

Chapter Nine - A New Look and Boom or Bust? 1980 to 1989.

The Society's second hundred years seemed to be getting off to a very promising start. The new Secretary had settled in and, in 1981 a new Chairman, Mr Victor Thornley, was elected. His predecessor, Hugh Fortescue, stepped down after 27 years in the position, but remained as Hon. Solicitor. Membership was growing rapidly - passing the 3000 mark. It was a period when self-sufficiency was the rage and goat-keeping in particular was 'in'. The Herd Book got even fatter as everything caprine was registered – whatever the quality – to cope with the demand. A surge of goats being up-graded under Regulation 4(2) indicated that more unregistered goats were being acquired. Herd Book 107 which covered 1981 listed over 900 new prefixes.

Having celebrated its Centenary and looked back at the personalities and achievements of its first hundred years, the Society now had to move forward. Commercial herds were really beginning to take off and sales were moving from the farm gate to the supermarket. Several new goat-orientated societies reflecting the wider interests were starting up. These were the Goat Veterinary Society, COBS, and the Goat Producers Association, which all became affiliated to the BGS. It was also especially important at the time to have good liaison with the veterinary profession as the threat of CAE in particular was causing anxiety.

In the early eighties when registrations were rising rapidly, and staffing costs to cope with them were doing the same, computerisation was essential. It was decided to put new registrations on computer and send this data direct to the printers of the Herd Book. Every member was given a membership number and all registration cards were now white instead of the colours previously used to distinguish Herd Book, Foundation Book and Supplementary Register registrations. From the start the computer, which was leased, ran into problems. Its main task was to deal with the registrations to ease the compilation and printing of the Herd Book - but it did not arrive until April 1982 when half the year's registrations had already been processed. Herd Book 110 was a complete disaster and had to be reprinted – using a different firm of printers. It then transpired that the leasing company, who were supposed to have supplied the Society with a machine capable of passing the data to the printing firm, had in fact supplied an earlier model which could not. They went out of business! The hope of speeding-up the production of the Herd Book was proving costly in terms of both time and money and the fiasco provided fuel for the 'anti-computer brigade'. How times have changed!

Computerisation was also affecting the Society from another source. The Milk Marketing Board was regularly

changing its charges – upwards - either by raising the charge per goat or by apparently maintaining the charge (but for fewer goats!). The service provided was changing too. At one time daily weights for each goat were entered on a sheet, with the yields totalled by the Recorder on his monthly list. Later the yields became 'estimated' with a 24 hour yield being taken as the mean for a 28 day period. The Recorder merely collected the box of samples the morning after, or turned up the next evening and morning to 'check weigh' and take fresh samples. In 1985 they introduced a real bombshell. They were computerising cow records...for 305 day lactations. If certificates were needed for 365 and 730 day lactations they would have to be paid for. The Journal became full of letters for and against either 305 or 365 day lactations.

Goats recorded through Milk Recording Clubs became entitled to a C prefix for lactations completed during the October 1st – September 30th 1982 lactation period. By 1987 they had parity with MMB recorded animals, and a year later males could have a combined CR prefix.

A degree of stability had been maintained during the Society's troubled times by the long tenure of the Journal editor. Miss Rochford had taken on the task in 1949 but died unexpectedly in 1984. Temporarily the Journal was produced in the office, by Mr May, who experimented with its layout, especially the cover. Mrs Goodwin then took over in 1985 and the Journal grew even fatter and covered a wide range of goat related topics. However, given the parlous state of the Society's finances as well as the cost of printing and postage, such a large publication (788 pages in 1986) could not be justified. Something had to be done and in March 1989 members were surprised to receive an A4 magazine in colour and entitled 'Goats Today'. Enthused by the interest in goats and self-sufficiency, the new publishers printed it for free using advertising and shop sales (at £1.50) to fund it. Not surprisingly it did not last. The printers went bankrupt and only eight issues were produced over the twelve months.

Other things were also given a new look. The Society acquired its 'corporate image' with the logo of various breeds of goat on the right hand edge of the stationery and all publications. The Year Book also had changes. Miss Mostyn-Owen had been awarded an MBE in the Birthday Honours in 1985 and the Year Book was dedicated to her on the diamond jubilee of the Mostyn Herd. Fittingly it was the first year to have colour photographs. The 1987 issue adopted the style familiar to to-day's members.

Increased membership brought new blood onto the committee and new ideas. The older members, in particular, were dismayed by the frequent changes made to the Rules and Regulations. These changes were often piecemeal – without being fully linked to related regulations. In 1986 a Rules Sub-committee was set up to 'tidy-up' the Rules and Regulations so they were a coherent unified document and fit to be published at the back of a Year Book. Also revised was the Breeds Booklet which was an essential item both for the publicity stand and as a vital reference for judges. Here the Breed Societies were consulted and their feed-back then put into a standard format across the Breeds.

The first Judges' Training Seminar was held at Hebden Bridge, Yorkshire, in 1985. Several more were held at two-yearly intervals over the next few years. In 1986 licences for four judges were not renewed, (one was going abroad) sparking new rulings for complaints against judges. The names of prospective judges (also of those seeking renewal) were to be published in the Journal prior to the licensing meeting.

For the 1981 show season milkers had to have kidded 20 days prior to the Milking Competition, and the following year female kid classes ceased to be printed. The Best kid was, however, published in the show report, although

Judge's comments were not. Proteins were now being tested for at shows and the figures appeared with the Milking Competition results. However at this time they were for information only - it had not yet been decided how to incorporate them into the 'points' system. From January 1989 the Regulation restricting Milking Competition entries to animals which had kidded up to 2 years prior to the show was withdrawn.

From 1983 all disbudding and dehorning had to be done by a vet. A year later all registrations had to be accompanied by an earmark certificate and in 1988 a year letter was introduced at the end of every earmark. The same year the first consignment of goat semen ever to be sent from the British Isles was sent to Oman.

Goat '82 was held in the April of that year and was largely a trade exhibition of equipment for goat-keepers – though some goats were on display. Held at Stoneleigh, it later became an annual event in late September with goat classes. The Autumn Exhibition at Peterborough in October also started at this time and helped to fill the gap left when the Dairy Show was discontinued. For several years there had been no show suitable for goats which milked well into the autumn. In May 1989 another high-profile event took place when the first Farm and Countryside show was held in Hyde Park. The BGS gained good

publicity – and became £700 richer! The 200 club was opened in 1989 to raise money for up-graded computer equipment for show results – the 1986 results had often proved to be illegible. There were £10 stakes with a percentage of the funds raised given as prize money.

The 1980s saw some significant achievements for goats. In 1986 Ashdene Metaphor became the first 700 gallon milker in the Northern hemisphere. She was the highest recorded champion since 1949 - in her first lactation - and, at the time, held the record for IPPCs gained in a single year.

BCCs for Golden Guernseys were first awarded in the 1987 season with R105 Acorus Cordelia* becoming a Breed Champion that year.



*CH RM 320 Ashdene Metaphor Q*2. Owned and bred by Nick Parr.*

However not everything was as rosy as it seemed. One of the joys of keeping goats had always been that they were largely disease free. In 1983 the first clinical cases of CAE - a disease common on the Continent and North America - were reported in Britain. A voluntary survey was held to determine the incidence of the disease. Preliminary precautions were introduced at shows. Little was known about the disease and research was needed. The Centenary fund wanted to support this, but the Ministry Research Laboratories could not accept money from unofficial sources, so an independent laboratory had to be found. In 1987 the Ministry of Agriculture and the BGS combined to set up a Monitored Herd Scheme. More controversial was the showing issue...were CAE negative only shows actually 'open'?

Inflation was still continuing with costs rising every year – and the Society suffered a 'double whammy'. Firstly there were substantial increases in printing and postage costs and then constantly changing fees for registrations

and other items meant that too many had to be returned as being incorrect thus wasting valuable time and money. The snowballing effect caused a backlog of registrations to start accumulating. The sheer number of registrations would have been a mammoth task, even if they had all been 100% correct.

In 1982 Associate Membership was discontinued which did reduce the membership, but also improved finances. The Committee election in 1983 was unnecessarily contested – which was costly. There were three new members for the three vacancies, but three ex-officio members chose to stand for election as well. This sparked a change of Rule which prevented this happening again. Any form of canvassing had

always disqualified a candidate but, with so many new members either knowing nothing of the candidates, or the candidates themselves being new and unknown to the general membership, a short election address/biography of not more than 150 words could now be submitted with the voting papers. In theory this should have enabled those with the most suitable qualifications to be elected, but in practice did not seem to elicit more votes despite the large membership.

From January 1985 elections for Area Representatives also became triennial although falling on different years to the Committee elections. At the end of the decade there was a suggestion that the Committee should be reduced as a cost cutting exercise. In 1986 travelling expenses were to be claimed after every meeting, rather than once a year and three years later committee members were each asked to donate £25 to the Society's funds to go towards the reimbursement of their travelling expenses. Fees for Affiliated Societies were also raised by £10 annually to help cover the Committee travel expenses of Area Representatives. 50% of the meetings were to be held on Saturdays to enable members with a weekday job to stand for election to the committee.

At the 1986 AGM the Chairman, Victor Thornley, had been badly received and, at the ensuing Committee meeting, did not submit his name for re-election as Chairman. He also asked that the sale of old BGS publications be undertaken by someone else. Over the years he and his wife had raised a considerable contribution to the Society's funds by this means. He was succeeded in the Chair by Paul Franche who accepted the position for one year only as he had now retired and would be moving to Australia.

The Secretary, Mrs May, had been paid a lump sum annually from which she hired secretarial staff as needed. The backlog of registrations had now become unwieldy, with kids unable to be shown because their sire's registrations had not been processed. In 1986 Mrs May wanted to engage more staff to clear this backlog but, on being informed that there was no further funding available, she resigned.

In trying to deal with the registration backlog, other jobs got side-lined and the Herd Books could not be published annually in the relevant years. The cost of printing and posting these got moved to the budget for the following year. With the size of the Herd Books of this period publishing two in one year was a great strain on the finances.

In the autumn of 1986 Cheryl Hawksley was appointed as Secretary and the expensive move to a rented office in Moretonhampstead, Devon, was undertaken. The terms of employment also had to be considered. In the past Secretaries had made room for the office work to be carried on in their own homes. Mrs May had provided a contractual service. Now there was to be an employed Secretary who would be operating from office premises

independent of his/her home, with additional staff also salaried. The office accommodation at Moretonhampstead was not ideal and, after a year, Cheryl Hawksley resigned. Her assistant, Sue Knowles, was appointed in January 1989 and more suitable offices were found in Bovey Tracey. Both Secretary and office remained in service for over twenty years!

Having settled the Secretary and office, it was now time for the Chairman to keep changing! The Society was going through one of its biggest financial crises, needed 'turning round' and Paul Franche's successor was having a tough time. Michael Flinton had been elected – the first Area Representative to hold the position. Having sized up the situation he initiated another first – a Budget! In the past overspending had drawn on the Society's reserves. Michael realised that the reserves were a major source of much needed income and, although it was a bad period for dividends and interest from investments, the Society could ill afford to reduce them. There were several expensive one-off payments to be made in addition to the delayed Herd Books. Rigorous budgeting was therefore enforced and much to the Editor's dismay, the plump Monthly Journal was the item to suffer most.

Between them, the new Secretary and Chairman caught up with the office back-log and addressed the Society's financial problems. At a Committee meeting in November 1987 most fees were raised and a proposal submitted that from 1st January 1989 the subscription be increased from £12 to £15. By August 1988 it became obvious that more income was needed to avoid depleting the reserves. A proposal to raise the subscription to £20 was put to the membership in a postal ballot but was defeated, only £15 being accepted.