

## 1964 In My Opinion from the Secretary of The Galloway Cattle Society of Scotland

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This year we have **Capt. W. A. Craig, M. C.**, Compstonend, Twynholm, Castle-Douglas, well known throughout the Galloway world as a breeder and judge of repute, and as someone who has very definite ideas and opinions on many subjects appertaining to agriculture in general, and Galloways in particular.



Q. I think that to commence with, I can do no better than to repeat the opening question which I asked last year, as I am sure that it is an all-important question, and one upon which you will be more than willing to elaborate!

It has always been a rather proud boast of Galloway breeders that for generations the true and original characteristics of the breed have been jealously and religiously maintained. Do you agree, or do you think there has been any deterioration in the breed generally – say over the past 10 years?

A. I don't think that there has been any deterioration at all over the past 10 years and I do think that a great amount of improvement has occurred owing to management. Heads have certainly improved. However, as regards the present-day absence of old bulls, i.e. heavy bulls characteristically bred, I don't think

they are as good as they were, say 40 – 50 years ago. To quote the bulls of former times I can mention such great predominant sires as "Mathew Mark", "Campfollower", "Sapphire", "Grange A.D.C.", "Mormon", and of course many others. I think that these old bulls were a better representation of the old fashioned characteristics. In the cows I can mention the Dora's of Tarbreoch, the Chapelton Lizzie's and Meg Merilees – great big cattle with plenty of character. I think that Meg Merilees was the best heifer I ever saw and I remember her being shown on what is now the Golf Course in Castle-Douglas!

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Q. The principal points of merit upon which we try to “sell” Galloways are that they are hardy, adaptable, mobile, good mothers and have the ability to convert the poorer types of pasture into first-class beef. Do you agree that these are the most important characteristics of the breed?

A. I quite agree with the above. There is some similarity with this question and question number three and it is more fully answered in the latter.

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Q. Galloways are obviously a hill breed, but it has become increasingly evident during the past few years that the breed’s potential as a beef-producer on the better type of lowland farm is being realised. Any comments on this?

A. Since early times Galloways have always been considered to be the most suitable breed for our second-class land and certainly a bunch of Galloway stirks will come off this class of land in the autumn in better condition than those of any other breed of the same age. This does not mean however that they are not well suited for the better class of land, in fact the reverse is the case. Proof of this can be found by a study of weights at the Scottish National Fat Stock Shows over the past years where the weight of the Galloways equaled and I believe even exceeded the weight of other breeds of similar age. In addition the quality of their flesh cannot be excelled, this being remarked upon by the writer Youatt 200 years ago, of the cattle of the Stinchar Valley who also commented upon their large size. The Rev. Andrew Symson, Minister of Kirkiner at one time remarked of the great Galloway steers on the plains of Baldoon in Wigtownshire. Herds of Galloways were also maintained at Borness and Cally, at Grange near Kirkcudbright and as far round the coast as Cavens, and which prove the suitability of the cattle for the best of the coastal districts.

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Q. Any comments on the advantage of keeping duns rather than blacks, or vice versa?

A. I would personally advise keeping blacks. Wholly dun herds are few and difficulty could be found in finding a good out-cross bull. Also what about the second-class heifers? The blacks are worth more than the duns for crossing with a white bull whereas the duns would do quite well with an Angus bull. In the latter case a farmer might require to keep two bulls instead of one. With the greatest respect to the owners of the dun herds, I think that the owners of blacks are more use to the expansion of the breed for the reasons stated above. Commercially speaking, the trading activities of dun owners in this field are somewhat parochial.

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Q. I know from experience that this is a point on which you hold rather strong views! During the past few years it has been considered advisable to try to eliminate white hairs on the Galloways. We both know certain breeders who will not purchase an animal at any price with white hairs – particularly for export. On the other hand we know many breeders who prefer a Galloway female to have white hairs around her udder. What are your personal feelings on the subject?

A. The objection to white hairs has become more pronounced in recent years when there has been a better demand for export. The reason why the white is not favoured in the U.S.A. is that when a calf is suckled, the udder for the time being is wet, and when the cow lies down the sun has the tendency to crack the white teats and udder. It then becomes painful and eventually the cow refuses to suckle. You then have an under-nourished calf and possibly a wrong udder. The incidence of white in a Herd is difficult to eliminate and may well take a lifetime. At the Messrs Scott's dispersal at Drumhughry many years ago the first animal sold, the old bull, had some white on him and an old breeder remarked to me at the time that the white was in the herd 40 years before that. If breeders now attempt to eliminate the white I think they will require to be careful not to get them too black. Of course there are black Galloways and those that are as black as a pot. The latter class is most objectionable and in all probability the coat over the body would be ribbed like the roof of a car factory. At Auction Sales we have sometimes heard the remark : "a dirty wee black beast". I cannot recall having heard that remark about an animal having a little white on it, indeed the latter were generally supposed to grow better and to be better milkers and were particularly favoured in the Cumberland area. Personally I rather like a cow with a partly white udder but not totally white or any prominent extension along the underline or even between the fore legs or up the flanks. I do not think it is worthwhile to totally discard the white for the sake of trying to breed an animal which might be suitable for export, perhaps only once or twice in a year and run the risk of deteriorating the size of the cows and their milking properties. In any case you are better with a guid cat than a cat o' a guid kind. Finally a white udder has generally less hair and a newly born calf has less difficulty in finding the teat. The calf is therefore less likely to acquire a hair ball in the stomach and the teat is less likely to become encircled with a ring of hair which may in time cut off the teat altogether. The policy of the Council in regard to white has in the past been somewhat elastic.

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Q. From the white hairs to white faces! We all know that the Hereford bull is becoming more and more popular for crossing with Galloways. Traditionally the most popular crossing bull has been up to now the White Shorthorn for the production of blue-greys.

As a well-known breeder of blue-greys, what comments have you to make on the current trend, and what advantages are there in the use of the one breed of bull over the other – if any – for cross-breeding purposes?

A. The first part of this question relates in the crossing of the Hereford bull with the Galloways but I am wondering whether blue-greys were meant here instead of Galloways? Certainly the Hereford is used to a very much greater extent on the blue-greys. I would say there are very few straight Hereford x Galloways in this country though the cross is not new by any means. Indeed I can remember a Herd of this class being maintained in Queenshill by the late W. M. Neilson in addition to his pedigree herd of Galloways. This is really a very good cross and some grand cattle were bred there and were all uniform being all black with white heads and all, of course, polled. I would not, however, recommend crossing the resulting heifers. Supposing we tried the White Shorthorn bull on them some of the progeny would be polled and some horned and colours might be too white or red and white, the red being inherited through the Hereford. Again, if we tried the Angus bull the progeny would all be polled and except in rare cases would all be black, though some would have the white head and some not. Therefore by the use of either bull there would be the

absence of uniformity. I know of a herd of Hereford x Galloway in the country which are quite good and I think that the calves could be seen at any time.

Now for the blue-greys. This type of cow far exceeds any other in the suckling cow class. There are however two types here (a) the traditional Scottish blue-grey and (b) the Irish, the former being so scarce that many farmers had to fall back on the latter type. Indeed the largest breeders in the country keep the Irish cow. They are generally quiet and good milkers. Personally I prefer the Scottish blue-grey to re-cross with the Angus bull. The progeny of this cross I would think maintain its symmetry throughout life better than those out of the Irish cow, e.g. the Supreme Champion at the Edinburgh Fat Stock Show 1964. With the Hereford bull crossed with the blue-grey cow, I would require a mechanical device to calculate how many different kinds would result. All would have the white markings but not necessarily on the same part of the body and otherwise they would be red, blue, yellow or even black or mahogany, the latter colour to be strictly avoided. In addition to male and female about half of each kind would be polled and the other half horned hence the necessity for the engineers! Apart from all that more difficulties are likely to result from the use of the Hereford especially with the heifers some of which might be too small and on the whole the cows might tend to be more difficult to winter and not last as long. The Hereford has undoubtedly made great strides in recent years, though the present-day prices of even the bad bulls may in time discourage their use. They are not new in this country however, a herd of Herefords being kept at one time at Gateside by the late Mr Tom Smith, long before the McTurk family, where, incidentally, a first-class herd of that breed is still maintained. A horned Hereford from this herd was even used at Compstonend some 60 - 70 years ago and it may be ironical to think that about the time of Waterloo an expert cattleman lived at Royston near here where farmers from the surrounding district brought their black cattle to have their horns removed. This was done with an axe on the top of a tall stone situated in the middle of the dam (then the garden) and this stone can still be seen partly cut away on the top, no doubt by the instrument in this crude operation. My principal objection to the Hereford is the absence of uniformity of colour and when did we ever hear of a cross Hereford winning a Championship at the National Fat Stock Shows? The Galloways are even found in various colours. Supposing we take a pen of 12 pure-bred Galloway steers, two black, two dun, two silver dun, two red, two belted and two brocket-faced, what would they look like – nothing on earth even though they were all good cattle. They would look much better separate and consequently with the Hereford crosses one would require to have about 150 cows to be able to sell a bunch of calves all exactly alike.

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Q. Let us stay with blue-greys for the next question! We have two schools of thought on the type of Shorthorn bull which should be used for their production. Some breeders prefer the "Perth" beef type, others the "Cumberland" type. What is your opinion?

A. Perth beef-type Shorthorns for some years have become much too small, even a white of this type crossed with the Galloway would in all probability beget calves very dark in colour or even black, with slightly grey necks and not likely to be good milkers. These would consequently not be so attractive to a purchaser to re-cross with the Angus bull. With the Cumberland Shorthorn and preferably the Canonbie or Newcastleton district type, the calves would be more likely to be a uniform grey, the bulls having been bred white on both sides for many generations. With the smaller farms in the latter districts many of the cows would be hand milked and consequently

milking properties have been studied and the blue-grey heifers would be more likely to be reasonably good milkers. Although these bulls might appear long in the leg, the wonderful properties of the Galloway cow, her shortness of length and the depth of body would enable her to produce an animal of symmetry and conformation and yet maintain its ability to grow.

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Q. Having mentioned Cumberland, let us remain there for a moment! It is almost an accepted fact that there are two distinct “types” of Galloway cattle within the breed – the Scottish type and the Cumberland type. Why should this be so? Assuming that you agree that there *are* these two types, what in your opinion are the advantages of one over the other?

A. I think there are two types within the breed and curiously enough many of the Cumberland breeders were not too fond of the Scottish type and of course the Scottish breeders were not very fond of the Cumberland type! I do not think that they cross very well. The Cumberland type has usually much more hair, some of it certainly brown or too brown or even rather red and long and inclined to be hard. This type no doubt was better suited to the heavy cold and rashie land of the Bewcastle district with its excessively wet climate. The Scottish type on the other hand was bred on much harder land. Many possibly did not grow as well but generally were more mellow-fleshed and with softer hair and more easily fed.

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Q. What steps would you advocate to raise the quality-standard of bulls within our breed? As you are perhaps aware, the general consensus of opinion is apparently that good “breeders” bulls are becoming ever more difficult to find. Why should this be so?

A. In the breeding of cattle neither the price of the bull nor his conformation however superb it might be will ensure that he will be a good breeder. Indeed in many instances the reverse may be the case. It is all to try out. The real good bull that begets one or two at least very good animals with the great bulk of his stock under average would be classified by me as a bad breeder. The good breeding bull is the one that leaves his calves all like each other and with the same degree of reasonably good conformation and where an independent authority could pick out his calves in preference to those of another bull whose breeding lack uniformity. Many yearling bulls are “lost” when they have completed their first season. They should be well looked after from say July or from early August.

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Q. While on the subject of bulls – what is your opinion on the use of nurse-cows? This practice is not generally in use within our breed, but is more-or-less accepted practice in certain other breeds. Are there any advantages in the practice?

A. So far as I can see the only advantage to be gained by this practice falls to those who pursue it. The bulls so nursed are certainly much bigger and fatter than the others and may and do in fact win more prizes and make more money at their first sale. The disadvantages I think (apart from his

price) might be that when the bull was required for use, he might be more inclined to enjoy the succulence of his nurse-maid than perform the operation for which he was purchased.

The greatest disadvantage of all might be that in due course of time, having lost the camouflage of the nursemaid (or maids) his conformation could not be classified as a work of art. The purchaser should know the remedy.

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Q. If you were approached by a young farmer for advice on formation of a beef herd, what advice would you give him?

A. I would advise him to ask a friend or the owner of a good herd to go with him to a sale and help him to purchase the number of heifers he required. He should make all his bids personally in preference to his advisor doing so. I would suggest that he should consider the advice of the tutor regarding conformation and breeding and either bid or stop according to the amount of money available. It might be that the tutor had as much interest in some particular animal as he had in his student. The animal might actually be got by a bull of his!

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Q. You must occasionally find yourself in the position of having to purchase a stock bull. What would be the essential points you would look for before purchasing?

A. Without going into elaborate detail in this question, the bull one should purchase should have exceptionally good points which may be lacking in the cows, always keeping in mind that the bull is more than half of the herd. For instance, if one had a herd of big strong cows, some of them possibly not having too much true Galloway character, I would try to buy a bull with a good wide head, wide muzzle, not long or narrow of his nose, soft brown hair and loose skin and with blocky conformation, always in an endeavour to correct the faults of the cows.

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Q. Farming in general, and I think stock-rearing – including beef production – in particular, is becoming more and more subjected to counsel and direction from scientists and geneticists, etc, with an inevitable departure from the more traditional methods. What is your opinion of this trend?

A. Scientists have no doubt been of great help to the agriculture industry in general. I advise that one should listen carefully to them and then proceed in conjunction with one's own experience.

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Q. Beef-recording and progeny-testing are things we hear quite a lot about today. Of what value are these to a breed such as the Galloway?

A. From the very fact of the outside conditions under which most Galloway herds exist and the difficulties in having this work carried out regularly and accurately, I do not think it would be of much value, nor would it be likely to be pursued to any great extent.

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Q. As a noted and experienced judge of Galloways and other cattle, and as the father of a young lady who is rapidly making a name for herself in the same sphere, what do you consider the best advice you ever gave to your daughter relative to (a) judging breeding cattle and (b) judging at Fat Stock Shows?

A. As regards the actual cattle I never gave my daughter any advice. From early school days however she was always assisting when making selections of cattle for one job or another and if one has not a keen and artistic eye for beauty, symmetry of form and conformation of figure you will never make a good judge of anything! What I did tell her was that if asked to judge she must satisfy herself entirely, regardless of the previous history of the animal (if known) or of the social relationship with either the owner or the herdsman. Judges who make grossly obvious mistakes generally find their invitations to judge diminishing. Like a horseman real stockman are "born". You cannot make a true stockman out of a plumber or even a country architect!