number of people are interested in the breed, including Mr. Probin's son, Graham, who has begun using a Blue Albion bull in his dairy herd.

Staffordshire County Museum is making efforts to ensure the survival of the Blue Albion. Anyone interested in keeping Blue Albions or having any knowledge of the history of the breed should contact us by letter or on Little Haywood 881388.

SOURCES CONSULTED

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Numerous interviews, telephone conversations and correspondence with persons associated with the Blue Albion breed. All information from these sources is stored in the collections of Staffordshire County Museum.



Five of the best! Blue Albion heifers owned by C.H. Webster.