

DEVON'S AT HOME 2010

By Sue and David Dreadon

On Saturday June 5th, 57 visitors from 4 countries including North America, Australia, Brazil and New Zealand, met at the Farmers Club, central London, to commence the Devon's at home Tour of 20 Devon herds, organised by members of the English Devon Cattle Breeders Association. One of the organisers, Gavin Hunter, lead us from the Strand Palace hotel to the Farmers Club as it was not a very conspicuous place to find with no signs on the exterior of the building. After introductions, socialising and receiving our information packs, we returned to the Strand Palace hotel where most of us were staying overnight.



Next morning, Sunday June 6th, we departed at 8.15am in a large coach and a minibus for the overflow

Heading north east to our first farm visit – the Colesdon Herd of David & Sarah Tutt. It consists of about 50 breeding cows based on the Thorndale and Forde Abbey herds on 120 acres for the Devon's, 180 acres of top quality rye grass hay for the racehorses at Newmarket, and 100 acres of cereals (including wheat, barley and oats). As with several farms we visited this one is marketing its own beef direct to the public, and we were shown through their own cutting room and cool store. After a lovely lunch served in a marquee we journeyed on to the Tilbrook Herd belonging to Gavin Hunter and family 40 minutes away.

A larger polled herd established in 1960, approximately 200 cattle. 50% of the cattle in the herd are by AI, that is unusual, but allows use of the best bulls in the world. Rotokawa 688, Kaurivale and Bongalabi Atlas have all been used. In return he has exported semen to all four countries represented on this tour, the most recent and familiar one being Tilbrook Sunset. This farm is a large modern arable unit with about 1000 acres of mainly winter wheat and oil seed rape. Ancient ridge and furrow contours in some of the permanent pasture fields (for drainage) were dug hundreds of years ago by hand, and the hedges instead of fences were a feature. We visited Gavin's cattle on three different blocks of land. The females and males are separated a couple of days after birth and calves are tagged and weighed. They calve in autumn and are left on their mothers for 10 months. The mature females go to the bull after a month of AI starting on 1st November. Heifers just go to the bull only.

It started to rain before we saw the in-calf heifers so stayed inside the grain barn and had our pork on hamburger buns with apple sauce and stuffing then meringues and fruit – strawberries, blackberries, and blueberries with cream and chocolate sauce –yummy!

Left at 6pm for Bank House Hotel, Worcester arriving at 8pm. Very old brick double storied building. Here we were greeted by Sue Farquhar.



Monday 7th June we were to see three farms with a lot of travelling involved. The first visit was to the Stonegrove Stud near Stourport, belonging to Dick and Richard Colwill and family. A small herd of high quality cattle founded from cattle bought from the Dingle herd sale. We later saw bulls bred here working in other studs.

The second stud we travelled to was the Swell Wold Farming Ltd near the town of Stow-on-the-Wold

This is a 1400 acre fully organic farm owned by the Fleming family with 40 Devon's still increasing with supporting stock plus 1000 ewes. There is an arable pasture renewal cycle to their operation. A very tidy extensive farm with quite a lot of amenity planting of trees. We had lunch here in an

open shed beside a swimming pool, with all the natural stone work around in buildings, paving etc it looked quite European.

Mr Flemming, a Banker, owns a farm in South Africa and Scotland too.

The last stop was at the Hansnett herd belonging to Mike and Sue Farquhar near Ledbury, Herefordshire.

Some NZ breeders will remember Sue coming to NZ for a visit before the World Conference in Australia in September, 2008.

A small herd of 14 cows and followers dedicated breeding quality polled cattle for commercial and pedigree breeders. This stud also had foundation cattle from the Dingle herd. In 2008 the herd won the Breeders award and Bull of the Year with Hansnett Hamilton. All the cattle were in very good condition, some tethered in the barn for display and others out in the paddock. Once again our evening meal served in the barn as a bbq as the rain came down. This area is noted for its strawberries.



Tuesday 8th June we departed Bank House Hotel in the rain for the Coxwell Herd near Faringdon. The estate is a large property of over 1100 acres in area, some of which is leased out, some of it being conservation areas. The land is heavy clay, very wet in winter and drying out in summer. Their Devon herd was established in 2000 consisting of about 55 cows. They have some Saler blood in them. During this visit we were given quite a bit of information on the history of leasing and tenancy of land in Britain along with an in depth run down on ear tags and identification of cattle, the passport system for cattle and subsidies. If recording is not done by due date there is a 20% reduction in the subsidy, then as time goes on a further 50% reduction and then 100% reduction – so there is a big incentive to keep paper work up to date. It costs £5 to replace an ear tag. We saw several holly bushes on our travels and learnt that it is good for keeping away ringworm.

We left at 12.15pm for Northmoor Herd. First up was a hamburger lunch in the marquees while the rain came tumbling down. When it stopped we climbed on board tractor driven trailers for our tour of the farm. The first lot were penned inside a huge modern wintering barn. The farm is situated near the river Thames and is a flat 500 acre mixed operation consisting polled Devon cattle, fattening Angus cattle for the Waitrose supermarket, and 150 acres of crops consisting of winter wheat and beans. The Devon herd was established in 1994 based on cattle that had had an earlier infusion of Saler blood with the aim of increasing size and confirmation. Recently they have introduced females from Forde Abbey, Dingle etc, and used bulls from Tilbrook and Stonegrove.

After this enjoyable visit to Northmoor we were dropped off in nearby Oxford to have a double decker bus ride of the city in the rain and do our own thing for the rest of the afternoon. It was a 2 hour drive to get back to the same hotel as last night.

As a matter of interest the Florey family sell boxed meat from their premises and the following is their price list:-

Per kilo			
Topside	£8.50	Fillet Steak	£26.00
Silverside	£7.95	Mince	£3.50
Rolled rib	£9.50	Stewing Steak	£6.55
Braising Steak	£6.95	Shin	£4.95
Rump Steak	£12.50	Skir	£6.00
Sirloin Steak	£17.50	Rib on bone	£7.25



Wednesday 9th June – an early departure from Worcester and a long 3 hour drive with one short stop at the Knoll herd owned by Vicky Jones. A small herd of traditional Devon cattle farmed on the marine flats behind the village houses and up on a high hillside (Knoll) in the background. The fields had obviously been very wet last winter. To access we walked along the village street from the Red Cow Pub where we later had lunch. Some younger cattle were on display out behind the Pub. Vicky has deservedly enjoyed much success with her cattle at shows and sales.

Later that afternoon we arrived at the Knowstone herd owned by the Stanbury's at South Molton. Son Richard was the UK junior ambassador who came on the trip to the World Conference in Australia in 2008. The farmed area is 333 acres with common grazing rights to the moor nearby. They are in a Higher Level Stewardship scheme where they get paid to graze Devon's on Species Rich Grassland and the moor.

100 breeding cows are kept, 40 of these being pedigree Devon's and 60 being cross bred cows all put to Devon bulls. The calves are kept until about 18/24 months. When finished they aim for about 320 kg dead weight and cross breeds at about 350 kg dw. They grow 50 acres of corn that is used on the farm and 150 acres of silage and haylage or hay also used on the farm. They also keep 550 ewes mainly Texel crosses with a small flock of pedigree Texel sheep. The family has enjoyed much success at shows and sales with their cattle. We had a guess the weight competition for a bottle of wine – won by our Joan Power and James from Brazil while enjoying a lovely bbq in their huge hay barn and stock shelter complex before we travelled on to the Falcon Hotel, Bude, to be welcomed by Juliet Cleave, the Tour Leader for Cornwall.

This is quite a lovely seaside place. We went for a walk around the foreshore and marvelled at just how far the tide goes out. The sea seemed to be on the horizon.



Thursday 10th June, an early start (7.15am) to beat the expected heavy traffic, we travelled to the Royal Cornwall Show at Wadebridge for the whole day. We used a local bus and driver as Paul our driver is due for his day off. Such was the traffic it turned out to be quite a slow journey.

The site is huge. Bigger than our Mystery Creek Fielddays, with something for everyone. We spent a very enjoyable day looking around the show and watching the judging of the Devon cattle in particular Gavin Hunter as he demonstrated his ability as a show judge, resplendent in a Bowler hat and suit.

During the day we again met people we had seen on the previous few days along with several we had met in Australia in 2008. Some of the group saw and spoke to Prince Charles and Camilla.

We left before the crowds at 4.30pm for the Falcon Hotel, Bude, an attractive seaside place, where we dressed for dinner and farewelled Gavin Hunter from our tour, celebrated Joy and Angus Cottey's 15th wedding anniversary, Australia's Bob Crawford and Lottie Miller's birthdays. Quite a night.



Friday 11th June, a fine day with a cold wind blowing. We set off at 8am for a 2 hour drive through Bude and onto Penzance with another half hour drive to St Just.

The first farm was that of Ivan & Joan Rowe and Goldings Farm. It is located on the extreme south west tip of England with a mild climate. The fields are small, a little over an acre each in size, fenced with granite stone walls. The closed herd was established in 1991 when they sold their dairy herd. It consists of 65 cows, the originals coming from the Clampit herd. The cows are traditional in type, very big well fed cows and docility is a must owing to the public walkways on the farm. Steers are sold to a finisher, bulls and in-calf heifers are for sale. Herd sire replacements are purchased from herds that have kept to traditional breeding. Ivan & Joan have always showed their cattle with considerable success.

The second herd we visited was the Bollowal herd of Jeff & Pat Thomas. It is situated just around the corner from the Rowes and is a mixed farm of 311 acres growing potatoes, vegetables, and cereals.

The farm has a pedigree herd of 50 breeding cows with followers totalling 150 head of Devon cattle. Most of the female lines originated from the Fairnington herd. Jeff won Champion Female at the Cornwall Royal show yesterday. The cattle are large although he has not used Saler blood lines for 20 years. He has a preference for larger cattle. All the cattle are housed in winter except the 2 year old heifers which are grazed on a Moorland farm where they can find shelter from the Atlantic winds.

We departed late for the High Bullen Hotel, an old Country Club at UMBERLEIGH, North Devon. This place is a three story brick building with lots of sporting amenities including a golf course.



Saturday 12th June. A nice sunny day for the drive to Molland, South Molton to the Great Champson herd of G. Dart and Sons. We were met by William Dart and his son and nephew. This drive was a challenge for our bus driver with very narrow roads and sharp corners and bridge approaches. We met a concrete truck on a narrow stretch and as we had a policeman on board (Angus) it was definitely going to be the truck that was to do the backing up to the first gateway to let us pass.

The herd has been bred for 60 years and enjoys much success in shows and sales with one bull Champson Defender fetching 14,000 guineas. After a nice cuppa on the lawn we travelled on tractor drawn trailers to visit the various mobs on the home farm, then travelled some distance up hill on to the high plateau of the Moor to see more cattle and the famous wild Exmoor horses. Another lucrative part of the farm operation is hosting and facilitating the sport of hunting pheasants and quail. All too soon we were leaving this old historic and picturesque property and the Dart family's hospitality.

Our journeying continued up onto Exmoor to visit the Wellshead herd of Mike and Sue Lanza at Exford. A 1200 acre, 1200 feet above sea level, all grassland farm with steep valleys, wood, and areas of gorse, sedge, and bracken. It is farmed under an Environmental Stewardship Agreement. Once again we travelled on trailers to view the cattle after lunch in a marquee. 70 breeding cows range over large areas of ground including the rougher areas but are brought inside during the wet period around Christmas.

Their first cows were purchased in 1995 and have been improving since then through the careful selection of bulls. As well as seeing the cows and calves around the farm, several mobs of young cattle, steers, bulls, and heifers were yarded near for our inspection.

Mid afternoon we retraced our journey down off the Moor travelling to the Red Down Herd, West Yeo Farm, near Witheridge, Tiverton belonging to Kate Palmer & Robert James. The name was taken from the doomsday name "Radone" meaning a red down/hill of soil. The herd was founded in 1997, females from several old established herds including the Langworthy herd. They also had straws from proven historic bulls dating back to the 1950's to breed some first class stock of traditional type without Saler or polled bloodlines. They also own Champson Defender the 14,000 gn bull purchased from G. Dart & Sons.

Two features of this visit were the exhibition of the Langworthy Herd Archives and to watch a butchery demonstration of cutting up a side of beef showing all the different cuts and what they are used for. This farm is also into marketing its own organic boxed meat enterprise. After a delicious evening barbeque on the farm we headed back to the High Bullen Hotel.



Sunday 13th June. Three farm visits scheduled for today, the first being to Angus (policeman) and his wife Joy Cottey's Garradon herd near Witheridge.

Farm size is 88 acres and run 70-100 head of cattle at various times of the year. They commenced farming Devon's in 1995, having been given their first two animals as a wedding present and operate a closed herd policy breeding their replacement females from bulls of the highest quality from other breeders. Before looking at the cattle in surrounding yards and fields we were given an address by a local veterinarian on many topics of interest in animal health. Angus & Joy have had

much success showing and competing over the years, and are members of the Countryside Stewardship scheme (environmental) and sell their own boxed meat on the farm. A very interesting visit.

Angus' meat packs are –

5kg pack	£50 for single person		
7.5kg pack	£67.50 for couple		
10kg pack	£85 for a small family		
15kg pack	£130 or		
20kg pack	£165 for a large family		
Rolled rib	£10	Rump Steak	£15
Topside	£9	Chuck Steak	£8.
Leg of Mutton joint	£8	Shin	£5.50
Brisket	£6	Skirt	£8.50
Fillet	£26	Ox tail	£6
Sirloin	£17	Ox Liver	£5
Pack 4 beef burgers	£5		
Premium mince	£2.50/pk approx ½kg, or 5pks for £10		

The second farm visit was to the Orswell Herd of Mike & Mella Wright, located at Stoke Rivers near Barnstaple. Mike & Mella have a son farming in the South Island, NZ.

The bus was unable to negotiate the last couple of kilometres to the farm owing to sharp corners and so we were shuttled by 2 x 10 seated buses down to the farm. Lunch was awaiting us in the grounds of their beautiful old house. The Orswell herd was established in 1995 with cows from the Cushuish, Parracombe, and Woodrow herds. Now a closed herd of up to 30 cows, showing successfully and selling through society sales and privately. We were able to look around the cattle in the fields near the very old farm buildings that had included horse stables and hay lofts. Very nice cattle and an enjoyable visit.

Our last visit today was to the Colleton herd of Grania and Simon Phillips, Chulmleigh, arriving late afternoon in very threatening weather. Three tractors with large trailers and hay bale seats were waiting to take us around the farm viewing the various mobs of cows and calves etc. The herd of 50 plus was founded on Forde Abbey cows in 1994, also a few from the Cushuish herd dispersal. Some of the females are sired by Forde Abbey Gulliver and some by Dandelion. They have built up the herd by keeping their own best heifers. Only one or two bulls are saved each year, the rest being steered and finished on the farm. They are all sold direct to private customers through their boxed beef scheme along with heifers not suitable for breeding, therefore they are selling about 30 animals a year in boxes. All the stock are grass fed on home grown grass silage during winter. The only animals receiving supplementary protein are young bulls destined for sales or show heifers.

At the conclusion of looking around the stock we had a barbeque outside Colleton Manor between the showers which were becoming persistent. We then had a look through the 400 year old house (castle) and chapel taking in its long and rich history. It is known that there have been buildings on this site for 8 or 900 years. It was dark by the time we returned to High Bullen.



Monday 14th June. Two visits today, the first being the Bagnell herd belonging to Philip and Caroline Gay, at Norton-sub-Hamdon, Somerset. Once again the bus was not able to negotiate the road to the farm so we were picked up by a 1944 Field Marshall tractor and trailer (quite a talking point) and driven to the farm through the village much to the surprise of the locals.

The Bagnell herd was formed in 2004 with the best foundation stock possible. High standards of stock health are maintained with the herd certified free of BVD, IBR, Johne's and Leptospirosis diseases.

The farm consists of 200 acres of steep hill land of which 150 acres are in ancient permanent grass, the rest being woodland. All the cattle except the yearlings are housed from December to March and fed silage grown on the farm. A flock of Jacob sheep are also a feature of this farm, used to clean up feed after the cows. Their lovely black and white wool/skins is sort-after for rugs. The meat is sold to the local Pub and butcher. We were then treated to a barbeque lunch of Jacob sheep meat, very tender, with all the trimmings. Beside the barn is the old farm homestead built in 1758. Another machinery shed nearby contained 2 old tractors, a 1944 Model N Fordson and an International.

Once again we were on our way a short distance to Forde Abbey, Chard, Somerset. Lisa Roper and family are the owners of Forde Abbey, and the 30 odd Devon cow herd is Lisa's passion. It was started in 1981 although there had been Devons on the property in the 1920's. The cattle are kept on 80 acres, keeping all calves until they go for meat or breeding. Bulls currently being used are from the Stonegrove and Bollowal herds. We spent a pleasant 2 hours looking around the cattle and extensive gardens of the Abbey.

Another enterprise that is part of Forde abbey which we were shown was the milking goats. A large purpose built barn housed 2000 milking Saanen goats which are milked twice daily on a rotary platform- 900 per hour. Gestation is 5 mths and an average of 1.8 kids is achieved per year. A young female has her first kid at 15 mths or 32kgs in weight. The goats spend all their lives indoors on barley straw bedding cleaned out ever 6/8 weeks and their diet is maize and red clover grass silage. Their milk is 40% for table use and 60% made into hard and soft cheeses.

At the conclusion of the afternoon there was a grand dinner in the Abbey Restaurant, being our final full get together with farewell speeches and many thanks being extended for such a wonderful 10 days of visits. We were then given a guided tour of the Abbey and its extensive vegetable gardens and the souvenir shop before we departed for accommodation in Yeovil, Somerset, half of us to the Halfway House hotel and the rest close by at Premier Inn.



Tuesday 15th June. Our last day today and we are off to Kingston Lacy that is a National Trust Property of 8000 acres, most of which is leased out. It was owned by the Banks family and founded in 1890's until 1981 when the trust took over. The earliest records show that a heifer calf was born on 1st January 1899. The Devons were milked as a Dairy herd until 1973-74, when it was decided to change to a spring calving, single suckled herd. A little showing was done in the 1920's and a few shows in 2008, except that the herd does take part in the Society's Herd Competition every year, with some success. The last win was the large herd section in 2001. Major influences on the herd has been Thorndale Assirati and Forde Abbey Xanthous.

The two tour guides showed us through the huge castle-type house, giving us a detailed account of the history and contents. We saw a painting done in 1510 and a huge chandelier gets cleaned every five years – it has 2000 pieces of glass to it.

Later we were taken on a farm trailer around the various mobs of Devon cattle. They are all horned (not dehorned) quite an impressive sight and cow numbers are around 60. Male calves are finished on farm and marketed locally through local butchers. Any females not needed for replacements are sold as stores.

Lunch was then served in a local hall. Some of the group saying goodbye before we departed for Stonehenge prior to the last run back into London (Strand Hotel) where we started from and so ending a very enjoyable and educational ten day tour of Devons at Home.

Dave couldn't help notice all the new tractors and machinery as we drove around the small farms and hearing about all the things the farmers were paid to do or not do such as resting land from farming for a period, clearing weeds like gorse etc. Subsidies!!