

Galloway Cattle up to 100 Years Ago

This paper was prepared and presented to the Summer Conference of The British Cattle Breeders' Club (in 1960), by Major Craig Wheaton-Smith. As it was presented 50 years ago, the title could read "Galloway Cattle up to 150 Years Ago".

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From about 1800 onwards there is a wealth of information on the original, and early breeding policies of most of our breed of cattle. Prior to 1800, however, few of the breeds we know today were in existence, or if they were, they scarcely resembled the breeds we are familiar with. There are a few exceptions, however, and the Sussex, Devon, Highland, Galloway and White Park cattle are recognizable 200 years and more ago. Of these breeds the Galloway is the only polled one, though there were polled strains of the Devon and Park cattle. For a breed to exist through all the changes the Industrial revolution and railways brought in their train, and still to remain one of our more important breeds, indicates considerable merit.

Probably the best accounts of the Galloway is George Culley's. The Galloway Breed, or Polled Cattle, he says, are a very valuable breed and seem to be in weight and size, as much less than the Longhorns as these are than the Shorthorns. They generally weigh from 40 – 60 stones (Ed. 245kgs – 381 kgs), some reach 70 and upwards (Ed. 445kgs); but their most essential difference from every other breed of cattle is, in having not horns at all. Some few indeed (in every other respect Polls) have two little unmeaning horns from 2 – 4 inches long hanging down loose from the same parts that other cattle's horns grow and are joined to the head by a little loose skin and flesh. In most other respects (except wanting horns) these cattle resemble the Longhorns both in colour and shape, only that they are shorter in their form, which probably makes them weigh less. Their hides seem to be a medium, not so thick as the Longhorns, they lay their fat on the most valuable parts and their beef is well marked or mixed in the fat.

We find this breed straggling through different parts of England and I remember (in Yorkshire) a very handsome variety of them finely globed with red and white. But we must look for the original of these in Galloway where they are mostly bred upon the moors and hilly country and grazed upon the land nearer the sea until rising 4 or 5 years old, when the graziers and drovers take them up in great numbers to the fairs in Norfolk and Suffolk previous to the turnip feeding season...for few or no cattle sell so high in Smithfield market they being such nice cutters up owing to the laying on fat in the most valuable parts. It is no uncommon thing in this refined market to see one of these little bullocks outsell a coarse Lincolnshire Ox, though the latter were heavier by several stones.

I have been informed...that the polled cows are very good milkers in **proportion to their size**...and also that the oxen and spayed heifers answer well for the drought, which certainly adds to the value of this excellent breed.

In Galloway they spay more heifers than perhaps in all the Island besides, and...they do not castrate them until they are about a year old, whereas in every other place I know the heifer calves are spayed from 1 – 3 months old.

He goes on to relate that calves have a spiked muzzle removed by the milkmaid after milking though not to prevent them from feeding on grass. In some parts of Scotland the general practice is to milk three times a day in Summer – but I do not recollect whether this is done in Galloway.

He finishes up by saying...I am inclined to think that the Galloway cattle and even the Kyloes, might be bred with advantage in many situations so as to be more profitable than either the Shorthorns or the Longhorns. I have a very high opinion of both these breeds of cattle as true quick feeders and being kindly fleshed, or excellent eating beef. Breeders, he says, prefer the black ones (He says this too of Kyloes, the Highland cattle. The rest of Scotland have a mixed breed of cattle, a "runtish coarse breed".)

Writing some 25 years later, Samuel Smith devotes 20 pages to the cattle in Galloway, and some 8 more

to the Dairy whose introduction in Galloway, he says, threatens materially to injure the breeding and rearing of cattle. This is blamed on farmers from Ayrshire, the cattle coming chiefly from Kyle, a district in Ayrshire, and are of the Shorthorned breed...commonly of a much smaller size than the Shorthorn of England...But let us return to Galloways.

No farm in Galloway, he says, is exclusively applied to any other purpose than to the breeding and rearing of cattle. Agriculture, in most cases, is only a subordinate consideration; breeding of sheep is not carried nearly to the same extent with that of cattle; and neither the Dairy nor feeding off for the butcher form material objects in their systems of economy.

The breed of Galloway cattle is peculiar to the District, and well deserves a particular and minute description. They are almost universally Polled, and perhaps rather under the medium size, being less than the horned breed of Lancashire or the Midland countries but are considerably larger than the North or even the West Highlanders. Their size is not very different from the Devonshires, though rather under it. But it should be noticed that the size differs materially not only from a difference of pasture, but may, without any variation in their other characteristic qualities, be considerably either increased, or diminished at the option of the farmer. And good farmers always choose to have their breeders rather under as they absurdly term it, than above their pasture. The prevailing colour is black or dark brindled, though they are occasionally found of every colour...but the dark colours are uniformly preferred, from a belief that they are connected with superior hardiness of constitution.

In making a comparison (for breadth of back, roundness and fullness of carcass, depth of chest, length of quarter with other qualities) of this kind between the Galloway and other approved breeds, it must be premised that the circumstances under which it is made are severely trying: as the Galloway breed has never been made the object of that judicious, accurate and persevering attention which has long been bestowed on the most celebrated in England. (But) the cattle in Galloway are pretty uniformly good, and that no instances are found of such wretchedly bad stock as in England, may be often seen in the very fields adjoining to those which pasture the best. But among them have arisen no enthusiasts in the professors – none who have studied it scientifically...no Bakewells, no Culleys, no Collings have yet appeared in Galloway.

In the space between the ribs and hocks, the Galloways are shorter than either the long or the short horned. This is in itself a most valuable point, and it is, doubtless, because the length of body is generally occasioned by the length of this space, that the reverse has been considered as an advantage. A very slender neck or fine head would be no recommendation to a Galloway, and certainly would not correspond with the broad shoulders, deep chest and close compacted form of body for which they are remarkable (with regard to conformation in bulls, and fineness of head) it is a remarkable circumstance that the Devonshire cattle are, in this respect similar to the Galloways, as it is said to be equally difficult among them to find a bull which has a degree fineness of head and neck proportioned to that of the cows. In fineness of bone they may challenge a comparison with either the long or short horns – a singular circumstance when it is considered for how long a period thick bones were held in estimation, the prejudice for thick bones originated not with them, but was derived from Norfolk.

The moorland farmers, convinced that large boned cattle would not thrive on their barren hills never aimed at increasing the size of the bone above what their pastures would feed. Independent of experience, it will not admit of a doubt that the same quality which enables an animal to subsist on very bad pasture will make it thrive remarkably on good. They are remarkable for their shortness of leg.

Particular selected individuals among Galloway cattle are also very thin of the skin, and of a mellow softness to which these (other) breeds cannot produce the shadow of a comparison. The Devonshire cattle is perhaps the only English breed which in this respect can vie with the Galloways. They fatten readily at a very early, and at a very advanced age.

Many are sent directly to the Smithfield market, a distance of 400 miles, and eagerly bought by the butcher though only betwixt 3 and 4 years old. They are often fit for the butcher at 2 or 2 ½ years old, and an old cow, lean in the Spring, will at the Martinmas (Ed. The feast of St. Martin of Tours celebrated on November 11) following merely with grass feeding sometimes yield six, seven or eight stones of tallow. The milch cows (Ed. Cattle that are reared for their milk) have a remarkable tendency to get fat, hence they are reckoned but indifferent milchers.

The average price (of the Galloway in Norfolk) is £2 per head above any other breed of the same weight. In one respect the inferiority of the Galloway is acknowledged. They cannot be raised to that enormous weight to

which some others have attained, but their inferiority is much more than compensated by the lesser quantity of food they consume.

The breed of Galloways, it is to be regretted, has not been preserved pure in every part of the country. It has been materially injured by intermixture with the Irish and the Ayrshires. One or two of these cows are purchased occasionally by farmers from the idea of being better milkers, and their progeny being kept, mix with the general stock of the country. Attempts have also been made to improve it by introducing foreign mixtures, for this purpose bulls were introduced from different parts of England of the most approved kinds.

The progeny of some of these has long been in the country and though crossed with the natives for 50 or 60 years, is still easily recognized but deservedly held in little estimation.

After making a strong plea to keep the breed pure, he goes on to say, without going beyond the limits of their own District and with no other information than what they may obtain from the nearest neighbours; they may at the very moderate sum of £15 to £20 obtain bulls and cows of an excellent sort and by making always a judicious selection, the breed already excellent would soon arrive at still greater perfection.

The average price of cattle on good farms in the low country are,

When 1 year old, £ 4.10. 0d
2 years old, £ 8. 0. 0d
3 years old, £12.12.0d
3 ½ years old, £14.14.0d

(These are based on prices averaged on the year 1807 – 1809. But prices towards the end of the Napoleonic wars rose sharply.)

At this age they are commonly sold to the drovers and carried to the English markets. The best are often sold a year sooner, and the inferior ones are often kept a year longer in the country. A Galloway bullock at £14.14.0d would weigh 36 stone of 16lbs (5cwt, 16lbs) (Ed. About 230kgs). Fed another year on the best pastures he would weigh 50 stone (7cwt 16lbs) (Ed. About 318kgs), 60 stone (Ed. About 381kgs) would be counted a large one. They have frequently, however, been brought to 80 (about 11 ½ cwt) (Ed. About 508kgs), and there have been instances of aged cattle weighing 100 (Ed. About 635kgs). He adds, in a dour footnote, that this is to be understood when fattened in England.

Spayed neys (Ed. Heifers) are of a smaller size than bullocks but fatten sooner. Their average value is 10 per cent less. Their period of greatest improvement is from two and a half to three and a half. Hence it is now the practice with the judicious farmer to sell his cattle at this age.

This, however, is to be understood only of such as have been reared on good pastures. Those who have been brought from coarse pastures improve still better at a more advanced age. Hence in buying cattle (*certis paribus* Ed. Holding everything else equal) little regard is paid to the age of the animal. Size, shape and condition being the same he will give nearly the same price whether one, two, three or four years old.

During the winter in Galloway cattle are fed chiefly with straw or coarse hay aided by the small remains of vegetation which goes on in the fields; their improvement from October to April consists solely of an increase in growth. In summer, therefore, the improvement may be reckoned double of what it is in winter, the expense of keeping would only be rated one third higher.

With the deduction of about one fortieth which are reserved for the tables of the opulent, all the prime cattle are appropriated for the English markets whither by far the greatest number are sent at three or 3 ½ years old. Many if they are driven at once to Smithfield, but the principal sales are at St. Faiths and other markets in Norfolk. They are commonly fed for a few months on turnip and sent to Smithfield (on foot of course) during the winter. Writing about 14 years earlier, Kent said of Norfolk – the stock grazed or fattened are about ½ Scotch, ¼ Irish and the other quarter what are called home bred. (The local breed was of the N. Devon type but smaller).

The first two sorts are generally purchased at St. Faiths and the other fairs about Michaelmas (Ed. 29th September), and if they are in forward condition one acre of turnips will put from five to six pounds profit on an ox by Lady Day or May Day following. Those which are not so forward are kept upon offal turnips in the winter and

fatted off in the marshes by harvest when they sometimes double their price at market within the year...The average weight of a Scotch bullock may be considered at 50 stone of 14lbs to the stone. I remember one a few years since of 80 stone which was reckoned very large.

At this time, 1796, an appendix gives the following summary of the type found.

1 Bought at St. Faiths, 50 – 52 stone of 14lbs. Put to turnips for 24 weeks, with hay in bad weather costing 4/- per week; costing to buy £9, selling for £14.16.0d, paying 10 per cent interest on capital laid out and a fair price for keep.

2 Bought in at the same time for £6, on lean stores, at a year younger. Put to grass, then into the straw yard, and 'eats the offal turnips after the better beast in the daytime'; for 24 weeks. Then fed on the marsh until Michaelmas for 28 weeks; sold at 44 stone, for about £12.2.0d, giving no interest on purchase price but a fair return on keep.

3 Bought at Harleston in December, same account as the first, for £7. Straw and offal turnips for 8 weeks, yarded by night. Then full turnips 10 weeks; then into the second year's ley or good pasture till harvest, weighing about 46 stone, selling for £12.13.0d. From 15 per cent on the original sum and a fair return on keep.

He goes on to say that the beneficial effect of treading on the light soil, and manure also has to be taken into account. But let us return to Smith, writing in 1810.

The whole number of cattle sold annually from Galloway according to very accurate information may be stated at 20,000. (The numbers and value for cattle in Kirkcudbright were estimated at 39,000 at £10 per head and in Wigton at 31,500 - 70 per cent of the value of all farm stock including horses). The proportion of bullocks is two thirds, the remaining being heifers and a few cows. The principal markets to which they are sent are Bunday 14th May, Hollisworth 14th June, Harleston 5th July, Woolpit 18th September, St. Faiths 17th October and Hampton 16th November. Many of the inferior cattle are sold in Dumfries or sent to the North of England to the number of 3,000. But the whole of these were not Galloways, some 2 – 3,000 being imported from either the neighbouring counties or from Ireland and the Highlands. There was a great deal of buying and selling between farmers, of course, in addition to this, as cattle found their way from the Hills to the better farms. The following weekly or monthly trysts were held – Kelton, Gatehouse, Wigton, Glenluce, Strimraer and Whithorn. Prime cattle were seldom brought to any of these markets.

This was a period of price fluctuation due to the Napoleonic Wars. It hit some farmers badly, and the surprising statement is made that there "has not been more than one out of ten among the drovers or cattle dealers who have not in the course of their dealings become once or oftener insolvent".

Breeding was carried out more on the moors than the low country, and more in Wigton than Kirkcudbright. Calves were dropped between 1st January and end of May – but when she missed a calf "unless a favourite one", she is fattened for the butcher; otherwise she is kept as a breeder until 12 – 15 years of age. The average weight of cows is put at 28 – 36 stones (of 16lbs), and then priced from £10 - £15. generally speaking, the good farmer reared 5 calves from 6 cows, but 80 per cent was felt to be nearer the average of the district, to 2 years of age, by one leading farmer. But the doughty writer of the Survey feels, from his experience, that 2 per cent is a far more attractive figure.

The principal disease hazards were the rot (fluke), red water and black leg.

Perhaps his view of the people might be of passing interest too. "They are placed at a happy distance from extreme poverty and great riches. Though far removed from barbarity, they are not sophisticated by over refinement, possessed of independence they are not enervated by luxury; taught the value of liberty, they have never abused it by licentiousness. Few better know how to appreciate the blessings they enjoy..." and so we must take leave of one of the best accounts of cattle and of the trade of this period of inflation (followed by collapse) but of agricultural improvement almost comparable to what we are seeing today.

Writing between the dates of these two surveys, Lawrence gives his opinion as follows. The famous Galloway breed is found in various parts of Scotland besides the shire of that name, but they exist perhaps on the moors of Moniegraft and Glenlove and these cattle are generally thinner in the hinder quarters than such as have been crossed by other breeds. They prevail also in Dumfries, particularly in the Nithsdaleside. It is remarked that although this breed is the most celebrated will boast of his true Galloways, yet these have been perpetually crossed. As it should seem, to render them still more true. The original colour black, a few brindled all per-

fectly hornless. Amongst the common run of Galloway cattle we sometimes find them white faced and pied, with small grizzly horns, undoubtedly from a mixture with Dutch or English Shorthorned bulls, but this cross is said to detract 20 per cent from the worth of the beast. He goes on to add that the pelvis is frequently too narrow, whence they want assistance, and sometimes fail in calving. Incidentally, he adds that the red cattle of Devonshire were some years since introduced into the shire of Ayr, in that many of the Dutch and Holstein breed have been kept immemorially in the Southern parts of Scotland.

Dumfries has been mentioned. The following account quoted from Youatt says (in 1811), the cows for breeding are principally of the Galloway kind. The return or annual profit is about £6 per cow. The young 2 year old bullocks kept for grazing are one half Galloways, and the other half West Highlanders. He notes too that in 1736 five score five year old Galloways in good condition, were sold to an Englishman for £2.12.6d per head at the bridge end of Dumfries.

Writing in 1837, Youatt notes that the richer pastures in Dumfries were giving, to Galloways bred or grazed there, a somewhat larger form and earlier maturity than they possess in their native district, and on this account they used to be held in much estimation. They were bought at the Dumfries market by Galloway farmers themselves who after keeping them for a certain time drafted them among their own cattle twelve month older and sent them for sale to Carlisle. It was doubtful, however, whether these beasts had the perfect form of the native Galloways and whether the fine grain of their meat were not somewhat deteriorated.

Youatt thought that up to the 1750's the greater part of the Galloway cattle were horned. This he felt was altered by the preference of English farmers for the polled animal, the polled ultimately superseding the horned. And he notes that up to 1786 the general level of agriculture in Galloways was deplorable. On colour, when he wrote, the prevailing and fashionable colour was black. A few were dark brindled, and still fewer were specked with white spots (a white park character also found in early Shorthorns), and some of them were a dun or drab colour, perhaps acquiring from a cross with the Suffolk breed of cattle (cattle got about a bit in those days, though other writers have attributed this to the Highland cattle). Calves were rarely sold for veal – "a good farmer would rather kill his son than a calf". Young cattle were rarely housed after the first winter.

In this, as in some other breeding districts, he says, cows and queys (Ed. Heifers) of good quality are to be met everywhere but it is difficult to find a bull free from defect. Too many breeders have become careless from this circumstance. They have become contented with a bull of moderate pretensions and the form and value of their cattle have been depreciated. Yet not to the extent that might be feared., for the imperfections of the sire do not always appear in the progeny but the sterling characteristics of the Galloway cattle break out again although obscured in one generation.

A bullock well fattened will weigh from 40 – 60 stones at 3 – 3 ½ years and some have been fed to more than 100 stones (by this time weights and measures were standardized) at 5 years old. The average prices for good Galloway beasts may be stated as follows –

Starts at about 15 months	- £3.10/- to £4.10/-
2 years old	£6.10/- to £8
3 to 3 ½ years old	£10 to £12

He notes that since 1811 cattle had fallen nearly one third in price, and he pays tribute to the uniformly good character of the stock. There is perhaps no breed of cattle which can be more truly said to be indigenous to that country, and incapable of improvement by any foreign cross. Shorthorns almost everywhere else have improved the cattle of the districts to which they have traveled. They have, at least in the first cross produced manifest improvement although the advantage has not often been prolonged beyond the 2nd generation; but even in the first cross the Shorthorn's done little good in the Galloway... The intelligent breeder is now perfectly satisfied that his stock can only be improved by adherence to the pure breed, and by care in selection.

From 20 – 25,000 were driven South. The journey to Norfolk took 3 weeks, with droves of from 200 – 300 at a cost in summer of 20/- to 24/- per head, and in winter 35/- to 40/-, the cattle being purchased by the drovers. By this time the lot of the Drovers – and their general reputation and character, was a bit better than a generation earlier.

Our last principal source is Professor Low, writing 115 years ago. Of the Angus in passing, he says, "this breed has a certain resemblance to the Galloway, and a mixture of blood seems to have taken place between them. But the cattle are less compact in form and longer in their limbs than the true Galloway and have not the depth

of rib so characteristic of the latter breed”.

He notes the Galloway to be properly a mountain breed, their average dead weight when fat at 3 years old may be reckoned at 45 stones – those sold in London at nearly 4 years weighing from 55 to 60 stone.

He suspected Youatt’s belief in the prevalence of horns 100 years before, and thought that the polled condition might be partly attributable to the physical character of the country which produces this constitutional character.

He observes that there was some competition now from Shorthorns, and that Ayrshires moving in for dairying. For Galloway proper, he says, “the management of cattle there is rude, but suited to the character of the district”. Hardly the happiest way of expressing himself. After covering much ground we have already traversed he sums up, “ The cattle of Galloway, though they have all the characters of resemblance which constitute a breed, yet vary greatly in size and form according to the fertility natural or acquired of the farms on which they are reared, showing the importance of providing an increase of food for the animals when growing in bone and muscle.” One of the great defects, at the present time, over a large part of Galloway, is the not supplying the growing stock with sufficient food.

Low was Professor of Agriculture at Edinburgh and had already published a splendid print of Galloways as part of his collection of prints of contemporary cattle – excellent group of animals. But echoes of his parting shot are still to be heard today.

There are numerous other references to the Galloway in this period. Briefly they note the expansion of the breed both north and south of their original area; and the rise of the Angus, bred along different lines to the Galloway, in-breeding and line breeding as opposed to out-breeding. This increase in the Angus filling areas into which the Galloway might otherwise have gone. The diminishing milking ability from 225 gallons in 1811 is noted by Aiton in his survey of Ayr, to enough for the calf a generation later, with little over. At the end of the period under review – by 1860 – the blue grey cross, White Shorthorn out of a Galloway cow, had become popular. The Herd Book was started in 1875 – and thereafter the breed have secured in Canada, and the Western States of North America, a reputation as range cattle suitable for spreading to the colder areas, favoured by their ability to resist exposure and produce a first-class carcass in adverse conditions. Experimental work with a successful outcome has been carried out in Alaska. Elsewhere in Norfolk – it seems likely that some Galloway blood found its way into developing the Red Poll in the early part of the 19th century.

As noted in the beginning, we leave the breed’s development before the impact of railways, enabling rapidity of growth to be selected for a stock which no longer need to have the stamina of age in order to travel some 400 miles without losing much condition; and placing less emphasis on fat, when cheap coal introduced the kitchen range, replacing the spit and open fire, and called for less fat to prevent the meat from scorching. It is with some regret that we leave this excellent breed, whose further development will form the subject of a paper at our forthcoming Summer Conference.

1 Longhorns were brindled, often with a white stripe along the length of the back. This was originally written in Bakewell’s heyday 1786, and in the early days a favourable comparison with the best breed then in existence – or at least the most popular breed.

2 Tallow candles sold for about the same amount per pound as butter. Usually for more at this time.

