

Chapter One - The Early Years.

Although the British Goat Society was founded in 1879, the actual starting point came a little earlier in 1874 when H.S.Holmes-Pegler published his *Book of the Goat*. A year later he was invited to judge the first goat show. This took place at Crystal Palace and was the forerunner of a number of shows held at London venues such as Alexandra Palace and the Royal Aquarium.

The first British Goat Society Herd Book lists six shows held between that first show and the 1879 Dairy Show at which a meeting was held and the following resolution passed: 'That an association be formed to be called The British Goat Society'. Eighteen members joined on this occasion and by December forty-six people attended the meeting at which the first committee was formed.

Baroness Burdett-Coutts, still remembered as a Victorian philanthropist, was the first Patron, the Earl of Londesborough was President and Professor Simonds (Principal of the Royal Veterinary College) was Chairman. Holmes-Pegler was both Secretary and Treasurer. As can be seen from this list, the original committee was a rather 'distinguished' group. In fact the first President was an Earl and the second a Duke! Baroness Burdett-Coutts was apparently especially irritated to see goat-carts at the seaside giving rides to wealthy children when she thought that the goats would be better employed producing milk for cottagers' children, an attitude reflected in the aims of the Society. The Baroness was a noted goat-keeper herself. She owned and bred 'Polly', number 1 in the Herd Book and, as well as being the first Patron, was also President from 1903-05.



A post card showing goats at Felixstowe pulling carts. Angela Burdett-Coutts felt the goats would be better used for milk production.

There was a certain element of crusading in the attitude of these early, wealthy BGS members which was reflected in some of the decisions made. The aims of the society were:

'To extend and encourage the keeping of goats by cottagers and others who cannot afford a cow with a view to increase the supply and consumption of milk in rural districts, and also to improve the goat as a breed and develop its milking qualities in order to render it more available for the purpose'.

With the first aim in mind the Society originally bought milking goats which were sold on to cottagers at a cost of thirty shillings (£1.50). This would have been a fairly major outlay so it was repayable at five shillings a month. Interestingly, demand soon outstripped the supply of suitable animals so the practice ceased after about ten years.

The second aim of the Society proved more difficult to implement. As Holmes-Pegler discovered when judging the Crystal Palace Goat Show, there was no standardisation of breeds – the exhibits, both male and female, were long/short haired, horned/hornless and of assorted colours. Yields were in the region of one pint a day. The first Herd Book and Prize Record did not appear until 1886 – the previous ten years having been spent amassing and classifying the rather scarce material. Its original aim was to keep records of the best goats which existed (those which had won prizes at shows) and thus produce heavy-yielding goats of good conformation – regardless of breed.

Holmes- Pegler's introduction to the first Herd Book and Prize Record, covering the years from 1875 to 1885, commented on some of the difficulties involved in its production.

'The establishment of a Herd Book for Goats has been attended with some difficulty. First, because the propagation of these animals has not been conducted with any regard to purity of breed, a qualification which, in most cases, it would not be easy to determine, no standard having been fixed. Secondly, in consequence of the very few breeders who have kept any record of pedigree? The only foundation, therefore, upon which it has been found possible to construct a Herd Book consists in the Prize Record, a list of the goats which have won prizes since the first Show at the Crystal Palace in 1875'.

By 1886 the conditions for entry had been defined as follows:

Goats are eligible for Entry in the Herd book when they comply with any one or more of the following conditions:-

1. *When both SIRE and DAM are entered in the Herd Book.*
2. *When the SIRE or DAM is entered in the Herd Book and the other parent is in the PRIZE RECORD or (in the case of the Sire) in the STUD GOAT REGISTER.*
3. *When the goat itself and either its Sire or Dam are in the Prize Record.*
4. *When the GOAT ITSELF is in the PRIZE RECORD, and its Sire has been accepted on the STUD GOAT REGISTER.*
5. *When the GOAT ITSELF is in the PRIZE RECORD and at least TWO OF ITS ANCESTORS (one on the side of the dam and the other on the side of the sire) are also in the Prize Record.*

It is tempting to suggest that the excessive use of capital letters is an indication of the difficulties that Holmes-Pegler experienced when compiling the first Herd Book. He appears very anxious that there shall be no misunderstandings.

As will be seen from the descriptions of goats given in the first Herd Book, at this stage there was no way that goats could be differentiated by breed as there were none! Details of both owner and breeder were also given.

Kids had to have their birth details registered in the Kid Register before six months of age, and were allocated a registration number. The number had to be sent to the show on the entry form – without it neither kids nor goatling could be shown.

It will be seen from the regulations that Polly satisfied several of the conditions for entry into the Herd Book, and in fact Holmes-Pegler's introduction makes reference to her as a particularly successful dam.



Part of a print showing some winners at the Alexandra Palace show.

Unfortunately Polly (Herd Book entry number 1) is largely obscured by the male standing in front of her.

Milking prizes were offered at the first show organised by the Society, but it was several years before the Star was introduced to denote goats which had won prizes in Milking Competitions at 'recognised shows'. The sons of * milkers whose sires were also out of *dams were prefixed by a symbol known as a dagger. The first goat classes were included in the Royal Agricultural Show's Schedules in 1879, 1889 and 1898 and Holmes-Pegler stated that 'shows have not been held annually by the BGS since, as so many county shows now hold these classes'.



Weighing the milk at the show at Westminster Aquarium. (From a print in Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News)

The number of magazine pictures depicting goat shows was perhaps because such shows were seen as an interesting novelty. Although they are certainly of interest to us today, it would be valuable to know how accurately such pictures actually illustrated the goats.

Despite the fact that the first Herd Book lists increasing numbers of shows, for almost thirty years the BGS was nurtured by Holmes-Pegler fulfilling many of the necessary roles. Elected Hon. Secretary and Treasurer in 1879, he relinquished the role of Treasurer in 1912, but remained Secretary until 1917. He was the first Editor between 1880 and 1905, and edited the *Monthly Circular* (as it was then) from 1908 to 1917. In its early years the *Monthly Circular* (consisting of eight pages) largely kept Members abreast of forthcoming shows, awards and entries to the Kid Register.

For many years, despite growing interest, Holmes-Pegler was the only judge. By 1908 a Judge's Panel had been set up, selected by the committee. Initially all the judges were men, it being some years before any women were given licences. However, Miss Henderson and Mrs. Soames both had licences by 1920.

One of the earliest judges was Sam Woodiwiss who had joined as a life member in 1893. He claimed to have owned thirty-two distinct varieties of goat, and at one time his herd (prefix Sedgemere) numbered over sixty animals. Between 1905-1912 he edited the Herd Book and from about 1920 was a BGS judge. He also judged horses, cattle, bull-dogs and cats!

T.W. Palmer joined the Society in 1908, becoming Hon. Secretary in 1921, and then, for many years, Chairman. He was also a judge and President in 1953/4. He was awarded the OBE in 1956. In these early years all the committee members were men, often with city connections which enabled them to provide rooms for the frequent meetings. However at an EGM in 1918 it was decided that up to six lady members could be elected onto the committee. In view of some of the still-familiar names who were already making an impact this decision would seem to be over-due! Prominent women and famous prefixes or affixes included Mrs Abbey (Didgemere), Miss Barnaby (Bitterne), Miss Booth (Springfield), Miss

Chamberlain (of Westons), Miss Gresley-Hall (Webb), Mrs Soames (Pytchley), and Miss Window-Harrison (of Weald). Miss Pope (of Bashley) had joined ten years earlier.

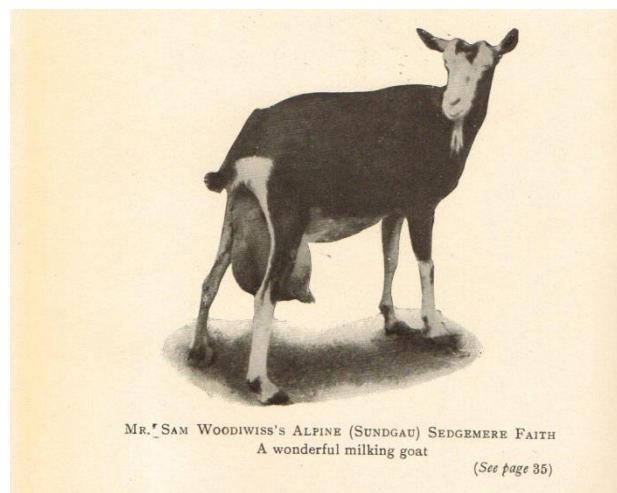
In 1935 Miss Abbey produced *Practical Goat-Keeping* in order she said 'to help the novice to get good results from goat-keeping and to enable him or her to give the animals a reasonably happy and well cared-for existence'.

Another new member at this time was destined to play a prominent part in the Society's history - this was H.E. Jeffrey. Elected a judge in 1926, he became the Society's first paid official four years later when he took the job of Secretary - a post he held for the next twenty years. He also became a Vice-Chairman and finally, President in 1963/4. In 1970 he produced a basic guide to goat-keeping.

Early imports.

There were a number of imports which were crossed with native goats. In 1884 there was the first import of Toggenburgs from Paris, followed by several small importations from France and Switzerland during the middle 1890's. In 1903 there were some further imports, namely five Saanens (two males and three females) and four described as 'Swiss' from the Paris Zoo. The Saanens were bred true for one or two generations but numbers were insufficient to breed pure from then on as there were no further imports of that breed for twenty years. However, they did improve the milk yields of the 'native' goats.

The four 'Swiss' goats included a specimen of the black and white Sandgau breed. This goat joined the herd of Sam Woodiwiss as Sedgemere Faith and became the foundation animal, not only for the British Alpines, but also of several well-known prize-winning strains of the period. She appears way back in pedigrees of all breeds except Toggenburg and Saanen. Faith was the first goat to give over a gallon of milk in twenty-four hours in public. As can be seen, although black and white, Faith was not perfectly marked 'Swiss' as regards her facial stripes, and her udder leaves a good deal to be desired. The fact that she had so profound an influence can be taken to show how far British goats have come...and also, perhaps, that looks aren't everything! Unlike Faith the other three 'Swiss' females appear to have had little influence on later breeding.



Sedgemere Faith (From Holmes-Pegler, eighth edition)

Goats of the Anglo-Nubian type had been appearing at the earliest goat shows. Holmes- Pegler suggests in *The Book of the Goat* that 'such goats came over from India on P. and O. Steamers' and combined with the 'native' goat produced the 'short sleek coat, small horns, rich black and tan colour and drooping ears which characterised the progeny of this combination and soon made it popular, especially at exhibitions,

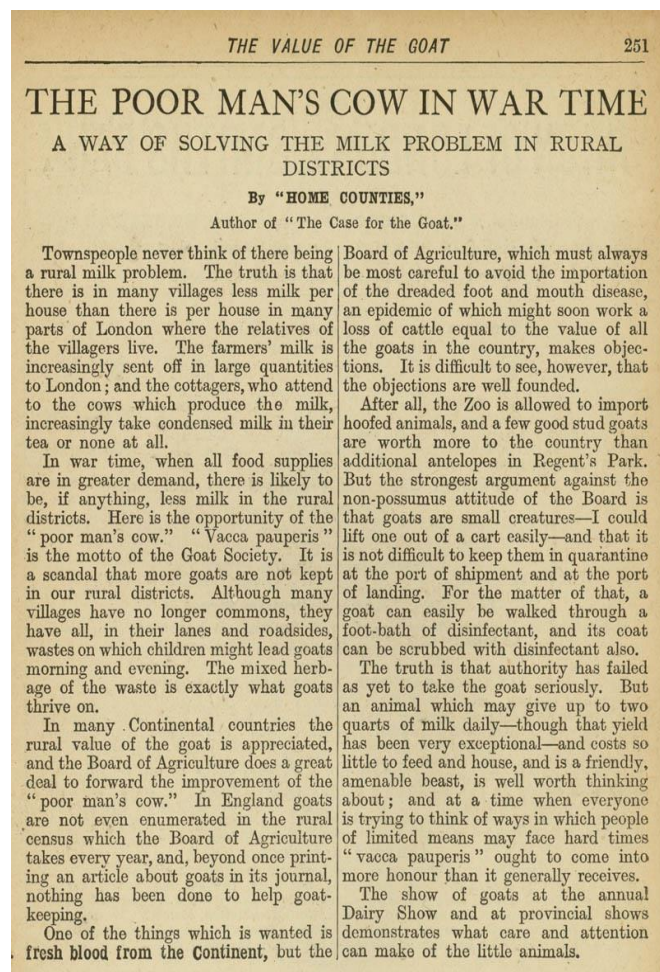
where most of the prizes have been won with it from the earliest days of goat-showing.' In 1904 three more Nubian males were imported and, together with Sedgemere Chancellor, formed the foundation of the Anglo-Nubian breed.

In 1905 Breed sections started to appear in the Herd Book, with the first closed section for Toggenburgs. Ninety-six animals derived from earlier imports, which had previously been registered in the general (Anglo-Nubian-Swiss) section, were transferred to the Toggenburg section.

Similarly, in 1910, a separate section for Anglo-Nubians was opened when 450 descendants of the four recognised Nubian males were transferred from the general section with a further 60 the following year when Sam Woodiwiss and a fellow breeder were authorised to inspect and select further animals as a result of amended conditions of entry.

A further section of the Herd Book came into being in 1918 when the Swiss section opened to register the Saanens imported in 1903 and their offspring. The following year British Alpines were recognised as a breed. Again inspection of the goats was at first used to identify the 'type'.

The criteria laid down in the original Herd Book for the registering of stock remained in force until 1912. Herd Books had come out every two or three years, but in 1918/19 there was an especially large one and 1920 and '21 each had an issue. In 1922 the Herd Book became quarterly.



This article from the 1915 Daily Mail is surely the work of Holmes-Pegler.