

Some Agricultural History Salvaged

By H. CECIL PAWSON

A CHANCE remark, made almost casually by my friend the late Major J. G. G. Rea (for many years Chairman of the Northumberland Agricultural Executive Committee), led to the exciting discovery of a number of letters written by Robert Bakewell to his pupil and friend George Culley in the closing years of the eighteenth century. These letters were in the possession of the late Mrs Leather-Culley at Callaly Castle, near Alnwick, among a large accumulation of correspondence destined for destruction. Mrs Leather-Culley was most co-operative and I soon found myself in a large store room on the top floor, surrounded by dusty cardboard boxes so crammed with bundles of papers as to daunt even the most enthusiastic researcher. For an hour I worked with no success, and then I picked up a four-page foolscap handwritten letter signed "Robert Bakewell," dated "Dishley, 28th April," and addressed to "Mr. George Culley, Fenton, Wooler, Northumberland." This moment of discovery remains vivid in my memory. Stimulated by this exciting find, my search was redoubled until ultimately I had retrieved thirty-two such foolscap letters, all written in Bakewell's own hand, together with a copy of his financial appeal, containing the list of many subscribers.

Visiting London shortly afterwards, I called at the British Museum and elicited the information that six shorter (quarto size) letters written by Bakewell were all that were available there. A call at Rothamsted revealed that the only Bakewell document preserved in the fine library at that Station was a copy of his financial appeal, which on examination I found was less complete than that now in my possession. So far as I have been able to ascertain after many enquiries, these are the only surviving original Bakewell documents. They are reproduced in full in my recent book, *Robert Bakewell, Part II, The Bakewell Letters—Culley and British Museum Collections*. The former collection has been presented to the School of Agriculture, King's College, University of Durham.

Looking back, I cannot but feel a sense of satisfaction that I made use of this almost fortuitous happening at a time when, like most agriculturists, I was already heavily burdened with other duties. I should like to record my gratitude to Mrs Leather-Culley for her gift of the letters and other papers and for her permission to "do with them just what you think is best."

"Other papers" included a variety of printed and handwritten documents on matters which can rightly be described as agricultural history. For ex-

ample, a lengthy printed document of considerable size sets out the full scheme and costs of equipment for the establishment of an experimental farm in Northumberland. This is dated just one hundred years before the famous Cockle Park Experimental Station came into being in 1897. Included are farming tenancy agreements of the Culley Brothers, who farmed so extensively in Northumberland. George Culley, said to be Bakewell's favourite pupil, was the author of *Observations on Live Stock*, 1786, a publication much praised by Bakewell. There were also sale catalogues of the eighteenth century of farms and livestock, with the prices realized marked in the margins, and other advertisements setting forth the merits of particular stallions and bulls.

One fears that much local history of this kind must have been destroyed as waste paper and in other unconsidered disposals in more recent times, and we may wonder how much material may still be lying about, undiscovered.

As an example of interesting correspondence—until now part of the hitherto unpublished “other papers”—the following selection is made which illustrates the leadership of Bakewell and the range of influence of his Dishley Society. It also provides an interesting revelation of the opposition in Northumberland and elsewhere to those who rightly or wrongly were suspected of desiring for personal reasons a “closed shop” in livestock breeding.

Fenton 23^d March 1792

Dear Sir,

We now have it [at last *erased*] in Contemplation to enter into an Association on the Tup Business, and indeed a few of us Viz: Messrs. Thompsons, Nisbet, Self &c. had a private meeting yesterday at Wooler & were very unanimous, yet we are all of an opinion, that we have some Gent^m. Tup Breeders in this Neighborhood who will not Join us. And should that be the Case, as they are Men of some influence they will be enabled to defeat our best Intentions, without your Association will take us by the hand. And on this Occasion I am very happy in having it in my power to refer to a Paragraph in your letter to me of the 16th Decem^r. 91 as follows “I believe few if any of our Company will shew any Rams before the next meeting, & it is intended to shew from the 8th of June to the 8th of July, and after that day untill the 8th of Sep^r: and from that day while the Season Continues. And in order to prevent going to Market, I hope it will be agreed on not to let a Ram to any Person (Live where he will) but who will engage not to sell any Rams but what he shall see killed before they go out of his hands. Or take any to Market, but what are already disposed of for the season, with such other regulations as shall be thought proper” Now Sir this is what we in particular request to know from you immediately on receipt of this That is, if you have

entered into the above resolution “Not to let a Ram to any Person, live where he will, but who will engage neither to sell Rams without seeing them killed, nor shew any at Market with a view to let.” Then we hope we can go on upon sure grounds, & shall immediately proceed on the receipt of your Anser. But, & if, your Association have not entered into the above resolution, & will let Tups to who ever come, without any Questions being asket, we must entirely drop all thoughts of the above Business. Because, if the above resolution is not determindly gone into, the above Gent^m. or any other who have got pretty deep into the Dishley Blood, will be enabled to benefit themselves to the very great injury of this Association. And indeed ultimately it must injure the whole set of Breeders of that valuable Kind. That we may have as little Delay as posible in this important Business, you will Excuse me if I again request your immediate Answer. And after that if you think proper to shew this letter to the Society at your next meeting, and if approved of will favor us with a Correspondence, I am sure it will be very agreeable to our young Association and in particular to your

Obt^d. & Hble Serv^t
G.C.

P.S.

Our present Resolutions are

- 1 Not to market any Tups whatever
- 2 To shew only at a time (suppose 20 or 30)
- 3^d Not to sell Tups even to a Butcher, except killed before taken way.
- 4th To return only 1 again, except an Evident defect has been in the mode
- 5th Not to let a Tup below 5 . . 5
- 6th To sell no Ewes under phhead except to a Butcher who you can depend upon to Slaughter them

NB. If it is not inconsistent with, or contrary to the rules of your Society we will be glad of your advice and assistance respecting our mode of procedure, and thankfull for such regulations, as you will please to recomend to us.—In a future letter, should these gent^m. prove refractory, I shall not think it wrong to give their Names to your Association, if approved by ours. That you Gent^m. may be the more particularly on your guard against them.—Will it not also be necessary to get the two Mr. Collings into our Association?

G.C. Copy of Let^r. to Mr. Bakewell

Sir

Fenton 23^d March 92.

Messrs. Thompson, Nisbet, Self & some other Breeders happening to fall in together yesterday at Wooler, & the Conversation turning upon Breeding. We considered, that a meeting of the Principal Breeders on both sides Tweed

might benefit the Cause. Have accordingly fixed upon Thursday the 5th of April next to meet at the Angel Inn, in Wooler, at 10 of Clock, in the forenoon, and not later. The above Gent^m. desired to Join in requesting the favor of your attendance along with Sir your &c.

G.C.

NB. I will also thank you if you will name the meeting to Mr. Harriot, & that the Gent^m. & myself will be glad to see him along with you at Wooler on the above day. Copy of let^r. to Wm Robison Esq^r.

1792 March 23 Copy of let^r. to Mr. Bakewell on Association Business also one of same date to Wm. Robertson Esq^r.

Fenton, 19 May 1792.

Well Sir,

A little while ago I told you that I should by and bye have occasion to write to you on the Tuptrade, or words to that Effect. Now you must know that the Tup Breeders in this corner, at least most of them, have for some-time had it in Contemplation to enter into a Society.—And in consequence of a letter I had yesterday, from Mr. Honeyburn Secretary to the Leicestershire Association. We have fixed upon Whitsun-Monday to meet upon this business, a very bad day for you to attend, however I hope either you or Bro. Charles will contrive to come, as I flatter myself it will be for all our mutual Benefits. And the members of this association earnestly request your attendance & concurrence, as well as your Bro^{rs} I am sure you can have no objection I hope to join Mess^{rs}—Robertson, Ladykirk—Alder, Horncliff—Nisbet—Potts—Thompsons—Culleys &ca &ca.

The foundation of the business is to take no Tups to Fairs or markets. To sell no Tups or Ewes of the Dishley Blood to Breed from. To shew only a certain number at once say 30. &ca &ca &ca with such other resolutions as may from time to time be agreed upon by a majority of the Society at any one meeting. The meeting will be at Joe Gibsons, Milfield ten oClock forenoon, on monday, the 28th Inst. where we will be very happy to see you or Bro^r. but if you cant come this time do say by letter before that day whether you incline to join us or not. And as I am much hurried, must request the favor of your reading this letter to Mr. Cha^s. Colling with the Compliments of the above Gentlemen requesting his attendance or at all events Sentiments on the occasion. I am for the above Gent^m. & Self your

ever obed^t Humb^e. Serv^t

(Sgd) Geo. Culley.

Mr. Colling

Copy of Letter to Mr. Colling

P.S. I had almost forgot to tell you that our reason for meeting on the 28 is

because an answer must be with the Leicestershire Society on or before the 4th of June their next meeting—& the parties could not meet sooner conveniently. Sg. G.C.

19 May 1792. Copy of a Letter to Mr. Colling on Association Business.

Fenton 19 May 1792.

Dear Sir,

The Gent^m Tup Breeders in this vicinity having for some time past been inclined to enter into an association for the mutual Benefit of the Parties so associated; and having entered into a Correspondence with the Leicestershire Society of Ram Breeders, a proper understanding has taken place. And in consequence of a letter from the Secretary of that association we have fixed upon Monday the 28 Inst. to meet at Joe Gibsons at Milfield by ten o'clock forenoon, where I am requested in the name of the Association to beg your attendance, as we believe it will be for your interest to Join us. And I hope you can have no objection to join Mess^{rs} Robertson Ladykirk—Alder, Horncliff—Nisbet—Potts—Atkinson—Thompsons & Culleys &c &c &c. It is right to acquaint you that the principal matters we propose are not to take any Tups to Fairs or Markets—not to sell Tups or Ewes to breed from. Not to shew above a certain number of Tups upon any one day—with such other resolutions as may from time to time be agreed on at future meetings—If it should so happen either f^m Illness particular Business &c &c. that you cannot attend on the above day. Be so kind as say by letter whether you approve & will join us at our next meeting of which notice shall be given you, in case you approve.

I am for the Above Gent^m & Self

Dr. Sir your Ever Obt. Servt.

Mr. Bates.

(Signed) Geo: Culley.

Copy of a Letter to Mr. Bates.

[erased P.S. I had almost forgot to tell you that our reason for meeting on the 28 is because an answer must be with the Leicestershire Society on or before the 4th of June their next meeting and the Parties could not meet sooner conveniently. Sg^d G.C.]

19 May 1792

Copy of a Letter

to

Mr. Bates on

Association Business.

Milfield 28 May 1792.

Sir

I was duly favored with yours of the 14th Inst. which was read before our Association this Day. And the Gent^m assembled beg their Respectfull thanks for the attention paid them by the Leicestershire Society of Tup Breeders And think that the Line would be best from the Mouth of the Humber up that River & the River Air by Leeds & Skipton, & so across Lancashire by the Town of Lancaster to the Irish Sea. If you approve of this, & will at your next meeting on the 4th of June extend your Resolution made to the 8th of June. "That no Member of the Leicestershire Society shall let or sell a Ram Share or part beyond the above Line Northwards so long as these Societies exist, except to the North^d. Society." "We will on our part engage not to Let or sell a Tup Share or part beyond the above Line Southward except to the Leicestershire Society" (An Honour we can scarce flatter ourselves ever to attain) Now we repeat that when we have your Answer & concurrence to the above resolution we will then go on with Spirit & firmness and are determined as soon as we hear from you again (which we hope will be immediately at or soon after your meeting on the 4th of June), provided it meet our wishes according to the above request, that we shall immediately depute 2 or more of our Members, to go South to reconoitre, and hire, if approved of some of your best Tups which we propose to do every year so long as we continue associated. I am for the Society & Self Sir

your obt^d. & Hble Ser.
Geo Culley.

P.S. We are now Ten & have reason to believe that Mr. Colling & 2 or 3 more will Join if we chuse, and shall be glad of the advice of your Society whether we shall admit them.

Copy of let^r. to
Leicester Society

11 June 1792.

Wooler 11 June 1792

Sir/

Yours of the 5th has just been read to this Society, who were disappointed that yours should not agree to the Line proposed by this in my letter of the 28th May. And I am desired to say that we will give up Lancashire, Westmoreland, Cumberland & the West riding of Yorkshire. provided you will allow us the East & North ridings, with Durham this County & Scotland, because the Society think that a clear Line is best to be understood.—After saying this much we agree to your resolution in the meantime, untill our

deputies see you Gentlemen, which will in all probability be about the latter end of next Week. When if you could convene a meeting we could discuss this matter more fully, & settle many matters which cannot be so well done by Letter. Allow us to say that one great objection to the North & East ridings of Yorkshire being at Liberty for both Societys, is, that those parts are so near some of our opponents, that Ewes may easily be sent by them to Tups hired from your Society into Yorkshire, a matter we must recomend to you, to guard against in the strictist manner I am Sir for the Society, & Self your Obt. Servt. Geo Culley.

P.S. Shall thank you to let Mr. Bettison & Stubbins know that the two Deputies appointed by this Society will most likely be at the Blackmoores Head in Nottingham on Thursday Eve the 21st Inst & shall wait upon these Gent^m. on the Friday morning. Copy of let^r. to Leicester Society 28 May 1792.

The Association was duly formed, but the opposition continued, as is shown first by the meeting which was held in Berwick as advertised, under the presidency of the Earl of Home, and secondly by a further meeting held on 2 July 1792 at Coldstream. In the printed description of the business conducted at this latter meeting occur the following paragraphs:

“Several of the Farmers present having informed the Meeting, that they had attended the Meeting of the Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Farmers, held at the Red Lion in Berwick, on Saturday the 23d Day of June last, and having delivered in the Resolutions entered into at that Meeting, which being openly read.

“Resolved unanimously, that a monopoly of any Trade, or any Association, entered into by any set of Men, (especially of those whose Resolutions enjoin secrecy) are highly injurious to the Public; and that the Members of this Meeting will pursue every measure to counteract such Associations.

“Resolved by the Farmers, who were not present at the said Meeting, held in Berwick, That in case the breeders of Stock, or Members of the Association formed at Milfield in May last, do not on or before the 12th of August next, publicly dissolve the said Association, and advertise their intention to furnish the Public with Tups, or other Stock, as formerly, and on the same liberal Terms as other breeders in this County, that they will, on the 20th of August next, enter into Resolutions, nearly similar to those entered into by the Noblemen, Gentlemen, and Farmers, at Berwick, on the 23d of June last; and they will, at all times, give a preference to those breeders who will sell Tups as well as let them to hire.”

These ‘growing pains’ in the movement towards livestock improvement

and the establishment of breed societies and standards illustrate the conflict between mixed motives of pride, prejudice, personal interest, and genuine desire for progress. They also indicate why Bakewell and his devotees were often under the fire of criticism for their secrecy and exclusiveness, with a measure of jealousy at times accounting for the intense opposition.

BERWICK June 9th, 1792.

JUNE 16th, 1792.

WHEREAS, several Persons, Breeders of Stock, in the County of Northumberland and Durham, who are in the practice of letting TUPS, have entered into an Association, or Combination; the Resolutions of which are generally believed to be inimical to the Public.

A Meeting is therefore to be held at the Red Lion, in BERWICK, on Saturday the 23d Instant, at 3 o'Clock in the Afternoon, to concert Measures for the purpose of counter-acting any such intentions.

THE Association formed for improving the Breed of Sheep in Northumberland, &c. have Associated for the purpose of going to an expence in pursuit of their object, which it would not be prudent individually to attempt.

That they have entered into a Combination inimical to the Country; (as an Hand-bill now in Circulation seems to assert) they beg leave to deny.

There can be no Combination in a Business, a participation whereof was offered to the Principal Tup Breeders in the Neighbourhood, nor can it be deemed inimical to the Country to improve its Breed, of so useful and profitable an Animal by the only means which appear to them adequate to the purpose.

W. PHORSON PRINTER BERWICK.

W. PHORSON PRINTER BERWICK.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

M. L. Ryder, M.Sc., Ph.D., graduated in zoology at Leeds and is now engaged in research on wool growth for The Wool Industries Research Association.

H. Cecil Pawson, M.B.E., M.Sc., sometime professor and assistant director of the department of agriculture, King's College, Newcastle, is the author of a life of Robert Bakewell.

H. C. Prince, M.A., is a lecturer in geography at University College, London. He has contributed to *The Geographic Review*, *The Amateur Historian*, and other periodicals.

T. D. Davidson, F.S.A.(Scot.), is a research physicist. He has published a study in Scottish witchcraft entitled *Rowan Tree and Red Thread*, and many papers on folk-lore.