



Cattle of 'every colour under the sun'

## Coats of many colours

John Robinson

When my grandfather died in 1962 he had built up the largest and best-known herd of pedigree Dairy Shorthorn cattle in the country. My father, however, knew that the days of the Shorthorn breed were numbered as it was rapidly being superseded by the rise in popularity of the higher yielding Friesian cow which had recently been introduced from Holland. He realised that he had to change breed, but there was a problem. Friesians were black and white.

Shorthorn cattle were predominately red (never brown) in colour, with a small percentage of white and roan animals. Never black. Indeed, up until that time there had never been a black animal on the farm. Father wanted to stay up-to-date and milk the highest yielding and profitable cows that he could but, at the same time, he wanted to preserve his father's tradition of only milking red cattle. Luckily there was a solution.

Some black and white Friesians carry a red recessive gene which means that occasionally they would produce a red and white calf. This would normally be discarded by the farmer who only wanted black and whites. Since a red and white cow mated with a red and white bull will only produce red and white calves, it was possible to build up a red and white herd with calves discarded from some of the best black and white herds in the country.

At the same time the Friesian Society accepted that if you crossed a Shorthorn cow with a red and white Friesian bull and then crossed their calf with another red and white Friesian and repeated the process for seven generations, the eventual resulting cow had changed breed and become Friesian.

In approximately 20 years father turned his Shorthorn herd into the largest herd of Red and White Friesians in the country, gaining the benefits of the Friesian's higher yield but maintaining his father's red colour.

Dairy farming at Iford gradually became uneconomic. The last cows went in 2003 and we converted to beef cattle. Ben started off with pedigree Sussex cattle which are very dark red in colour. They are very hardy and can more-or-less 'live on thin air'. However, they are very slow growing and tend to fatten at low weights. So gradually, Ben has introduced larger and faster growing continental breeds such as the Simmental and Limousin breeds which come in a variety of yellow and grey colours. In order to increase the size of the herd rapidly he has also bought cross-bred Friesian (black) and Hereford (red with white faces) cattle with the result that we now have 1,000 head of cattle of every colour under the sun. I think they look rather fine, but I am not sure that my father and grandfather would agree!

## Iford team success at Laughton Ploughing Match

We're delighted to say that we did rather well at the Laughton & District Agricultural Society annual ploughing match, held on 21st September at Bradfords Farm, Little Horsted. The Iford Estate team came away with three bits of silverware – 'Best farm 2000 acres and over', 'Best field of wheat' and 'Best corn sample'.



## Farming update

Ben Taylor, Estate Manager



A long time has passed since the last newsletter, with a lot of work done on the farm! Harvest has been and gone, fields have been cultivated and sown, and are now beginning to look green again. It should not be underestimated how much time and effort is put in by the farm staff to make this happen, particularly during July and August, when everyone else seems to be either on holiday or on the beach. It is testament to their efforts that everything was gathered in good time, safely stored in the sheds and all resown in good conditions to give the new crop the best possible start.

Harvest itself was a slightly mixed result. After last year's record crop this year was always going to be worse, and so it proved to be. The very wet June, with associated lack of sunshine, caused problems in the early-ripening crops with small, poor grains resulting in poor bushel weights. However, we were saved on the main crops as they ripened a little bit later with the benefit of sunshine. The overall harvest still looks as though it will rank in the top three so, all in all, it wasn't too bad!

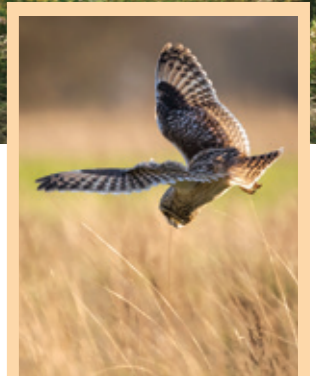
The French and German crops on the other hand have been disastrous. Being that much earlier than us and suffering much worse weather, they are as much as 40% down on yield and with very little quality to offer. In previous years, this would be a signal for prices to shoot up, but unfortunately the world is awash with so-called

coarse grains and, consequently, removing 1.2 million tons from the supply has passed almost without a ripple.

Events like this are a reminder that despite our best efforts, we are still totally dependant on favourable weather, and that disaster is only a thunderstorm away! This is why it is crucially important that as much income as possible is secured from non-farming sources, and is the reason why farms like this have diversified so heavily over the last 20 years. Our efforts to diversify continue with the holiday lodge development that you may have heard about. By the time you read this I hope that the planning application will be submitted and, if all goes well, I aim for it to be ready for use by Easter 2018.

Elsewhere on the farm, the onset of winter means that the focus turns to cattle. Cows need to be brought inside before they start making a mess of the fields, calves need weaning from their mothers (apologies if you have been disturbed by the noise!) and we spend the next few months feeding and bedding cattle on what seems like a never-ending cycle of food in and 'waste' out! We also pregnancy-scan the cows to determine the size of next year's harvest and I'm pleased to report that we are expecting about 375 cows to calve in the space of about six weeks, starting in March. This represents over 95% conception which is a brilliant result and the culmination of a lot of work in improving the breeding herd over the last few years.

Finally, for those of you on social media, we have also spent a bit of time on Facebook over the last few months with some brilliant pictures taken by Jonathon Watt of both the farm and the farming, some of which are featured on these pages. Well worth a look if you have time, search @ifordestate on Facebook.



## Wildlife in Winter

*If you're a nature-lover then winter brings with it many sights to gladden the heart and make the cold and damp a little easier to bear.*

*At Iford, each of our diverse habitats – the close-cropped rolling Downs, traditional farmland, the wetlands beside the River Ouse – attracts a distinct selection of birds at different times of year. In winter, we see flocks of Scandinavian thrushes, the fieldfares and redwings, large flocks of waterfowl (as described in past issues of this newsletter) and several birds of prey including marsh and hen harriers and diurnal short-eared owls, as the one shown hunting over the reed beds above.*

## Get me to the hall on time!

Over recent years the Iford Estate has become very popular for weddings, with the estate having two busy wedding venues.

The Iford Hall, with its arts and crafts charm, lends itself to those wanting a vintage or country fayre themed wedding. Each couple is able to create a truly personal event at the Hall. Having Friday as a set up day, they can style it and the paddock beautifully with marquees, lighting, hay bales, bunting and much more. One couple went as far as making hundreds of brightly coloured pom poms, which really gave their wedding a fun feel.

The Estate also includes The Party Field, an alternative wedding and party venue where couples can create a festival feel, pitching a tent and making a weekend of their celebration. Our guests love the beautiful views from the field and the space, where children can run and play games.

Most couples get married locally in Lewes or Brighton coming to the Hall or field for their reception. Some however arrange a ceremony; although we are not



licensed, this really provides them with the opportunity to have a wedding with a difference. The venues are so popular that we do limit the number to ten per year at each. At the Hall we also make sure that we leave at least one weekend between each wedding so that it's available for others to use too. Over recent years the income from weddings has been essential to help pay for the maintenance of the Hall, including interior and exterior painting and a new fully fitted kitchen. It has also enabled the facilities to be made available to the Parish for community events free of charge.

If you wish to book the hall for any event please contact Sarah Taylor, sarah@thepartyfield.co.uk or on 07900272655.



Cottagers, a young girl and a farm labourer pose in their doorways while several cats go about their business in the lane. Note the metal pails and window-boxes.

## Then and now

These two photos were taken about 100 years apart and show Sutton Cottages in 1920 and the present day.



## The Sussex Pastfinders – discovering thousands of years of human activity on the land around Iford

This article has been contributed by the 'Sussex Pastfinders' who have for the last few years been undertaking a metal detector evaluation of the history of the Estate

A plough-team of eight oxen, a ploughman and an ox goader were expected to plough an acre a day. Sometimes horses would be used with the oxen but never on the same yoke.



The seed was covered by harrowing, a simple form being to drag bundles of brushwood behind a horse. More sturdy harrows were made of wooden pegs fixed into a wooden frame.



Barley would be sown at four bushels to the acre and oats, peas and beans at three bushels to the acre. Children of the village would often keep pests at bay with slingshot.



The Sussex Pastfinders have found and recorded extensive evidence of several thousand years of human occupation and activity in and around the Iford Estate. The fields below the Downs have been the principal focus for the group's fieldwork. The nature of the evidence being recovered is not derived from any known stratified archaeological building, but stems instead from so-called plough-zone 'stray-find' archaeology. That is to say that the evidence comes from thousands of years of human activity on the land and consists of material culture that has been lost, discarded or deposited in the ground throughout history. As the village population increased, the majority of this human activity stemmed from the need to intensively farm the fields to grow sustenance crops for themselves, their livestock, their Lords and the church.

In today's world of fantastic automation and labour-saving devices, a small number of efficient machines

and workers strive to ensure the bounty of the fields surrounding the village. The broad objective of efficiently maximising crop yields has remained the same, but the cultivation practices to achieve it have changed dramatically. In Medieval Iford, from first light till dusk, the fields would have been covered en masse with villeins putting in back-breaking manual labour on the Lord's, or their own, small strips of land to produce but a minute fraction of the harvest yielded today. The wonderful illustrations are taken from the Luttrell Psalter, a Medieval book of psalms that was written and illustrated between 1325 and 1335 AD. It shows illustrations of some of the everyday Medieval cultivation and harvesting activities that would have taken place on the land around Iford. In the stillness of an early morning in Iford it is easy to sense the history of those long-gone people and communities leaking through into the present.



A team of five people – four reapers and a binder – could harvest two acres a day. Men would then stack sheaves.



The rights to glean any fallen grain often fell to the poorest in the village, and was of considerable benefit to them. It was carried out before livestock was released to graze the stubble.



Grain crops were threshed using a flail. This consisted of two lengths of wood, the hand-staff and beater, joined by a leather thong. After threshing, the grain was winnowed to remove the chaff. A villein could thresh about seven bushels of wheat in a day.

