

## The Ayrshire Breed of Cattle.

**A Lecture to the Society on 10th March, 1949.**

*By Hugh Bone, Esq.,*

Lately Secretary of the Ayrshire Cattle Herd Book Society  
of Great Britain and Ireland.

The origin and early history of the Ayrshire Breed of Cattle have been dealt with by many writers. I propose here to deal with the origin and development of the breed, and how the Ayrshire cow has been improved to its present high state of efficiency as a producer of high quality milk.

Early writers state that the original strain was imported from abroad—Holland, Scandinavia, and even Spain being mentioned. In the case of the Dutch theory of origin, it is asserted that animals of the Teeswater or Holderness breed were introduced into Ayrshire. These breeds were supposed to have derived their origin from a cross with some large bulls imported from Holland into Yorkshire about 1700. With regard to the Scandinavian theory, it is said that when King Haco of Norway came up the Firth of Clyde to fight the Battle of Largs in 1263 he had with him in his ships several cattle which were brought ashore. The Spanish theory is somewhat similar, for it was supposed that cattle from one of the ships comprising the Spanish Armada swam ashore after the ship was wrecked at Portincross. All these cattle were supposed to have been inter-bred with the native cattle, and this accounts for the mixed colours of the Ayrshires. The ancient origin, however, is by no means clear, but Aiton in his "General View of Agriculture of the County of Ayr," published in 1811, states that "judicious selection and mating among the native cattle, coupled with improved feeding and handling, was an important factor in the evolution of the breed." While, therefore, there may have been importation of foreign blood, either at first or second hand, the substantial and efficient origin has come about through selection and improvement of the native breed. One feature is the repeated changes in the colour of the breed. Originally the colour was black. The late Mr. Charles Douglas of Auchlochan in an article on Ayrshire Cattle published in the Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society of Scotland in 1919, refers to the fact that the most numerous breed of cattle in Scotland was what is spoken of as the "Kylo"; that it is usual to identify the "Kylo" with the West Highland Breed as we now have it; but that the probability is that the West Highland Breed of the present day did not



exist till a later date, and that the "Kylos" or Black Cattle were the prevailing breed throughout those districts in which the polled cattle were not predominant. The Minutes of the Kilmarnock Farmers' Club, instituted in 1793, support the view that the original cattle of the district were black. Thirteen years later, 1806, rules were drawn up, and the objects of the Club were *inter alia* stated as being the improvement of Agriculture and the Black Breed of Cattle in Ayrshire. The Club held Shows for Cattle from 1808 onwards, and the Shows are described in the earlier Minutes of the Club as "Shows of Black Cattle." In the Show Minute of 1811, however, it is stated, "The Club agrees that there shall be a Show of Cattle in the Town Green of Kilmarnock." From that year the word "Black" is left out. A Minute of the Club in 1814 speaks of "the great demand for our dairy breed from all parts of Great Britain, but particularly England." The same Minute speaks of the cattle as the "real Cunningham Breed." Cunningham is the northern division of the County of Ayr, which is divided into three districts, the other two being Kyle in the middle, and Carrick in the south. There is an old rhyme which goes—

"Kyle for a man,  
Carrick for a coo;  
Cunningham for butter and cheese,  
And Galloway for 'oo."

Other writers declare that the real name by which the breed was first known was that of "Dunlop Cattle" derived either from a Mr. Dunlop of Dunlop House (who was credited with being one of the introducers of the breed), or from the Parish of Dunlop in which Dunlop House is situated and which is in the Cunningham district. As the breed spread it became known as the "Cunningham" breed and is so described in the Minutes of the Kilmarnock Club already referred to. When it spread to other districts of Ayrshire and to the neighbouring counties it became known as the "Ayrshire" Breed. Various writers prove that the Ayrshire or Cunningham Dairy Breed had well established itself over the South-Western Counties including Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, Wigtownshire, Bute and Arran in the early part of the 19th Century. Another chronicler, named Rawlins, writing in 1794, says:—"They have another breed called the Dunlop which are allowed to be the best race for yielding milk in Great Britain or Ireland, not only for large quantities but also for richness and quality." Dr. A. D. Buchanan-Smith of the Institute of Animal Genetics, Edinburgh University, in an article also published in the Transactions of the Highland and Agricultural Society, in 1937, states:—"In 1769 John Orr, Esq., brought to Grougar, near Kilmarnock, some cows, probably of the Dutch Type; these were good cows, for one of them cost £6, which was more than twice the price of the best cow

then in that quarter. Their progeny greatly multiplied in the strath of the Water of Irvine." At a like period the Earl of Marchmont had been improving his cattle at Berwick with stock from the Bishop of Durham, and his factor, Bruce Campbell, carried some to Sornbeg in Kyle; Mr. Hamilton of Sundrum used a bull of this stock with effect in the district about Cessnock.

There can be little doubt that it was through these imported cattle that the colour of the dairy cow stock of South-West Scotland changed, as Aiton records, from being black, in the middle of the 18th Century, to brown or brown and white by the early years of the 19th Century.

Such then were the rather unpromising foundations from which the Ayrshire was built up, and, whatever the original source, one thing is certain and that is that it was by careful selection and mating of the cattle in the early days that the breed now stands out pre-eminently the best dairy cow in the world for producing the largest quantity of milk combined with the highest butter fat at the lowest cost.

There are plenty of grounds for giving the farmers of that day full credit for the development of the breed. They were shrewd men, and both in published writings and private documents there is ample evidence to show that they set great store on their cattle. One such document is worth quoting, for it shows that there were good cattle at Rowallan more than 300 years ago: it is the will of William Muir, elder, of Rowallan, Kilmarnock, and runs:—

"The said Williame had pertaining to him, the tyme of his deceis, Fourscoir and thrie tydie ky—Furrow ky, with thair stirkis, fourtie ane—Thrie bullis—Nyntein stottis and quoyis of thrie yeir auld. . . ."

## EARLY BREEDERS.

There we have then a résumé of the facts concerning the early history of the breed. What of the Breeders of that early day? It is not till the beginning of the 19th Century that we know definitely who some of them were. Among the first was Theophilis Paton, of Swinlees, Dalry, who was born in 1778 and died in 1872. His herd won many prizes around 1835 and following years. It was about this time that the Ayrshire began to have stronger horns with the points turned upwards instead of inwards as previously. Bulls from the Swinlees herd were spread all over the country and were introduced into almost every herd of importance.



The herd of Mr. Parker, of Broomlands, Irvine, took its origin from Swinlees, and its owner succeeded Mr. Paton as the most successful winner in the Showyard, where his stock were noted for their style. It was about this period that the breed received help from the Highland and Agricultural Society. In 1814 that Society offered prizes for bulls and heifers in the Kyle district of Ayrshire, and the breed is for the first time referred to as the "Ayrshire." In 1826 (the year of the short corn) the Annual Show was held at Glasgow, and the Magistrates made a donation of £50 to the Ayrshire classes, which had been increased in number. There were 27 entries in the cow class and 22 for bulls.

In 1835 the Highland Society held its first, and up till now, its only Show at Ayr, where a bull of Swinlees breeding, named "Jock the Laird," took the honours. In that year the Ayrshire Agricultural Association was formed. Another bull whose blood was widely spread throughout the breed was one named "Geordie," bred by Mr. Walker of Kilbirnie, which was a first prize winner at the Glasgow "Highland" in 1838. He was the forerunner of what was known as the Show Bull. Another was "Burnhouses" bred by Lawrence Drew of Merryton, the great Clydesdale breeder. This bull was owned by James Howie, of Burnhouses, Galston, the father of Mr. James Howie, Muirside, Dumfries, and Mr. John Howie, Solicitor, who later was to become Secretary of the Ayrshire Cattle Herd Book Society. The female progeny of this bull were full of style, with grand frames and rightly hung vessels, while the teats were correctly planted and of the proper dairy size. Sons of this bull were used far and wide.

About this time there came into the picture a cow which had considerable influence on a section of the breed. She belonged to Lawrence Drew and was variously known as "Drew's Wee Black Cow" or "Mrs. Baird." She was undersized in every way but her vessel was very tight and level along the sole and this carried her to victory at Shows for many years. Her teats were small and are alleged to have required "setting" with collodion. Bull calves off her were used everywhere, and did much to impair the usefulness of the Ayrshire as a dairy cow.

In the South-West of Scotland it had long been customary for the women-folk to do the milking. According to some authorities it was therefore considered suitable that the teats of the cows should be small. The "vesselled" type was accordingly introduced and in breeding this type little or no attention was paid to the primary purpose for which a cow exists, namely, the production of milk, so long as the sole of the udder was flat and the fore udder carried far forward with a neat attachment to the abdomen. The teats were small and squarely placed. In the opinion of some the vessel-bred cow for sheer beauty of form and symmetry has never

been surpassed. This was the type of animal which won the Ayr Show Derby for many years but which gave very little milk compared with what they give nowadays. Indeed the late Alexander Cross, of Knockdon, who probably won more Derbies in his day than any other, once remarked that "Ayr Derby queys were not expected to give milk." This was also the type of animal which nearly ruined the breed for overseas buyers. They naturally thought that the animal which won the Ayr Derby—for Ayr was recognised as the home of the breed—was the kind to breed from, and bulls from such animals were bought for export abroad to the detriment of the breed.

### THE HERD BOOK SOCIETY.

The Ayrshire Cattle Herd Book Society was instituted in 1877 and published its first Volume of the Herd Book in 1878. This was compiled mostly by the late Hon. G. R. Vernon of Auchans, Dundonald, assisted by the late Mr. John Cochrane, Nether Craig, Kilmarnock.

The early Minute Books of the Society do not contain much detail about the activities except in regard to the conditions of eligibility for entry of animals in the Herd Book. These were varied from time to time, some breeders wanting to close the Book to non-pedigree cattle while others wished it to remain open. To-day the Herd Book has four sections:—Females with a fully registered number; Bulls also with a fully registered number; Females entered in Appendix "B," which is the Foundation Register, and Females entered in Appendix "A," which are descended from Appendix "B" cows. To be allowed entry into the foundation register cows and heifers have to qualify on milk and butter fat production standard as well as having been got by a registered sire and out of a pure bred non-pedigree cow.

The first Secretary of the Society was Mr. James McMurtrie, a Solicitor, and he was followed in 1900 by Mr. John Howie, Solicitor. The post was only a part-time one up till the time Mr. Howie retired in 1922, when I was appointed as full-time Secretary to succeed him that year. When Mr. Howie took over in 1900 the membership of the Society was 267, five being in England. By 1922 the membership had grown to 848, while the number of animals entered in the Herd Book was 7,499. To-day the number of members is over 6,300, while the number of animals entered in Volume 73 is 51,696.



## AYRSHIRES 100 YEARS AGO.

Before going on to the Development of the Ayrshire to present day standards I would like to refer to some interesting information which I came across a short time ago in the pages of a paper called, "The Ayrshire Agriculturalist," the first number of which was published on 29th September, 1843. One of the largest contributors to that journal was Mr. William Aiton to whom I have already referred. He was a well-known agriculturist and historian of his day. In a letter to the Editor, Mr. Aiton tells of his buying in 1778, "ten cows of as good a quality and condition as the ordinary dairy cows then in Cunningham at an average price of £3 15/- per cow, and none of them higher than £4 0s 0d." Earlier, in 1760 the average price of milk cows did not exceed £2 10/- or £2 15/-, each. Farm butter in those days was sold in Ayr, Kilmarnock, and Irvine markets at 4d and 4½d per pound of 24 ozs. What a contrast to-day with cows making up to 2,800 guineas and bulls to 5,800 guineas, while farm butter is off the market entirely.

It was interesting to note in the same newspaper that Scottish breeders were exhibitors of Ayrshires over in Belfast in that year, and among the prizewinners was Gabriel Dunlop, of Peacockbank, Stewarton. "Gibby" Dunlop, as he was known, was a Cattle-Dealer and was an old man when I first knew him through exhibiting at Ayr Show.

To give you an insight into the way things were done in connection with Cattle Shows of that day I might mention that a great Banquet was held when, the account states, "About 1500 Gentlemen sat down to Dinner presided over by the Duke of Leinster, but the Ladies were accommodated in the Galleries where," it says, "The display of fashion and beauty added lustre to the gay and magic scene." From this one might gather that the ladies were permitted only to look down on their Lords and Masters enjoying themselves, and did not partake of the viands themselves.

## MILK RECORDING.

One of the greatest factors in the development of the Ayrshire cow was Milk Recording, which began in Scotland in 1903, long before it began in England. The pioneer of milk recording was the late John Speir, of Newton, Glasgow, and to him Ayrshire breeders owe a deep debt of gratitude. I need hardly tell you that the purpose of milk recording is to find out what each cow is giving in the way of milk-production so that the owner can weed out the poor milkers from his herd and retain only those that are paying their way and from which it is wise to breed. Milk recording was

voluntary, as it still is, on the part of breeders, and it did not find favour with some of the owners of the Show or Vessel type of cow. Their opponents accused them of being afraid to record their cows as it would show up the fact that they were poor milkers. However, wiser counsels prevailed in the long run, and to-day all progressive breeders insist on having their herds' milk recorded.

Milk Recording in Scotland is carried on under the auspices of the Scottish Milk Records Association, in England under the Milk Marketing Board. The two systems are somewhat different. In Scotland all the actual weighing of the milk and testing it for butter fat is carried out by the Milk Recorder who visits each farm on an average every 20-22 days according to the number of farms in the circuit. In Scotland the recorder does all the figuring and book-keeping, but over the Border the farmer himself does the weighing of the milk and the jotting down in the register of the amount of milk each animal gives at each milking. He must weigh once a week on the same day each week, and the Recorder calls at intervals of six to eight weeks and adds up the figures the farmer has put down, initials the register, and goes off home each night. If the English farmer wants a butter fat test he requires to send samples away to a Central Laboratory where they may lie for several weeks before being tested for butter fat. The English system is very much more expensive than the Scottish one but we have been unable to get the M.M.B. to adopt our system. The only part they have adopted is to calculate the milk record by Lactation instead of in a period of 365 days. A lactation is reckoned from the date the cow or heifer calves until she goes or is put dry to prepare her for her next calving. You thus get a much more accurate idea of how a cow is doing between one calving and the next. Scottish, and indeed all, breeders of Ayrshire cattle lay great stress on the production of a live calf every year, and in most cases the breeding programme of the herd is arranged accordingly. The S.M.R.A. publish a Report each year which gives the names of animals in each herd which have reached a certain standard, the milk yielded by them and the percentage of butter fat. Many of these records can be traced through these reports over a period of years, a thing that cannot be done from the English M.M.B. reports. In this way much valuable information is made available to any breeder on the look-out for a herd sire. No progressive breeder ever thinks of buying a herd sire unless he has studied the milk yields of the dam and dam of sire and is satisfied that these have sufficient milk and butter fat behind their pedigree to warrant the purchase of the animal.

The Ayrshire is not a super-milk-producing cow, and spectacular yields are not the aim of the Ayrshire breeder. They believe it is a better policy to have the whole herd averaging 1,000 gallons of milk or over with a live calf each year than to concentrate on one or



perhaps two individual cows and milking them three times a day in order to make a big record for the sake of advertisement. The highest yield ever made by an Ayrshire cow in this country was that of Nether Craig Janet, which gave 3,091 gallons at 3.79% butter fat in 350 days and calved again in 14 days over the year. Bigger yields have been made in Canada and America, but over there they drive their cows a little harder than we do here; besides they have plenty of feeding stuffs, which makes all the difference.

### THE NEW SHOW.

About 1919-20 a cleavage of opinion as to the merits of the vessel cow and the real milk-producing Ayrshire became acute, and it almost developed into a split between the two factions. A large number of members of the Herd Book Society were determined to get recognition in the Show ring for the cow which could both look well and at the same time produce a large quantity of milk. This resulted in a New Show being promoted at which the animals were judged on a system of points for appearance and points for milk production. This show was the means of bringing out cows which could produce at the pail, and at the end of the fifth show practically all the animals exhibited were gaining full points for milk. The show had thus achieved its object and was discontinued in 1927, the first show having been held in 1921. The outcome of the New Show was a concentrated attack on the

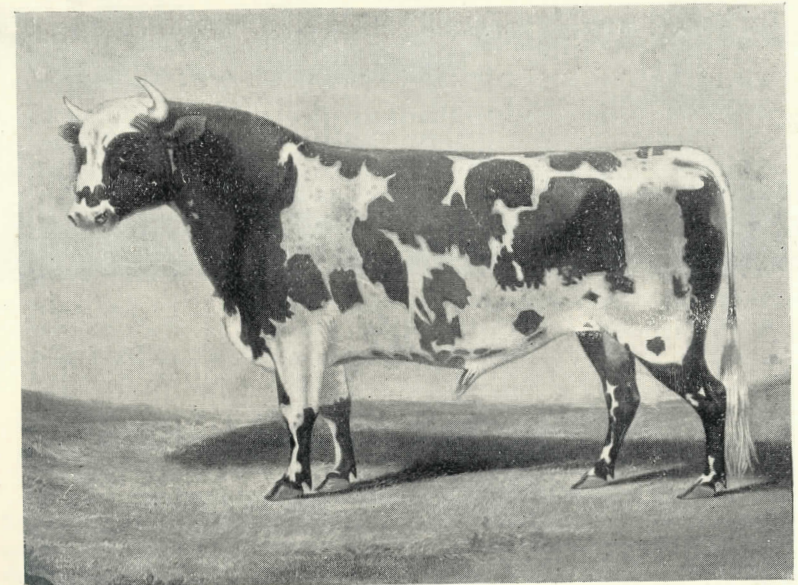
### LONDON DAIRY SHOW.

and in 1923, 1924 and 1925, the breed carried all before it in the great inter-breed competitions for the Championship Trophies which were awarded on Inspection, Milking Trials, and Butter Test, defeating all other breeds of dairy cattle in Britain. These awards have been won by Ayrshires on eight occasions, the last time in 1947, which was the last Show I attended as Secretary of the Society. I thus began my career as Secretary with the breed winning the major honours at London and ended it with their repeating the achievement.

The highest average quantity of milk given by an Ayrshire at London was 88.6 lbs. each day at 4.05% butter fat. That was in 1934. Last year the highest quantity was 86.7 lbs., at 3.63% fat. In the competition for the "Bledisloe" Trophy in 1948, for which six cows of each breed compete as a team, the highest average quantity of milk each day was 81.6 lbs., at 4.51% butter fat. That means that each cow gave an average of over eight gallons of milk each day at the Show.



These two Ayrshire Cows won First and Second Prizes at the Highland and Agricultural Society's Show held at Glasgow in 1828. The First Prize Cow on the left is a Cow showing the typical wedge-shaped body of the present day Ayrshire, the straight top-line and her underline both representative of the breed.



This Bull, "Geordie," belonged to Mr. Logan, Mains, Kilbirnie, and won First Prize for Two-year-old Bulls at the Highland and Agricultural Society's Show at Glasgow in 1838, First for Aged Bulls at Ayrshire Agricultural Association's Show held at Dalry in 1839, and First for Aged Bulls at the Highland Show, Inverness, the same year.

*Illustrations by courtesy of the Highland Agricultural Society.*



In November, 1948, a new venture was started in Scotland, the Scottish Dairy Show, which was held in the Kelvin Hall, Glasgow. At that Show Ayrshires took full revenge for their defeat at London the previous month by winning every inter-breed trophy both for teams and for individual cows. Here the average for the team of six cows was 79 lbs. milk at 3.6% fat, while the average for the highest individual cow was 82.5 lbs. at 3.42% fat. These figures were not so good as those at London.

### **HIGH PRICES.**

The highest prices paid for Ayrshires were 2,800 guineas for the Heifer, Mackay's Plume 2nd, and for Minsted Fairmaid; the highest price for a bull was 5,800 guineas, paid for Burnockstone Supreme Title.

### **TUBERCULOSIS ERADICATION.**

The Ayrshire Cattle Herd Book Society was responsible for the very first Scheme for the eradication of tuberculosis from dairy herds. It was a long uphill job to get the Government to set up any scheme at all. From this developed what is known as the Attested Herds Scheme, every herd in which is certified free from Tuberculosis. There are more Attested Ayrshires than any other breed in this country, and it has all resulted from the forethought of the Ayrshire farmer and his determination to have nothing but the best. This is one of the reasons why the breed is so much sought after by dairy farmers all over the Globe. It is true to say that the Sun never sets on the Ayrshire Cow for she has been exported to almost every civilised country in the World. I have recently returned from a trip to the United States of America and Canada, where I saw many herds of Ayrshires and attended several Cattle Shows, or Fairs as they are called over there. The Ayrshire is greatly liked in these two countries.

### **ENGLISH, WELSH, AND IRISH ASSOCIATIONS.**

During the past few years branches or off-shoots of the parent Society have been established, one for England and Wales and another for Ireland. Both of these have large memberships and are doing good work in spreading the fame of the breed, arranging classification at Shows, holding Sales, and generally doing everything possible to get more people to stock Ayrshires in preference to other breeds. Each of these Societies has a separate Secretary and receives grants of money from Ayr to help them in their work.

In the English Counties are springing up many Ayrshire Breeders' Clubs, which meet for discussion of their various problems of breeding, feeding, disease eradication, etc. Literature is provided from Ayr to these Clubs, and Demonstrations are arranged at well-known farms where the members may learn about the points of the Ayrshire cow, and also how to handle and show an animal in the ring. Judging contests are also held, and these are very useful for young breeders getting to know how to judge and what to look for in a dairy cow.

There briefly is the history of the Ayrshire Cow and its development from what would be termed in these days perhaps a "Scrub" animal to its present pitch of perfection as a producer of man's first food.

---

#### **ADDITIONS to the BIBLIOGRAPHY of AYRSHIRE DURING 1949.**

TAYLER (HENRIETTA), editor. "The Seven Sons of the  
Provost: An Eighteenth Century Chronicle of the Family  
of Kennedy of Dunure." NELSON, 21/-.

The Provost was Sir Thomas Kennedy, Lord Provost of Edinburgh in 1685 and 1686, one of the Ayrshire family of Kennedy of Dalquharra and Dunure.

He had seven sons who played vigorous parts in the political, military and social life of Scotland in the 18th century. Through the medium of letters exchanged between the sons, their father and only sister, during a period covering about seventy years, Miss Tayler presents a vivid and interesting picture of the lives of this remarkable Scottish family.

Miss Tayler has culled the material for the book from the unique collection of letters preserved in the Kennedy family, and from some of the Stuart MSS. at Windsor Castle. These letters are of real historical value. For the most part the family story is told in the family's own words, but Miss Tayler has edited the letters with care and linked them with narrative that is intensely readable and not encumbered with detail.