

THE TITSEY HERD

I was rather surprised to be asked by the society to write a 'history' of the Titsey herd as we are relatively new to the breed only having bought the first animals in 2006 at the autumn sale at Ashford.

I have managed the Pitchfont Farm for the Innes family since 1986 who have in turn farmed it since 1976.

Pitchfont is effectively the home farm of the historic Titsey estate close to the commuter town of Oxted in East Surrey.

The estates history can be traced back to 1534 when John Gresham of the city banking family bought the estate. The estate stayed by direct succession in that family until 1842 when the Gresham heiress married into the Leveson-Gower family. The last of the line, Mr. Thomas Leveson-Gower, who was Mr. David Innes guardian, died a bachelor in 1992. Fortunately, a private charitable trust had been formed in 1979 to perpetuate Titsey for public benefit.

Pitchfont was farmed in hand as the Titsey Company Farms until 1976. There are records of cattle keeping here showing that there were herds of dairy cattle including Shorthorns and Guernseys. In 1965 the 'Tytsey' pedigree herd of British Friesians was formed alongside these there was a small breeding herd of Aberdeen Angus.

As time progressed and land came under the plough a more arable/dairy regime transpired. When Mr. and Mrs. David Innes took on the tenancy of Pitchfont in 1976 the pedigree Friesians became the Limpsfield herd which during my stewardship had evolved to the more prevalent Holstein.

With the change in farm support and falling cereal prices we looked at the business and felt that a lower input enterprise would suit some of the very marginal land hereabouts, so we decided to purchase some Sussex with a view to marketing beef locally. We chose the breed without hesitation being so suited to the area and I personally have always had an interest in the breed and remember as a student at Plumpton visiting Steve Combers farm at Robertsbridge in 1977 and seeing Petworth Warspite 17th (but it might have been 15th !!) leaving an indelible impression in my mind.

Of course in the 1970s and 80s it was almost without question that a Sussex beast won Lewes Fatstock Show (Lewes being my home town).



When we had made the decision to buy some Sussex we were lucky to have our late President, Sarah Hurley to guide us and explain the registration system to us. We purchased six cows, three in calf heifers and a bull as our breeding base.

The bull was Ladywell Buccaneer 2nd who came to us via Simon Wright's herd and he has left us with some lovely long heifers which we feel is the way forward.

He was swapped last year to go to the Hillhurst herd of Mrs. Hardy, which is now in Will Hurley's ownership, and Boxted Major 3rd came here, his progeny are just starting to hit the ground.

Sadly, September 2009 saw the dispersal of the Limpsfield pedigree dairy herd and the decision to expand the Titsey Sussex herd. We have about 70 to calve this year and are planning to expand this in time to about 150 cows with about 100 spring calvers and 50 autumn calvers to give the continuity required for our retail outlets.

We have embarked on a health monitoring scheme and in the future hope to offer for sale superior quality females and, in time, bulls.

Our junior stock bull (seen right) purchased last autumn is Trottenden Formidable 3rd, a modern young bull full of promise, his first calves are due this summer.



The Innes family and I look forward to seeing the expanding Titsey herd grazing the parkland around Titsey Place and hope to welcome to Pitchfont fellow breeders in our endeavour to promote and develop this wonderful native breed.

I would like to thank the breeders and stockmen and women who have helped us source the nucleus of this new herd and for their warm enthusiasm and encouragement.

Bill Peters, Farm Manager - April 2010

