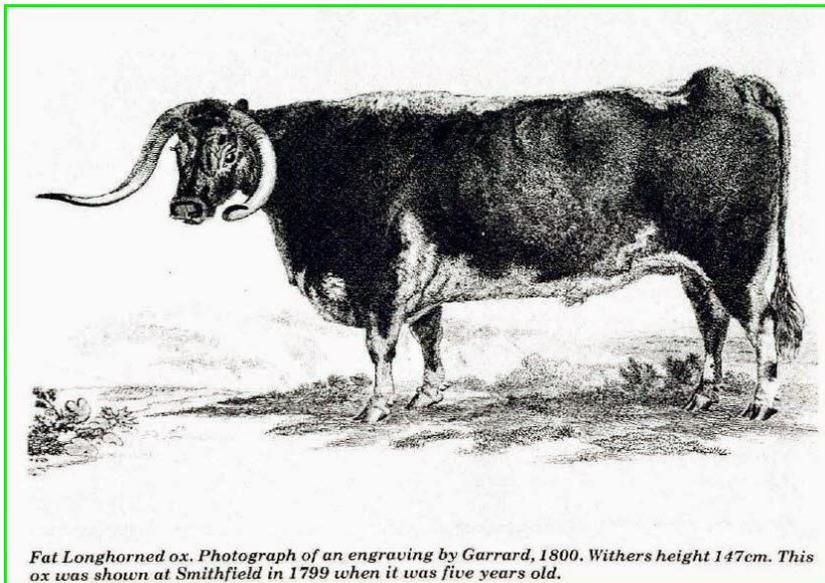


William Cavendish and the world class [1] Shorthorn Cattle Herd at Holker Hall

Introduction to Cattle and the Cartmel Peninsula in the 19th century

At the beginning of the 19th century cattle in the Cartmel area were either longhorn or 'a breed of small cattle of black and duns in colour from Scotland'.



A Longhorn Bull 1799 [2]

Only heifer calves were reared, bull calves 'were either knocked on the head when calved, or the more humane of the farmers...bought them in the market carts to Ulverstone, and gave them away to men who attended for the purpose of receiving so many' [3]. By 1870 the area had changed from arable farming to stock rearing. This was partly a result of turnips being introduced and grown as winter feed and grass quality being improved by the increased use of lime. The main driver however was selective breeding work on shorthorn cattle being pioneered at Holker Hall.

The first Shorthorn Herd at Holker

William, Earl of Burlington (as he was known as then) bought shorthorn cattle to his Holker Estate in 1840 after purchasing 30 cows and heifers from the Castle Howard area [4].



A Shorthorn Bull [5]

A pedigree herd was established with advice from Mr Bates, a noted breeder in North East England under the stewardship of his land agent, George Drewry, who was appointed to the Holker Estate in 1845. William and George were dissatisfied with the results and decided in 1851 to dispose of the whole herd of 60 animals [6]. A flock of 225 Southdown sheep originating from sheep brought from the Earl's Sussex Estate in 1845 was sold at the same auction. 200 people were entertained to lunch and the sale realised £1400 [7], averaging £25 2s 6d [8]. Subsequently a new herd was established from newly acquired breeding stock purchased in 1854.

The World Class Holker Herd

During the remainder of the 1850s and throughout the 1860s the herd was developed at the Home Farm adjacent to Holker Hall. It was reported in 1860 that the Home Farm extended to 500 acres and three fifths was grassland [4]. The soils were light loam and peat and overlaid rock or reclaimed salt marsh. Annually 150 shorthorn bullocks were purchased as yearlings from Milnthorpe and Lancaster, fattened and then sold at Brough Hill. Sheep were also bred.

With the arrival of the railway, sales at Holker became easier [9]. For example on 9th September 1864 30 animals were sold and the average price realised was over 52 guineas and the total for the sale was 2198 guineas [10]. This was despite a long continuing drought which increased costs of keeping a herd [8]. William retained 22 of his stock to grow and improve his herd again.

The fame of the herd spread worldwide and at the next sale, in 1871, an auction of 43 award winning cattle achieved record prices totalling nearly £10500 [11], an average of £240 13s 10d,

with Australia the destination of several of the Duke's shorthorn bulls [12]. One of the bulls, Duke of Oxford Fourth, had a very bad journey to his new home having nearly been drowned as waves invaded his housing and he was nearly washed overboard but his halter saved him from drowning by keeping him securely attached to the ship though it almost strangled him. In 1874 43 head sold for £16497 12s, an average of £383 13s 2d [9]. In 1876 the bull, Grand Duchess of Oxford 29th, was sold from the Holker herd to George Brown of Canada for 2500 guineas which at that date was the highest price paid for a female shorthorn in England [13]. At the 1878 sale 30 cattle were sold for about £20,000 and the Duke claimed that the breeding of the herd 'belonged wholly and solely to my friend, Mr Drewry' [14]. They had a personal friendship rather than a relationship of employer and employee.

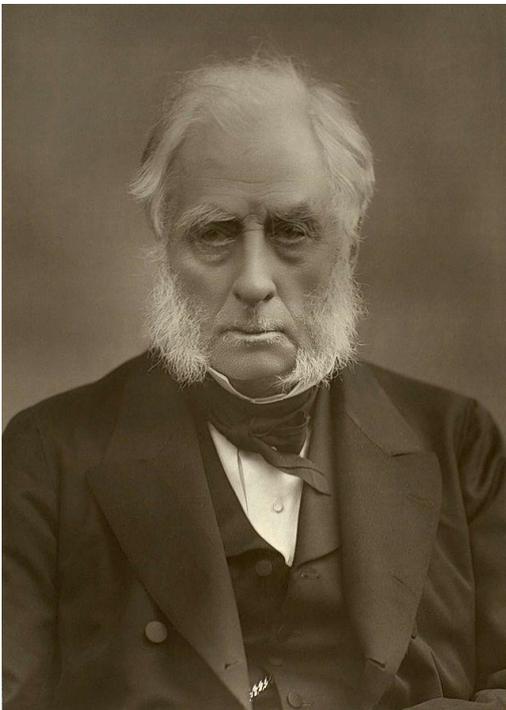
By 1885 it was being reported that shorthorns were the favoured breed in the north [7]. Reporting sales from the Holker Estate it was demonstrated that prices had risen considerably since the 1851 sale but pointed out that the prices dropped after 1878 due to the depressed state of agriculture. The 1889 sale [15] described the Holker herd as one of the oldest and highest bred Bates herds in the Kingdom. At the standard luncheon that always accompanied these events the Duke as usual attributed the success of 'one of the finest herds of shorthorns in existence' to his 'friend' and agent George Drewry's 'good taste and excellent management' [15]. It was said in George Drewry's obituary that public and private sales from the herd realised £100,000 [14] and added £2000 annually to the Estate accounts. Six auctions between 1851 and 1896 resulted in the sale of 228 animals for a total of nearly £60,000 and many more were sold privately.

Although in 1891 the Duke of Devonshire died [16], Victor Cavendish, the son of William's youngest son Edward, with George Drewry, continued the breeding programme. George died in 1896 and George Moore became herdsman. The Holker herd, created by George Drewry, consisting of 49 head, was sold four months after his death [14]. At the auction in August 1896 attended by over 500 people Victor announced he was interested in breeding better Clydesdale Shire horses but he said he would continue with the shorthorn cattle too. In an 1896 report on the Holker shorthorns it was claimed that between 1864 and 1875 no herd was held in higher estimation than the Holker herd [17].

In September 1925 the death of Edward Drewry ended the family's 78 year association with the Holker Estate [18]. Edward had taken over the management of Holker Estate from his father George in 1895 and had only retired 2 years before his own death in 1925. He had re-established the shorthorn herd during his time in charge of the Estate.

William Cavendish

In 1808 William, who would become the seventh Duke of Devonshire, was born. William, Lord Cavendish, his father, was killed tragically in a coach accident on the Holker Estate in 1812. In 1829 he married Lady Blanche Georgina Howard and on the death of his grandfather in 1834 he inherited the title of Earl of Burlington. Holker Hall, with extensive estates in Lancashire, and Compton Place, with an extensive estate in Sussex [19], passed to him with the Earldom. Sadly his wife died in 1840 and the Earl retreated to Holker Hall for much of the year as it was his favourite residence. In 1858 he became the Duke of Devonshire on the death of his cousin. His estate now covered 193,000 acres and stretched over 13 counties but he continued to live at Holker Hall [16]. However along with an income of £200,000 a year he inherited a huge debt which cost him £60,000 a year in interest [19]. He had a reputation as a prudent sober, moderate man and his management of the estate increased income and paid off debt. Much of this was due to his involvement in the development of Barrow-in-Furness which he financed from divided income but he was also very interested in improving agriculture and that expenditure was financed from estate income. However in the 15 years from 1874 all his resources went towards shoring up Barrow's failing industry.



William Cavendish [20]
7th Duke of Devonshire
(27 April 1808 – 21 December 1891)

Sadly when William, the Seventh Duke, died in 1891 the Holker Estate was again burdened by debt. Spencer Cavendish, William's second but eldest surviving son, became the eighth Duke but

died in 1908 and his nephew Victor Cavendish, William's grandson and eldest son of Edward, William's third son, who had inherited and continued to live at Holker Hall became the ninth Duke. With much regret he and his wife left Holker Hall to live at Chatsworth and his brother Richard took over the estate [1].

Shorthorn cattle

A superior herd of shorthorns existed on the Estates of Earls and Dukes of Northumberland and the breed was found in Yorkshire, Durham and Northumberland [21]. It was recognised as a breed by about 1750. They were usually red or red and white spotted with a large girth and very short legs. The cows were good milkers and both bulls and cows yielded a heavy carcass of beef. Thomas Bates, Britain's premier cattle breeder was born in Matfen, Northumberland in 1775 [22] on one of the Duke of Northumberland's Estates [21]. In 1811 he bought the manor of Kirklevington, at Yarm, near Darlington. The purchase included 1,000 acres of land, half the land was 'good, old grass fields' and the remainder 'poor, cold clay'. Before Thomas could bring his shorthorns to Kirklevington he needed to install extensive drainage schemes which took 20 years but turned the land into prime grazing that produced wheat and the quality fodder that his cattle needed. Thomas believed that commerce and agriculture ought to go 'hand in hand'. This was undoubtedly influenced by the changing nature of the country with a rise in population and the emergence of industrial centres which created a demand for food. To meet this demand he set out to improve the livestock through inbreeding or line breeding previously considered unacceptable in cattle breeding. Subsequently the Bates strains were developed for milk production [23]. Thomas died in July 1849 and much of his stock was purchased by Lord Dulcie who already had established a quality herd. Sadly he died in 1852 and when his herd was sold, realised very high prices. William, The Earl of Burlington with George Drewry acquired Oxford 15th for 200 guineas from the Dulcie sale to restart their shorthorn herd. This bull had been bred by Thomas Bates.

George Drewry

George Drewry was born at Weary Hall, Wigton, Cumberland on October 23 1816 [14]. George had been taught by Mr Benson 'whose line was still to be found on Sir Wilfred Lawson's estate at Brayton' [24]. This was the Reverend John Benson of Cockermouth who was a shorthorn breeder and Sir Wilfred, 2nd Baronet of Brayton who was MP for Carlisle (1859-1865) then Cockermouth (1886-1900).

He was employed at the Duke of Bedford's Estate at Tavistock before becoming agent for Sir A Buller's property at Pound, Plymouth from 1840 until 1845. In 1845 he was appointed agent for the Earl of Burlington's Furness and Cartmel Estates. Subsequently he was also appointed agents at his Lordship's properties at Keithley and Skipton in Yorkshire, the Buxton Estates in Derbyshire and Wetton, Staffordshire and Lord Chesham's Lancashire Estate [25].

His knowledge of cattle was in demand and he served as judge at many agricultural shows throughout the country. He was one of the first members of the Royal Agricultural Society of England. He was described as 'a great Professor - a signior, grave, reverend, and most potent - amidst a widespread circle of admiring and imitative people. He was present at the purchase of the first cow of the famous Holker Shorthorn Herd [14]. During his time as estate manager at Holker a programme of reclaiming former peat bog was also undertaken throughout the estate and steam cultivation was introduced [14]. He followed techniques that Bates had proved to work in rearing his award winning herds.

He married Caroline Chubb in Tavistock in 1844 and they had 9 children but only 3 sons and 3 daughters were alive when George died. They celebrated their golden wedding anniversary on 23 October 1894 with the whole village and received many valuable gifts from the residents of the Hall and people in the District showing the esteem that the family were held in [26]. 150 guests attended a dinner in the evening with some of the Cavendish family acting as waiters. George died on 12 April 1896 at Holker House, Cark-in-Cartmel. He worked until he was taken ill a few days before his death having served as Estate Manager for 51 years. Caroline died in 1899.



The Drewry grave at Flookburgh Cemetery

Pat Rowland Oct 2018

Edward Drewry was also buried in this grave in 1925. He was the Drewry's youngest child born in 1858.

Home Farm

The buildings known as Home Farm are the low buildings backing onto the public highway adjacent to Holker Hall. The earliest edition of the six inch Ordnance Survey map surveyed in 1847-8 show the buildings were already developed then.

Shorthorn Farm

Shorthorn Farm is the name of the buildings opposite the public entrance to Holker Hall. When this was first named I have not been able to identify but it was certainly called that in 1915 [27]. That is all that remains to remind us of the importance shorthorn cattle had to the fortunes of the Holker Estate.



Conclusion

Agriculture changed considerably during the second half of the 19th century and the long, continued partnership between William Cavendish and George Drewry ensured that Holker Estates initiated or kept up with the changes. They were both highly involved with and served on National and Local Agricultural Societies giving them access to other innovators and improvers and up-to-date information. Holker Tenants were encouraged to have shorthorn cattle. As tenants they worked with the Estate and William and George encouraged them to keep farms in the same family for several generations. The success of their shorthorn breeding programme enabled the agriculture of the Estate to prosper. In turn this will have influenced other farmers in the area

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