BRITISH FRIESIANS; THE SOCIETY AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY
1909 - 2025

FOREWORD

I felt compelled to write this history of the British Friesian breed in order to clarify the position of the two distinct strains of black and white cattle found in the UK; the British Friesian and the Holstein.

The modern British Friesian owes much to a group of very determined breeders who formed their own club in 1990, and the support they received from the Holstein Friesian Society; Duncan Spring, Billy Kilpatrick and David Hewitt, in setting a specific type evaluation for the breed. They were wise enough to take the longer view.

Mary Mead, 2012

2009 was the year we celebrated the centenary of the formation of a Society to register the black and white cattle that were imported into the east coast ports of the British Isles from the Low Countries* of Northern Europe. The cattle that specifically came from Friesland provided the foundation of the British Friesian breed as we know it today, and we are proud of their long lineage.

It is therefore timely to take a look at the history and origins of the British Friesian. In so doing, I have relied on the following:

'Holstein-Friesian Cattle; A History of the Breed and its Development in America' by Frederick Houghton and published by the Press of the Holstein-Friesian Register, Brattleboro, Vermont, U.S.A. in 1897.

'History of British Friesian Cattle' written and published by the British Friesian Cattle Society 'prepared, in 1930'…'to celebrate its "Coming of Age"

'British Friesians – A History of the Breed' by J.K. Stanford, O.B.E., M.C., M.A., Published by Max Parish and Co. Ltd, London, 1956

'British Friesian-An Epic of Progress', by Gordon Mingay, This was prepared for the British Friesian Cattle Society's 75th birthday, and published in 1982.

Chapter 1
Foundation Stock

'From the earliest accounts of the Frisian (Friesian) people they have dwelt upon the shores of the North Sea and possessed herds of cattle, from which they derived their chief means of support.' (Houghton)

Always, it seems, have the Friesian peoples been cattle breeders of repute. In AD28, Tacitus recorded that these people paid their taxes to their Roman governors in ox hides and horns; further evidence of their long association with cattle breeding. The area that they occupied (later referred to as East and West Friesland) was so subject to frequent flooding that 'this miserable race exist(ed) like shipwrecked mariners on such hillocks as they (could) find, or build, above the highest water.'
(Pliny AD23-79 - Naturalis Historia).

Eventually, in response to regular flooding which resulted in the deaths of many thousands of people and livestock, work began on a series of drains and dykes, culminating in the creation of the Zuider Zee in 1170. Although not altogether successful in its defence from the North Sea, by 1370 the area known as the Netherlands** was renowned for its lush alluvial land.

Later travellers to the region were impressed by the discovery, not only of the benefits of the naturally rich pasture land, but also the expertise of the farmers, in the care and development of their stock which clearly thrived under these conditions .

'At two years of age, with rare exceptions, they commence giving milk, and at six or seven years old they uniformly go loaded with flesh to the butcher. These dairymen do not lose their dairy plant at the end of every eight or ten years in a lot of old and worthless cows. They sell their cows well fattened at an age when their flesh is of the best quality. The price obtained pays for extra food that may have been used, and replaces them at a profit with younger animals.' (*Houghton p. 14*). It was their practice to select the top 20% of their heifer calves, judged by their dam's production, and even then, if these select few failed to reach their high standard at the end of their first lactation, then off to the butchers they went!

It is interesting to observe that no one 'breeder' appeared to excel above another, preferring a more balanced cow, rather than aiming for superior families, as they did not tolerate inbreeding.

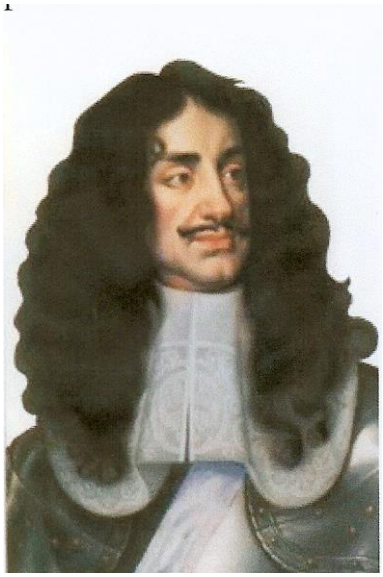
'The preservation of the Friesian people and their continued adhesion to cattle breeding for more than 2,000 years is one of the marvels of history.'
Prof. G J Hengerveld (Royal Veterinary Institute, Utrecht)

Black and white cattle had been known in Friesland† since medieval times, although the predominant colours of the native breeds throughout Northern Europe and the British Isles were varying shades of red-brown. In 1344, records of a monastery at Monnikendam, in North Holland recorded a mixed herd of cattle comprising 57 black, black and white, black

cows with white heads and black patches around the eyes, 42 red and white and 16 more of different colours.

Outbreaks of serious disease, and continued flooding down through the centuries, regularly decimated the cattle population of the area. The murrain (plague) was so severe throughout the Netherlands, that, in 1744, Friesland lost over 109,000 cattle and Holland lost two-thirds of its entire livestock. Then, in 1768, a further 98,000 cattle died, until by 1782, a total of 396,000 head were lost. Substantial numbers of black and white cattle of varying quality were imported into Friesland from Jutland (Denmark) to make up numbers. These black and white cattle went also to Holland, Groningen, and the states of Schleswig and Holstein. The black colour, being genetically dominant, gradually led to the demise of the old red and white Friesian. Generically, they were known as Dutch cattle, Hollanders, Friesians or Holsteins. 'The (breeding) skill of the Friesian people was put to good use and, after two generations, cattle were soon displaying the first-class qualities possessed by the original stock.' (*Stanford p20*)

Dutch cattle of whatever colour were much favoured by British farmers and there is reference to 'pied kine' in Lincolnshire in 1683. Between 1600 and 1650 the Dutch were involved with the draining of the Lincolnshire and other east coast fens and it is likely that they brought their cattle with them. However, due to constant outbreaks of disease on the Continent, the importation of cattle was forbidden by order of Charles II in 1666 which appears to have been so thoroughly ignored that a further Act was required in 1680 to ban importations 'forever'.



Charles II banned importations 'forever'

Although still blighted by disease and a severe flood in 1825, (*Stanford p22*) the Dutch set about establishing a more uniform black and white animal in the mid 1800's, and with its reputation for milk production, these cattle spread out across Europe and further afield. Substantial numbers were exported to the east coast ports of the British Isles; 300,000 alone between 1862-4. They also had a marked influence world-wide.

As a result of this boom in exports, the Netherlands Cattle Herd Book (NRS) had been created in 1875. However, in 1879, the Friesland Cattle Herd Book (FRS) had been issued in, and for, the province of Friesland for the registration of the more definitive Friesian type, with a refinement and categorisation of the black and white colour markings. The Friesland Cattle Herd book was the first to define these. In fact, FRS volume 5 contains measurements in great detail of 198 animals, ranging in age from two to seven years.
'Breeders concentrated on strong constitution, good feed utilisation and an optimum dual-purpose conformation'. This dedication paid off with continued exports to many countries.

Cattle registered with NRS were still very variable and three breeds were identified; the Holland-Friesian, the Groningen and Maas-Rijn-Ijsel, and so separate herd books were established for each breed in 1906.

Chapter 2
Black & White Across The Globe

Although the early seventeenth century Dutch settlers had taken cattle with them to America, their influence had been lost. From the early 1800s a few animals were imported, but then crossed with native cattle. The first permanent introduction was made in 1852 by Winthrop W Chenery, who established the first black and white herd in Massachusetts. Subsequent purchases by Chenery and other breeders formed the nucleus of the North American black and white cattle population. It is ironic that the first Herd Book for registering black and white cattle was issued by an American in 1872. Subsequently, due to objections to the name Holstein (as they were generally known in the USA) by a number of breeders, including Europeans, another Herd Book was issued under the name Dutch Friesian. These two associations were amalgamated in 1875 and united their records by adopting the name Holstein-Friesian. Over 7,000 animals were imported into the U.S. until they were banned in 1905 because of the danger of Foot and Mouth.

In 1881 Canada imported black and white cattle from the United States. In 1884 the Holstein-Friesian Association of Canada was formed, but the Canadian breeders registered their animals in the American Herd Book up until 1891. Both the Americans and Canadians set out to breed for production and the Canadian breeders especially 'saw it as their mission to produce tall, sharp, wedge-shaped animals with a deep barrel and superb udder, an extreme dairy type', aiming to establish a market for a more high yielding dairy animal. 'Visitors to Canada voiced the same complaint as was heard about the American Holstein: that breeders were selecting sires on the basis of milk production with type a bad second.' C. W. H. Glossop of the Lund herd, after visiting over 50 herds in 1924, reported that he had seen 'very, very few cattle that would appeal to an English breeder, at any rate as far as type is concerned' And if Canadian Holsteins were to be allowed to come into England in any numbers they 'would do our breed an immense amount of harm', though a few selected females 'would do us a great deal of good'.

The Friesian breed in Australia and New Zealand was established from identical foundation stock. The son of John Grigg, a farmer in Canterbury in New Zealand, had visited Holland before returning home after completing his studies in England. He was so impressed with what he saw that, in 1884, he purchased a bull Taureau and six unrelated females (with four calves that were delivered during the voyage). The story goes that John Grigg was irked at his

son's actions and sold all the original animals, including a son of the bull, to a Mr Frederick Peppin of Victoria, Australia, keeping only the bull and the remaining progeny. They managed to remain a closed herd for seventy years with no outside influences until eventually Terling Brabazon was purchased which had a dramatic effect in refining the cattle in the Grigg's herd. Many of the animals in Volumes I and II of the Herd Book of the Holstein Friesian Cattle Club of Australia (founded 1914) went back to Taureau 2. Australian breeders began to import Friesians from Holland, and also returned to New Zealand to replenish their bloodlines and create new ones, eventually importing live cattle and semen from Canada. The New Zealand Friesian Association was founded in 1910, regular imports having been made from Canada and the United States from 1902, continuing until a governmental embargo in 1959 on importations, except from the British Isles. Subsequently, semen from the MMB's Holstein Bull Linmack and the British Friesian Terling Brabazon are said to have made a remarkable impact.

The early settlers in the Cape Province of South Africa had strong ties with Holland and imports of cattle were made in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. However, in 1850 the first so-called pure-bred Friesians were imported, leading to segregation in separate herds. The first registered bull, Wiersma 10, FRS was imported in 1881. Although a bid for the celebrated Ceres 4497 FRS was unsuccessful, most of the Friesians in South Africa can be traced back to FRS descent, particularly to Albert 1306, Jan 3265 and Ceres 4497. The South African breeders felt the need for an association of their own and in 1912 the Friesland Cattle Breeders Association was formed.

In 1892, all imports to Britain from the continent were banned under a Disease of Animals Act, by which time over a million Dutch cattle had been imported. The advance of the black and white cow ebbed and flowed according to disease status, and the banning of imports led to a shortage of fresh blood lines. Numbers in 1900 were said to be modest and there is no doubt that the Shorthorns dominated the dairy scene. However, due to the indecision of Shorthorn Breeders as to which direction to take their breed, the high yielding reputation of the black and whites eventually won the day. Increasing quantities of milk for the liquid market was being sought, and this fact fuelled demand for the higher yielding breeds.

Herds of black and white cows at Terling and Lavenham were already in existence, and we read of the Wallace family who moved down from Scotland and gave up their Ayrshires for imported Friesians, in the late 1870's, "the Friesian being very good for the butcher at a time when the Ayrshire calf fetched almost nothing". The Friesian was described as "an animal on short legs with a good bag, giving herself a large volume of milk and reproducing herself every year, also being valuable for her meat. There was nothing to touch the 16 week old veal calf fed on milk." This is more or less a description of our modern British Friesian, though now somewhat taller and with much improvement in the udder, but retaining the financial advantages which so impressed the dairymen of the day.

The need to establish a Society for the registration of black and white cattle in the UK was becoming clear as pioneers could see opportunities for their breed. Although herds were mainly established in the south east, near the lucrative liquid market in London, the growth of large towns and extension of the railways, led to a remarkable expansion and increased demand for the liquid market.

Better standards of production were considered essential, and the Council of the Royal Agricultural Society initiated classes for butter in 1903, and milk yield in 1905, for each of the then recognised dairy breeds.

Chapter 3
The Society: The Formative Years

An important reason for the formation of a Society was the lucrative export trade, and the need to provide guarantees of pedigree. Only the breed societies could hold the big collective sales that could attract the foreign buyers. Other breeds were exporting, and the Black and Whites were already developing a good reputation.

Mrs Agnes Brown, one of the leading lights in the foundation of the Society, judging at a show in the 1920s.

A meeting at the Gloucester Royal Show in June 1909, attended by Mrs. Agnes Brown, Mr. Hugh Brown, Henry Ratcliffe, C. H. Westropp and William J. Clarke, put the plan in motion, and following a meeting in London on July 21st, a set of rules was adopted. These included the herd prefix and the provision that only the actual breeder of the animal might register its entry in the Herd Book. Each registered animal to be identified by a numbered stud or clip to be inserted in one ear. Animals that had been passed by inspection for registration in the Herd Book were denoted by the removal of a portion of the other ear, for which purpose a suitable instrument was specially designed. This method was replaced with birth notification sketch cards in 1918.

George Hobson took over as Secretary in 1911, staying in the position for 35 years. His contribution to the British Friesian breed can never be underestimated.

The origins of the name of the Society appear unknown. There is no record at that time of a definitive Holstein breed, although there are references to Holstein Friesian or Hollander (NRS).

However, the influence of the Friesian or Frieslander is evident from the repeated trips to that area by members of the Society to 'fix the type'. The aim of the Society was to bring 'type' closer to the native breed of Friesland and the history of our British Friesians really commenced with these imported animals. Volume 4 of the Herd Book contains the pedigrees of all the imported animals.

Entry to the Herd Book by means of inspection had been a daunting task. This work had been carried out by the honorary inspectors; Hugh Brown, Henry Ratcliffe, Gerald Strutt and C.H. Westropp. In fact, Hugh Brown personally inspected the 27 herds in Scotland. By the end of 1912 he and the rest of the group had approved 6,000 females and 1,000 bulls and from 1st Jan.1913, entry was by pedigree only. Membership rose from 245 in 1912 to 2,098 in 1924 and Local Breeders Clubs began to be formed. In 1921 a grading up scheme was launched in which a cow could be entered as Class A on inspection as typical of the breed, with minimum requirements for yield and butterfat. Her offspring by a pedigree bull then entered Class B. After four such crosses and production standards (700 gallons as a heifer and 1,000 for a cow) females qualified for full pedigree status. (The eventual introduction of Artificial Insemination in the early 1940s made it easier for the smaller farmers to go through the grading up process.)

Although the Royal Show of 1911 offered classes, following the establishment of pedigree status, the show ring was not exactly the black and whites' forte as they struggled to establish type. However, demand was there in the sale ring with the first three figure sum of 115 guineas being paid for the bull, Hedges Bonnie Laddie in 1913. The variation of type within the Herd Book was a constant concern and a trip to Holland was organised by the redoubtable George Hobson in 1912 and led by Hugh Brown. They went again in the following year to visit the International Show at the Hague and useful contacts with Dutch Breeders were made until finally, in 1914 the vital importation by the Society (now called The British Holstein-Friesian

Cattle Society) came to pass. This historic importation of FRS registered cattle was to revolutionise the British breed and laid the foundations for greatly improved physical characteristics, giving breeders a standard to aim for as twenty-two years had passed without any new blood and numbers had shrunk drastically. Special permission had to be obtained and forty males (of which one died) and twenty females arrived at Tilbury Docks three days before the outbreak of World War One. They were then quarantined for three months before being very successfully sold.

George Hobson had no doubt of the advantage of showing: 'The Show yard, more than anything else, has prevented dairy cattle from being developed for milk production in such a way that constitution and symmetry are impaired.' In 1915 a Dutch judge was invited to help make the awards in the classes for the Breed at the Royal Show. However, some years later Mr R J Anema, a Dutch Judge at the Royal Show, warned of the danger of Friesian animals carrying far too much condition. Endeavours to balance strong constitution with high production continued when the Ministry of Agriculture introduced its premium bull schemes so that, by 1929, the Ministry had subsidised 1,372 bulls, of which just two were Friesians.

In that year, Mr Trevor Williams became both President and Chairman of Council and the Society moved into office accommodation of its' own at 4 Southampton Row, London. The Society made a start with official milk recording, also recognising figures provided by local milk recording organisations. Subsequently, from 1920, milk recording was placed under the direct control of the local organisations under the supervision of the English Ministry of Agriculture and of the Scottish Milk Records Association. Testing for butterfat content of officially milk recorded cows was commenced at Reading University. At the AGM the following year, Trevor Williams suggested a magazine devoted entirely to the interests of the Breed, and the British Friesian Cattle Society Journal finally appeared in February 1919, with a further issue in April.

1917 appears to be the last year in which references are made to Holstein Friesians. Mr Trevor Williams, in his presidential address, saying, "I believe in the British Holstein Friesian you have the finest dual purpose breed in the whole world."

***The Society had, once again, changed its name, and became the British Friesian Cattle Society. Thus it remained for the next 70 years.

Chapter 4
Picking up the Pieces: Between the Wars

Due to the war, food supplies became a priority and grassland was ploughed up to provide potatoes and cereals at the expense of meat and livestock products. Milk production was substantially reduced and price controls were introduced at all stages of distribution. A shortage of expensive feed with inadequate milk prices, led to many cattle being sent for slaughter and a shortage of supplies developed in the winter of 1918-19 until the government increased the ration allowance for cattle.

Ceres 4497 FRS, the famous Dutch sire who, despite never leaving Holland, had an enormous impact on the British Friesian breed. Even before the formation of the Society, early breeders had identified his bloodlines.

The number of cattle had fallen by 700,000 between 1917 and 1921. Consequently, as farmers sought to rebuild their herds after the war, there was a surge in the price of pedigree cattle. The desire to continue the importations from Holland was thwarted by Foot and Mouth disease in that country and so, in 1922, Council sent George Hobson to South Africa to inspect parents of the proposed imports, and his report was issued to every member of the Society in an endeavour to exert some measure of control.

Whilst the average price for the 83 lots was an astonishing £1,242 15s, generally the progeny proved disappointing. Notable exceptions of that importation were Terling Marthus and Terling Collona. Terling Marthus was to make a considerable impact on the breed, descended as he was from the great Dutch sire, Ceres 4497 (FRS). 'Marthus bred beautiful cattle, noted for long deep bodies, long and level hind quarters, good wearing qualities, pleasing udders, high milk yields and satisfactory butterfat.' Gerald Strutt had paid the enormous sum of 3,900 guineas, but what a good investment it turned out to be! In 1927, Council were alarmed to learn of a proposed importation of a hundred animals from South Africa. Breeders claimed they were in a position to send better animals than on the previous occasion.

Council sought assurances on certain standards and pedigree and, although the South Africans were unable to give their guarantee on such standards, they proceeded with the export of the cattle. It was subsequently discovered that only 14 out of 96 animals sent complied with the originally agreed terms. Despite threats from the South Africans to set up a rival Herd Book in the UK, the Society held firm and most of the animals were later entered in the Supplementary Register.

Terling Marthus was regarded by many as the breed's greatest sire

Whilst encouraging the breed to be known further afield, especially in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, the Society was adamant that prior consent was a prerequisite for imported animals. Nor would export certificates be issued, without the animal being officially inspected and approved.

Later, in 1934, pedigree Canadian Holstein-Friesians, were imported by farmers in the north-west of England, who were believed not to be members of the Society. It was once again emphasised on Council that the Society had bylaws to deal with any member who chose to support a rival Herd Book.

1924 saw the formation of a pedigree herd of British Friesians at the experimental farm of the West of Scotland Agricultural College, with advice and financial assistance from the Society. The Society was to give further assistance to the establishment of another herd at the Harper-Adams College in 1927.

In 1929 the Advanced Register for production was replaced with the Register of Merit which increased the minimum butterfat qualification of 3.5%. In 1930, the Auction Rules were amended to include breeding guarantees and soundness of udders.

It is worth recording that by 1925 there were six 3,000 gallon Friesians, and over 164 which had passed the 2,000 gallon mark, in one lactation. Against this figure all other breeds of dairy cattle in the country could number only sixteen. Many of these high-yielding animals achieved great longevity as well.

Society membership stood at 801 at the end of the war in 1918, reaching just over 2,000 in 1922. However, there were turbulent times ahead with increased production once again competing with imported cheese and butter, and rock bottom prices for milk. In 1923 a top price of £1,680 had been achieved at auction for a Friesian, but in 1929 it had fallen to £250. In some years Society sales were cancelled, and in 1935 the membership had fallen to 1,371, which was a reduction of 35% over eleven years.

Towards the end of the '30s, things started to pick up due to the establishment of the Milk Marketing Boards (MMB) and general recovery after the war. By 1938 membership stood at 1,879, the highest since 1926, and prices for cattle had increased. The Society continued to urge improvement, and to educate and encourage the members through the pages of the Journal, with George Hobson as editor.

Poor butter fats still attracted much derision from critics and so, in 1936, off to Holland once more went Gerald Strutt, G.B. Radcliffe, E.B. Hall, A. Weightman, F.Gilbert and George Hobson, on a determined mission, to seek change for the better both from FRS and NRS herds. This time they were much more successful with 29 out of 49 bulls gaining Register of Merit and further improving type. Of that importation, Royal Hiltkees, Lavenham Janrol, and Mayford Marius were especially notable, in producing an exceptional number of both RM sires and daughters.

The vast improvement in 'type' over the previous 30 years was noted by Mr George Hobson in the Journal. The result of their efforts, were "the stately, shapely, well-bodied, short legged and nicely-vesselled cows of today". In 1939, it was decided to hold a special class for 2,000 gallon British Friesians at the Centenary Royal Show held at Windsor, of which there were now 1,000 registered with the Society. With the outbreak of the Second World War, shows were then suspended for the duration. In order to protect its valuable records, the Society relocated from London to Garford, near Abingdon. Staff numbers were also much depleted due to the 'call-up'.

Chapter 5
Feeding the Nation

As had been the case during the First World War, government sought to maximise home food production by converting permanent pasture and expanding arable output. Sheep and pig numbers fell substantially, but cattle were encouraged, mainly to increase milk production. It was easier to import the end product of meat and eggs, rather than bulky feedstuffs for pigs and poultry. Food subsidies were introduced and net farm income benefited. In fact, British Agriculture emerged at the end of the war in 1945, in a healthier state than for many years.

The Society had struggled valiantly on, with increasing numbers of registered animals and a membership that had grown from 1,879 in 1939 to 5,600 by the end of the war. Rationing of paper had caused the Journal to dwindle in size. Even Milk Recording was threatened until Breed Societies agreed to a subsidy of £1 per registered herd, as the government had suspended milk recording, and bulls no longer needed to be licensed. The latter naturally led to an increase in bull calf registration. Although the increase in numbers would be a help to those unable to pay for the higher priced bulls, George Hobson was concerned as to quality.

Surprisingly, it wasn't until 1948 that the Ministry realised that Friesian and Shorthorn male calves could add greatly to the U.K. meat supply.

The Council of the Society had been considerably enlarged, and the rules revised. It had been necessary to take a strong line with 'delinquent' members and steep fines were introduced! A Standing Investigation Committee was formed to deal with 'irregularities', which unfortunately grew during the war years, and led to embarrassing expulsions and refusals of registrations.

Although Shows had been abandoned, Society and Club sales continued. It was decided to ban "A" Supplementary animals from these sales as it was felt that many of the newer members were less familiar with the breed and had bought, thinking them to be full pedigree. In 1941, two calves were born at Reading University as a result of artificial insemination, a development which was subsequently to have such a marked effect on the breed.

In 1942, the Council had proposed setting up its own artificial insemination station, at some expense, and with the hire of three bulls. This was not pursued when the Milk Marketing Board decided to take over the AI work from the Ministry. The various milk recording organisations were brought together within one body; the National Milk Records (NMR) under the umbrella of the M.M.B, which set about improving hygienic standards. A bonus scheme, for farmers producing Grade A milk, with a further penny per gallon subsidy from the government, for milk from herds declared free from tuberculosis, was introduced.(sadly to later return with a vengeance, particularly in the South West). It wasn't until the 1970s that most of the UK was declared free of brucellosis.

The first independent AI Centre was set up by Horlick's Farms and Dairies at Ilminster in Somerset. The Society had continued to hold sales, and income and management were good. Prices of Friesians had risen 600% and the Society had investment funds of £70,000. The world shortage of grain and the country's lack of foreign exchange made food production highly valuable and the purpose of the 1947 Agricultural Act was to raise output to 150% of pre-war levels. This had the effect of increasing average farm incomes by six times their pre-war level in money terms.

The relatively healthy state of the industry was reflected in the price of cattle and, at a sale in aid of the Red Cross, a dry cow Terling Torche 75 made 1,800 guineas, and a Lavenham cow, 1000 guineas. George Hobson warned members that the prices bore no relation to any possible price they would get for their milk, either then or later!

The Journal had very rarely concerned itself with milk prices, by which most of the smaller subscribers made their living and, indeed, milk production rose very substantially so that by the time the MMB took over milk purchasing again from the Ministry of Food in 1954, the problem of dealing with surplus low value milk, once again appeared.

George Hobson was, as ever, concerned with the quality of breeding stock, as the market was flooded with inferior animals "by those in a search for unearned profit". Stern words indeed, but he had devoted much effort through the pages of the Journal to educate and guide the development of the breed.

The Society had hoped that the Clubs would also influence the breeding policies of their members' herds and develop and prove blood lines. With the exception of the Yorkshire Clubs, it was said that many others had developed into dealers and salesmen, which was not at all what had been envisaged.

Chapter 6
The Society Builds on its Success

1946 was marked by two notable events. The first was the retirement of George Hobson after thirty-five years as secretary of the Society, thus marking the end of an era which had seen the establishment of the British Friesian as the UK's premier breed, and the Society as the largest dairy breed organisation. The Society was once again established in London, and W.H. Bursby was appointed to replace George Hobson. Eventually, with a greatly increased staff, they caught up with the substantial backlog of work. The contribution that George Hobson made to the establishment of the British Friesian breed is legendary and should never be underestimated.

The second event was the decision to seek a further importation of bloodlines, and this time from Canada. This had, in fact, been mooted back in 1919, but the cattle had failed to come up to Council's standards. This time they were more fortunate and, with a minimum requirement of 3.7% butterfat, 220 cattle including 54 bulls brought better udders than the original Dutch cattle, although of a 'more extreme dairy type with long narrow hind legs'. However, they were to have a negligible influence and by 1960 represented only 1.5% of the British Friesian Cattle Society herd book. The Society still maintained strict control and many other Canadian cattle that were imported privately and by the Ministry (MAFF), were not eligible for the Herd Book. This resulted in the formation of the British-Canadian Holstein-Friesian Association Herd Book, a separate organisation for the registration of those imported Holstein cattle.

Although unpopular with the Membership, they also held firm against the registration of 500 in-calf heifers donated by the Dutch to the British Agricultural Disaster Fund, as they had not been specially selected.

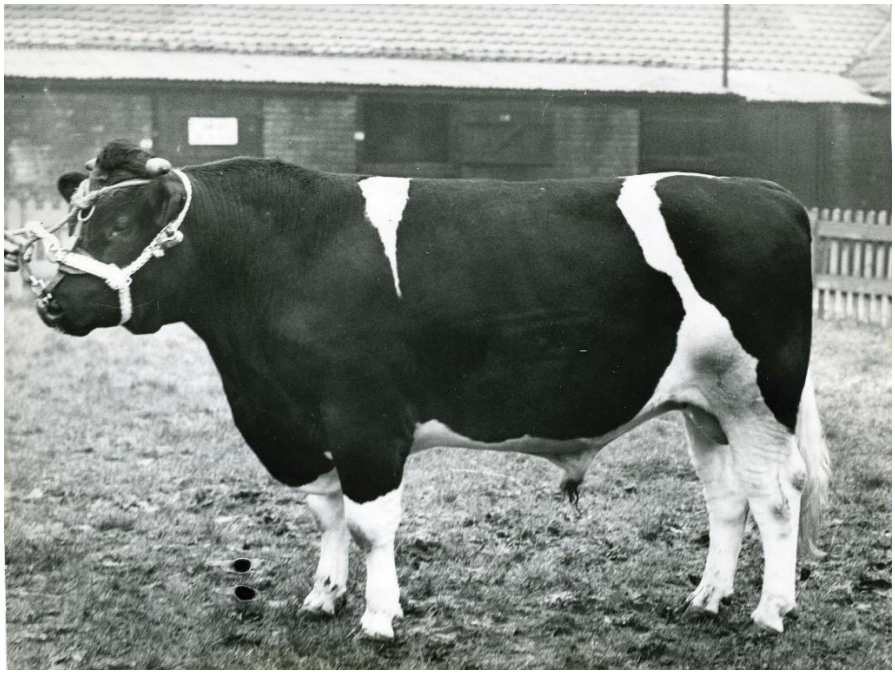
1949 saw a new venture in the form of co-operation with National Milk Records to provide their production records of the registered Friesian animals for England and Wales, with a similar agreement for Scotland and Ireland. A Society Production Register was launched in 1950 and other valuable data and breed averages were produced. In that year 49,406 females were registered; nearly double the numbers in 1945. There was anxiety amongst breeders that pedigree was meaning less and less, and anxiety also about problems said to arise from too much inbreeding in certain herds.

In 1950, Council decided to visit Holland again, this time with a Ministry vet. They had been limited to 100 animals, but only managed to select 70 which came up to their requirements for type and butterfat. Subsequently, many of the bulls proved to be problematical and it was thought to be over-ambitious in expecting to find so many good bulls in any one country and in any one year. Although there were considerable improvements in butterfat and hind legs, as

was the intention, it is generally accepted that both the 1936 and 1950 importations resulted in a reduction of size.

Nevertheless, there were some exceptionally fine bulls, such as Hunday Adema 88, Westontown Grietje's Constantijn and Horlicks Adema 66 (bought by the Somerset Cattle Breeding Centre and used fairly extensively throughout the South West.)

This was the Society's last importation and thereafter it was left to individual members to source with their own particular needs in mind.



Horlicks Adema 66 was used in AI and was one of the most successful importations of 1950.

1950 also saw the inception of the Bull Progeny Production Register which covered all bulls with 20 or more unselected daughter lactations completed since September 1948.

The Society, needing to house voluminous records, was now in a position to purchase and move out of London. Scotsbridge House at Rickmansworth was obtained for £35,000. After additional building it was officially opened in 1953 - another landmark in the Society's history.

Chapter 7
British Friesian Supremacy

From the end of World War Two in 1945, and throughout the fifties, was an exciting and difficult period for the Society. W.H. Bursby (W.H.B.) had been appointed Chief Executive with no farming connections at all, despite there being more than a thousand applications for the role. The post war boom in milk production had encouraged farmers to go 'pedigree' and by 1959 membership had more than doubled to 14,000. WHB learned much from Geoffrey

Curtis who, for many years, was an influential President, and then Chairman of Council, until 1960.

Concerns were expressed about the effect of artificial insemination on the market for bulls. The influence of the Milk Marketing Board on breeding policy was still unknown, now that it was possible to produce several thousand daughters from one bull. The Society had had a nasty experience with some of the unproven bulls from the 1950 importation, which had also contributed to a loss in size, as the Dutch had moved away from the Ceres influence.

The breed also needed much support in Ireland, as its population grew, in the face of official prejudice in favour of the dual purpose Shorthorn. Even trickier was the relationship with two other Societies; one for the registration of red and white Friesians, and also the Canadian Holstein Association formed in 1947. The red recessive gene was well known in black and white breeding circles and for a time the problem had been suppressed and calves not registered. However, it was recognised that they tended to be perfectly good in many other ways, and a separate Society had been formed for their registration.
The British Friesian Cattle Society had taken a strong stand against the 1946 Canadian imports by MAFF, which had not been approved, and declared them to be "a shocking lot of animals", stating that they could not be registered as this would be tantamount to giving the Society's blessing to "imports of promiscuous animals of low value from which the Society should remain disassociated". MAFF defended their decision, but it was concluded that the new Canadian herd book would not be regarded as a serious rival to that of the British Friesian. Eventually, with Society permission, a small number of private Canadian imports were allowed to be registered in the British Friesian Cattle Society, under strict control.

The Society continued to strive to maintain the Friesians' supremacy. Standards were increased and RMX and Type Classification were introduced. Whilst criticising the Holstein for being too tall and rangy, they needed to guard against the Friesian becoming too short and thick set. The strapline 'Single Purpose, Dual Result' suited admirably, as they pursued their aim of the ideal balanced cow.

It is interesting to note that the Herd Book of 1972 contained 7.25% of foundation stock and 25% from the 1914 importation, 19.75% from 1922, 27.75% from 1936, 3.25% from 1946 (Canada) and 14.5% from the 1950 importation and 2.5% from other private importations (1961-71). The most influential bulls according to the 1972 Herd Book were Terling Marthus at 12.5%, Ceres and Albert both at 7.3%.

Before W.H.B. retired in 1974, a decision was taken to install the Society's own computer. WHB had joined the Society straight from war service, and became widely respected as an authority on Friesian cattle. He eventually became the first non-breeder to be elected Chairman and President of the National Cattle Breeders Association. In 1976, Major-General E.G.D. Pounds was appointed Chief Executive and took on the task of overseeing the installation of the computer.

Shopland Edleet Ruth 6, RMX, EX, EC took the championship at the World Conference Show in 1976 and became the first cow of the breed to attain the perfect classification of 100 points, achieving Elite Cow status.

Chapter 8
Science takes Centre Stage

Debate continued as to the efficacy and wisdom of the widespread use of AI and the influence of the Milk Marketing Board (MMB) in their bull selection. The MMB had advocated 'milk first and foremost', whilst the Society had emphasised a policy of balance, and an improvement in butterfat. In 1959, Dr Joseph Edwards, who was scientific adviser to the MMB, had produced his own pamphlet (that was leaked to the Press), in which he proposed mating 2,000,000 cattle of all breeds to no more than 200 bulls. It was argued that they had known breeding merit and it would not cause genetic deterioration. At the time, the MMB owned 700 bulls, bred 1,500,000 cows, with 40% being from progeny tested bulls. It was probable in the future, that 80% of all cattle would be bred by AI. It was proposed to use 200 new sires a year on 1,000 cows before laying off for 5 years. Frozen semen would make all this possible and any effects of inbreeding might be avoided by out crossing, by inter-breed crossing, and by using older semen frozen for long periods.

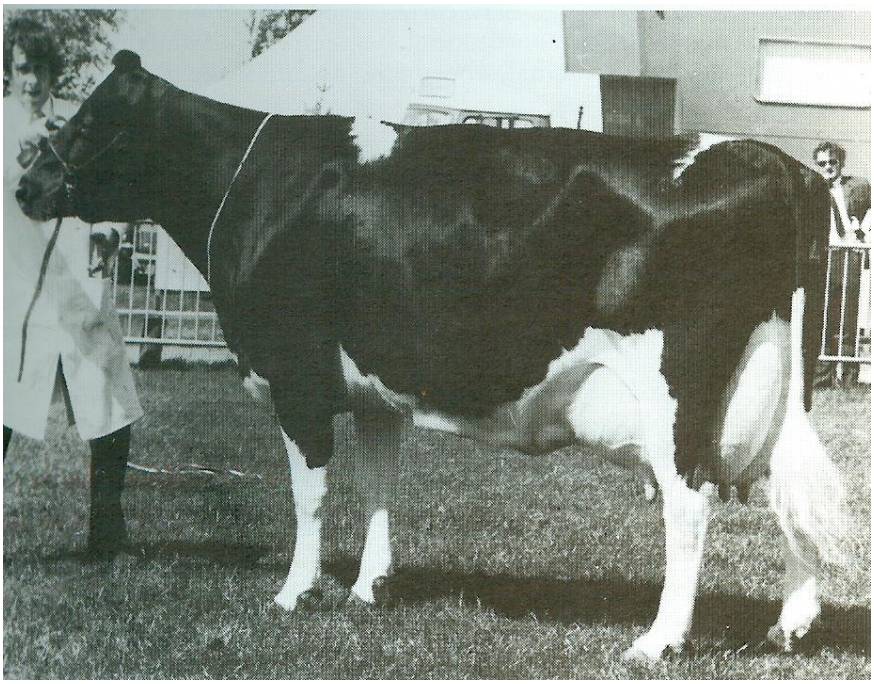
The Society had not been consulted and had severe misgivings. They were not certain that the Contemporary Comparison system used by the MMB was robust enough (and indeed, it was eventually revised by the Board in 1974 as the Improved Contemporary Comparison, ICC). They were unhappy that lines of breeding would be ignored and lead to a narrowing of the blood lines.

Furthermore member/breeders had suffered financially from a reduction in the number of bulls required and the consequent fall in their value. The Society was accused of bucking

modern trends by ignoring the lessons of scientific genetic improvement and it was claimed that the MMB was 'an organisation that was capable of doing a fine job in the genetic improvement of dairy cattle'. It was pointed out that, although a few breeders had achieved success with small herds as the Breed Societies had encouraged them to go it alone, the majority did not have enough cattle to test the bulls adequately.

The solution was to form private AI organisations and this was done in 1960 with the launch of Cattle Breeders Services (CBS) by the Claybury, Hunday and Montgomery herd owners. Bulls from other herds were often brought in, tested beyond the three herds, and also for feed conversion and live weight gain. The MMB subsequently increased its offered price for progeny tested bulls, although a proposed royalty scheme was turned down.

Other private AI organisations sprang up and proved popular, as it was felt that the MMB selected too much for milk production with less emphasis on economic type requirements. By 1975, there were seven private groups in AI, and a National Association of Semen Suppliers was set up to establish a code of practice. In 1979-1980 total inseminations of dairy and dual-purpose breeds reached 2,600,000 with Friesian inseminations at 64%. AI had greatly spread the influence of the breed through the sale of bulls and semen to AI Companies abroad. The new technique of embryo recovery and transfer was considered a significant milestone, offering the opportunity of expanding the genetic influence of superior female characteristics. In 1978, the Society introduced regulations for the registration of such animals in the herd book. With the opening up of more choice in bull selection, the Clubs became active in arranging herd visits, including to Ireland and even South Africa. Bull and progeny competitions were started, with classes at local shows. The Clubs had not achieved representation on Council, but this disappointment was tempered by agreement for both national and regional representation. In 1980 there were twenty-six affiliated Clubs with many thousands of members.



Terling Norah 255 (by Terling Notary) was a legend in her lifetime, having produced over £100,000 worth of progeny, before being sold in 1981 for 3,000 guineas at the age of sixteen and a half years.

Chapter 9
The Active Eighties

In 1984, the Society's Chief Executive was Major General E.D.G. Pounds C.B. and the Chairman was J.E. Moffit (Dalton). The Milk Marketing Board guaranteed the purchase of all milk production, managed most of the insemination centres and bull studs (MMB Bullpower) and ran the milk recording service. The milk price was relatively stable with additions and or deductions for butterfat %, solids not fat % (SNF), seasonality and transport. In addition, there was a co-responsibility levy (CRL), a European levy to fund disposal of surpluses.

The cattle breeding industry was becoming more competitive as private breeding companies took advantage of increasing deregulation, which included the granting of DIY AI licences to dairy farmers after approved training.

Many private breeding companies were operating, often set up by groups of top pedigree breeders, originally to promote their own bulls such as Avoncroft, Cattle Breeders' Services (CBS), Select Sires, Herdwise and Semenworld. Semex and Pioneer Holstein Breeders' Services (PHB) were exclusively marketing Holstein semen – all the others were selling both Friesian and Holstein semen, including the MMB.

The application of computer power to analyse data gave increasing confidence to the indexes, especially the ICC and the linear type graphs, enabling bulls to be compared more accurately.

Some of the more popular Friesian bulls included: Terling Notary and son Lavenham Frigate, Lavenham Creator, Lovat Brandysnap, Hully Mastermind, Bigforth Alphonso 2, Ridgwardine Jacobite, CBS King Henry, Grove Brandy, Grove Breadwinner, Crewilpool Emporer 2, Foxhole Panatella, Wraxcourt Bounty, Burgate Benedict Gornal Pegasus and Douneside Avenger.

Foxhole Panatella, a bull that is to be repeatedly found in the back pedigree of many of today's successful British Friesians.

The Society and the industry were becoming divided over the increasing use of the Holstein in the black and white breed which now constituted over 90% of the dairy herd in England and Wales. There was much debate about how effective bulls that were half Friesian and half Holstein would be; whether they could combine the best of both sides, or would progeny

revert to type? The Society was recognising that the influence of the Holstein needed to be accommodated or the growing British Holstein Society would be a very real threat to the BFCS.

The Royal Show Supreme Champions reflect this. In 1982, the winner was Ensdon Helen 21 (6.3% Holstein); in 1983 Kessingland Ella 2 (28.1% Holstein) and the 1984 Champion was the first to be recorded at over 50%. She was Grove Dawn 33 (56.2% Holstein). Holmland Ruby 42 BFE99 was Supreme Champion at the Royal Show in 1985. Sired by Shopland Athleet Eduard she was the last 100% British Friesian to win the Cup.

The morning of April 1st 1984 is a day that very few members will forget. Without warning, milk quotas were introduced to all EEC countries, based on the previous year's production on that farm; less 10% with an adjustment for butterfat base. The psychological effect was massive. Most dairy farmers remained in shock for a long time, as the world that had existed since 1933 of increasing production with a guaranteed market came to an abrupt end. Sales of dairy semen plummeted, as there was great uncertainty as to whether replacements would be needed, but a beef cross was a saleable calf.

Many herds were in the middle of expanding or modernising, taking advantage of the generous MAFF grant schemes funded with European money. Appeals were heard, but very little quota allocation changed. As the rules were clarified, and quota purchase and lease became possible, breeders began to adjust to quotas, and started to look at systems that filled the quota, but avoided the possibility of a super levy.

In 1986 came the first reports of a new disease in cows; Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE), which would turn out to be one of the most dramatic diseases ever to afflict the UK livestock industry. Unfortunately termed 'mad cow disease' by the press, the changes to cull cow and calf disposal would have an effect on all cattle keepers and producers, both dairy and beef. Many top cow families were lost and there was an understandable increase in the use of embryo transfer to ensure that genetics from important cow families were not lost forever.

Burgate Benedict

In response to market forces, the MMB and others had been promoting the use of the more dual purpose type bulls, resulting in a smaller and beefier animal with a subsequent loss of milk, although not all breeders went down this route, It is hardly surprising that the Holstein found favour with a number of farmers.

Therefore, during 1988 the increasing influence of the Holstein led to a proposal to change the Society's name from British Friesian Cattle Society to the Holstein Friesian Society (HFS). All the regional clubs were asked to conduct a poll of members who voted to change the Society name.

There was also a change in the true type cow, the theoretical ideal cow. She was now taller, more angular and could have a deeper udder. As a result of all these changes, many British Friesian breeders felt disenfranchised, and a number stopped classifying, believing it was almost impossible to achieve the highest scores from the classifiers as they were now looking for a different type of animal.

In the late eighties, British Friesian cattle were being exported to seventeen different countries. The discord over classification was being felt very keenly by the breeders, involved in the provision of breeding bulls and the replacement of cattle to the industry, as well as exports, as importers naturally looked for minimum type qualifications.

Chapter 10
Seizing the Initiative

The frustration and disquiet experienced by British Friesian members of HFS came to a head in 1990. In order to protect, and further develop their breed within the Society, The British Friesian Breeders Club (BFBC) was formed as a national club, and it was agreed that it should be affiliated to the Holstein Friesian Society. David Ward, the founder of Cow Breeders, who had previously been a Field Officer for the Society, organised the inaugural meeting of the BFBC.

John Simpson (Catlane) was invited to be the first Chairman and Chris Bradbury MBE (Haywood), Treasurer. Over forty members attended, including Ivor Davies, and Joe and numerous other Archers. Mike Coffey from HFS also attended to keep a watching brief!

The Club organised herd visits to the Failand and Collycroft herds, as well as a progeny inspection tour of daughters of Huddlesford Doraman. Publicity in the Farming News resulted in a growth in membership. The first Bull Progeny Competition was held, very kindly sponsored by Bovex, the AI company run by Ray Hull. The winner of this first progeny competition was Marshside Performer 4, who was then taken on and marketed by Bovex.

The Club organised and manned its own stand at the Dairy Event in 1992 for the first time, and then at the Royal and South West the following year. A British Friesian show was held in conjunction with Moor Green in 1994. The number of British Friesian bulls available through AI was rather worryingly low. As a consequence, in 1992 the BFBC launched the first of several test bulls; Catlane Camelot being the very first.

A new body, the Animal Data Centre (ADC) was set up based at Scotsbridge House, under the leadership of geneticist Gordon Swanson. In 1992 an Animal Model was developed which enabled the evaluation of bulls by Predicted Transmitting Ability (PTA), replacing Improved Contemporary Comparison.(ICC). One of the UK's more successful private breeding companies had set up the MOET (Multiple Ovulation Embryo Transfer) herd in Northumberland and changed its name from CBS to Premier Breeders. They were then taken over by the MMB and the assets they acquired included the MOET nucleus herd.

Meanwhile, at the Scottish Agricultural College's Langhill herd, comparisons were made between a high genetic selection group against a control group, selecting for yield of fat and protein. The selection group gradually became dominated by Holstein genetics; typically a more angular model.

1993 saw BSE at its height. There were over a thousand cases a week and half of all UK herds had been affected. The Agriculture Bill 1993 paved the way for the reorganisation of the MMB in England and Wales, the three Scottish Milk Boards and the Milk Board of Northern Ireland. The MMB was devolved into Milk Marque, Genus Breeding with Promar, the advisory and costing service, and National Milk Records, with milk producers receiving shares in these businesses.

Genus began to market teams of young unproven Holstein bulls from the MOET nucleus herd (which were mostly out of dams imported from the USA), and developed a Genus Profit Index to rank them. The profit index (PIN) was then developed by the Animal Data Centre (ADC) into the UK's first composite Index. Based purely on production, this was the start of the divide between index (production) and the balanced cow, perhaps more favoured by members of the Society.

The ADC published rankings of the top PIN herds in all the regions. All bulls were ranked on PIN and the Holstein bulls proven overseas, mainly from the USA and Holland, were promoted very heavily. British Friesian bulls fared badly in comparison. No allowance was made for the higher fat and protein percentage and the lower maintenance requirement of the smaller animal. This was a major change for Society Members, as all calves now being registered (including British Friesian) had a Pedigree Index (PI) calculated through a Parent Average from sire and dam. Milk prices in the early nineties were good and so there was more money to spend on the more expensive semen from the Holstein bulls, the daughters of which required more sophisticated systems of feeding.

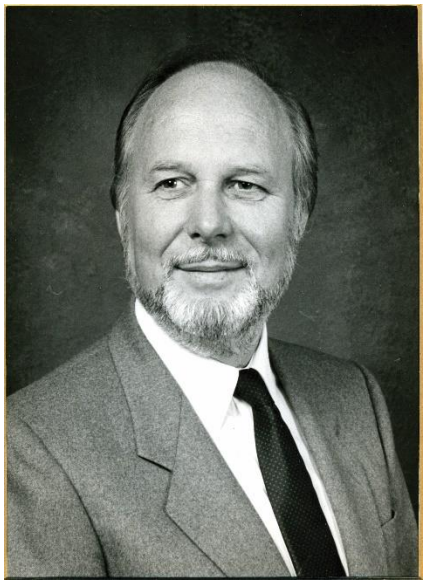
By 1994 the ADC had developed a more complex index termed ITEM (Index of Total Economic Merit) which was PIN plus an economic value for four type traits; Angularity, Foot Angle, Udder Depth and Teat Length. All bulls were now ranked on ITEM as well as PIN. In the July 1995 proof run, the top 100 bulls on ITEM were all Holstein, with several of the top bulls having a higher PIN than ITEM, so their linear score was poor enough to reduce the production ranking. The less angular Friesian also brought down the averages and enhanced the Holstein figures, as they were evaluated together.

The BFBC found its activities were being limited by a funding shortage. Income from subscriptions and semen sales was boosted by a raffle of a donated calf; there was no financial

assistance from HFS. In 1995 the Club produced its first Annual Club Brochure, full of articles and herd advertisements, which provided a very useful extra income stream.

During 1996, the BSE crisis led to British beef being banned from the export market, with an immediate effect on the domestic market on beef prices and the knock-on effect on calf values. The second half of the 1990s was a desperately difficult time for British farming. There was a collapse in farm incomes, as the pound sterling appreciated rapidly against the Euro, which had the impact, both of cutting area and headage payments, to farmers and adding to the pressure on market prices.

In 1998, the Club transferred its membership database to computerised files. The ADC, which had moved to NMR headquarters in Chippenham, changed the main index to PLI (Profitable Lifetime Index, measured in £ per lactation). PLI comprised production (PIN) and type traits from ITEM with the exception of Angularity, which was replaced with Fore Udder Attachment, ready for the proof run in 1999. Somatic Cell Counts (SCC) were also published for all bulls.



Duncan Spring was Chief Executive between 1987 and 1996. He was a driving force for the Society which was enjoying all-time record registrations on his retirement.

Every five years the production base is reset to reflect the increase/decrease for cows born in the previous five years. The consequence of this system is that older cows suffered from two, or even three, base changes resulting in low or negative PLIs.

Farmers were encouraged to breed off their younger, higher PLI animals in order to speed up 'genetic gain'. British Friesian breeders valued their older cattle, despite their lower PLIs, because of their proven performance and profitability within the herd, and continued to breed from them. Consequently, the lower PLI was perpetuated in the progeny. However, this practice, to a large extent, has enabled the breed to avoid the narrowing of genetic bloodlines and single trait selection, i.e. angularity.

1999 was an important year for the British Friesian breed. The Society (HFS), through Billy Kilpatrick (Chairman), Duncan Spring (Chief Executive) and David Hewitt (Head of Classification Services), agreed to a separate British Friesian Type Classification.

David Hewitt was Chief Executive of Holstein UK between 1999 and 2008. He oversaw the establishment of the Cattle Information Service (CIS), as HUK became involved in milk recording through the purchase of Scottish Livestock Services (SLS). He was also instrumental in the setting up of the Centre for Dairy Information (CDI), before becoming Chief Executive of the World Holstein-Friesian Federation.

This was based on the 1989 Model Cow, with the BFBC the arbiter on Type. British Friesian Type Classification was only open to females and to qualify they had to be a minimum 87.5% British Friesian, percentages of Holstein and Friesian being recorded for each animal on the registration certificate.

The prefix BF was to be used i.e. BFE, BFV etc. and at that time no points were shown, although subsequently introduced. A minimum height of 140cms was set for Excellent.

Although the data could not yet be used in bull evaluations, it provided a standard for the breed. Members had favoured the strong scopey Friesian as found in the Terling and Lavenham herds, and some had purchased older foundation cows with a good depth of British Friesian breeding.

Chapter 11
Identity Crisis

The turn of the century saw the unification of the two Societies. The British Holstein Society (BHS) was effectively subsumed into HFS under the Chairmanship of the Earl of Selbourne, who took office in 1999 to oversee the coming together of the two societies. The new society became Holstein UK and Ireland, known as HUKI, with many members unhappy with how much had to be spent to incorporate the 1,200 members of the old BHS.

Unhappy also were many members of HFS with the change of name and the potential loss of identity for the British Friesian. BHS members were adamant that Friesian should not be included, as they considered the Friesian old-fashioned, which would be a disadvantage to the international marketing of the Holstein cow.

However, HUKI consented to regular editorial pages in the Journal specifically for British Friesians. 'Incorporating British Friesian Breeders' was to be included on stationary and in advertising. In return, the BFBC agreed to put 'affiliated to HUKI' on its own publicity material. During 2000, the Club set up a British Friesian website and eventually, a direct link from the HUKI website.

One of the effects of unification was the allocation of breed code 01 to all registered animals (previously, breeders of Holsteins registered with the BHS were allocated breed code 12*)*. With all black and whites having the same breed code, no matter who the sire was, all data was now treated as one breed and evaluated as such. With ever more data being collected, and interpreted, the British Friesian was modifying and moderating some of the traits, particularly those that are now termed fitness traits.

Traits such as Lifespan, SCC and the data that was being collected on fertility were all included, but not separately identified. This data also included a great deal of material from commercial, non-pedigree herds which milk recorded, and often had many cows in their herds with 50% or more British Friesian breeding.

BFBC members were at the forefront in trying to demonstrate how unfair it was to the British Friesian not to be treated as a separate breed. Type Classification had already been recognised as needing a separate ideology. In order for bull proofs and cow genetic merit to have a true value, the British Friesian needed to have its own breed code.

All anecdotal evidence showed that British Friesians had better lifespan, less mastitis and better fertility than the Holstein. However, until data was collected separately it was not possible to prove what most Friesian breeders knew!

A group of dedicated breeders continued to put pressure on the relevant bodies to treat the British Friesian as a distinct breed, and to unravel the mixed data that was obscuring many of the British Friesian's valuable traits.

The breakthrough came in 2004. The designation of Breed Code 20 was a momentous occasion in the modern history of the breed. This breed code could now be allocated to qualifying animals (who were 87.5% BF or more) with separate bull evaluation for type and production. The Milk Development Council (MDC) funded the necessary research and implementation working in partnership with HUKI, NMR, CIS, UDF and SAC. The MDC had absorbed the Animal Data Centre and was now releasing the proof runs for all breeds from its new home in Cirencester. Although still evaluated with the Holstein, the British Friesian figures are now published based on their own breed average alongside Holstein, Ayrshire, Dairy Shorthorn, Jersey and Guernsey breeds.

Another breakthrough in 2004 was the introduction of show classes for the British Friesian, at the European Dairy Farming Event (EDFE) held at the Royal Show Ground. Sales of British Friesian semen continued to climb. Genus, with over 50% of the UK's semen sales, began to test more British Friesian bulls to try to cope with the demand.

The increase in interest in the breed was due to falling milk prices and ever increasing concerns over fertility, feet and longevity problems in the national herd, particularly in the high input,

high output herds. The perceived attributes of good fertility were confirmed when the separate evaluation took place. Many dairy producers were investigating options that would or could lower the cost of production in the face of lower returns for milk. Increasingly, Dutch Friesians were being used, with many tested in the Republic of Ireland, where the Friesian had remained popular, for the many farmers using grass based systems.

The Republic formed its own Irish Holstein Friesian Association (IHFA) leaving HUKI (which now became HUK).As a result, the Society lost a substantial number of members and the Irish no longer had access to British Friesian type classification. This led to the formation of an Irish British Friesian Club (now The Irish Pure Friesian Club) in the Republic, for enthusiasts of the Breed

Contented British Friesians

The BFBC held British Friesian workshops with the HUK classifiers, to ensure accurate classification of the breed. They were joined on occasion with members from the Irish Club. Investigative visits took place to Holland and Ireland. Herd visits became a strong feature of the Club, with members prepared to travel far to inspect daughters of certain bulls.

There was increasing interest in British Friesians from overseas markets, particularly from developing countries where the level of expertise and the quality of forage had seen the Holstein, at best struggling, or even abandoned as unsuitable. The promotional stand at the Royal Show each year was always on the "must see" list of the group who looked after the foreign delegations and inward missions.

During 2007 it was becoming very clear how much pressure dairy farmers were under. Bovine TB was rapidly becoming a really serious problem in the areas affected; tens of thousands of cattle were slaughtered thus causing a real shortage of replacement heifers. This situation was

exacerbated by the short herd life of the national herd. The increase in value of cattle and need to upgrade facilities such as dirty water containment led to many more dairy farmers giving up.

The demand for British Friesian semen kept increasing, especially as the beef market was paying a very good premium for good conformation male calves. Many commercial dairy farmers were starting to crossbreed to benefit from hybrid vigour, particularly for fertility; many pedigree breeders correctly realised that using the British Friesian not only gave the hybrid vigour but also kept the animals in the Society's herd book.

The AI Companies were starting to have adequate numbers of good proven British Friesian bulls available to cope with this demand. Many of the bulls currently available have been sired by such bulls as Foxhole Panatella, Wraxcourt Bounty, Gornal Pegasus, Douneside Avenger, Burgate Benedict and Crewilpool Emporer 2, as well as Dutch Friesian bulls, proven in Ireland.

During 2008 the BFBC began advertising in national dairy magazines in order to counter the fashion for crossbreeding with coloured breeds and the potential loss of data. Breeders were selling numerous breeding bulls, both privately, and to AI studs in the UK, as well as Ireland.

Chapter 12
A Decade of Disease

Progress had been interrupted by the 2001 Foot and Mouth epidemic, which was described as 'one of the worst social and financial catastrophes to befall peacetime Britain'. The UK Foot and Mouth crisis that began in February 2001 had a huge impact on the country's economy. Altogether, there were 2,030 confirmed cases of the disease in the UK and Northern Ireland and about six million animals were slaughtered. The cost to farming was put at more than £900m. Tourism and the rural economy are estimated to have suffered losses of £5bn.

Compensation, for farmers whose animals were slaughtered to prevent the virus spreading or for welfare reasons, topped £1.34bn. The last confirmed case of Foot and Mouth was in September 2001 but there were a number of false alarms after that. All exports of livestock, semen and embryos had been banned from confirmation of the first case of FMD in February. The UK cattle industry despaired over the government's handling of the Foot and Mouth disaster especially coming on top of the BSE crisis. (In the 1967 F&M outbreak, 400,000 cattle had been slaughtered, including many pedigree animals.)

Foot and Mouth reared its ugly head again in 2007, causing initial panic and disruption to exports, particularly semen, and forcing the cancellation of the Royal Show and the EDFE in that year. Thankfully, this outbreak was short lived.

In 2008, the UK was hit by another livestock disease when cases of Bluetongue were found in East Anglia. Formerly a disease of the Americas and hot climates, the disease had moved steadily northwards, with most of mainland Europe having cases and movement restrictions. The same restrictions applied to the UK, and coupled with ever increasing Bovine TB herd restrictions, led to problems with sufficient entries at the EDFE at Stoneleigh, so the breed was

represented by a demonstration team, but showed again in 2009. The BFBC organised its first herd competition.

The Modern British Friesian

Chapter 13
The Centenary and Beyond

As the Society entered its Centenary Year, the demand for quality black and white male calves continued apace, due to a wider recognition of the attributes of the British Friesian. The demand for British Friesian breeding bulls for private sales outstripped availability and semen sales, including exports, continued to climb. This demand reflects deep concern over the longevity and fitness of the national herd. The national index, PLI, now incorporates more fitness traits, and gives those traits higher values in the equation.

In 2008, the Fertility Index, published by Dairyco Breeding+ (formerly MDC), showed that the British Friesian was a staggering 7.8 points better on fertility than the other black and whites, and in January 2010 the margin had widened to nine points. A review of the Langhill herd, covering the period 1980 to 2005, found that 'Selection for increased milk production unequivocally leads to deterioration in genetic merit for fertility and body condition'. (Coffey M. and Pollott G.)

As the breed faces the future with increased confidence and numbers, we can only speculate as to how technical advances, such as the use of genomics, will aid Holstein bull selection, and not lead to a further narrowing of bloodlines through misuse or monopolization of the technology. Already, the World Holstein Friesian Federation (WHFF) has issued a warning regarding inbreeding and the increasing list of birth defects (as listed on the HUK website). To attempt to fast forward specific traits ahead of evolutionary development of the whole cow, could be considered risky in the extreme, with displaced abomasums a possible example.

The Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) and the EU are expressing anxiety with regard to securing the biodiversity so essential for the survival of any species. Whether genomic technology will benefit farmers, or just those commercial organisations which stand to profit by its application, remains to be seen. If those who do not earn their living by milk production are to be the deciders of such things, then theirs is a huge responsibility.

The development of the modern British Friesian owes much to the determined efforts of working farmers; the practitioners who have to bear the cost of mistakes. British Friesian Breeders are determined to continue to breed a cow that is adaptable, and well placed to serve the future in sustainable dairy farming.

What British Friesian breeders, and ever increasing numbers of commercial dairy farmers know, is that the British Friesian is naturally more fertile, naturally more resistant to mastitis and has greater longevity, no doubt due to the different approach to breeding decisions.

With much uncertainty surrounding both climate change and estimated growth in the world population, who can say what political or geographic constraints, will influence milk production and therefore the producer of that milk, the cow herself?

With a change in the arrangements of milk quota, the predictions are for increased volatility; not exactly something dairy farmers find easy to manage. As the emerging economies around the world strive to feed their population, increased demand for inputs will drive up costs of production, particularly grain, fertilisers and oil derivatives, not to mention competition from bio-fuels.

Reducing costs through more efficient use of grass and clovers, more sustainability through lower replacement rate and contributing male calves, will offer great opportunities for the British Friesian breeder as people recognise not only the financial advantages of these attributes, but also in terms of carbon footprint.

Looking back over this history, were those Friesian farmers so very wrong in their approach? They had discovered their own financial formula for success. Is this a new challenge and way forward for the Society as situations change?

We have observed the gradual transfer of decision making in bull selection away from the Society and the membership; firstly to MAFF, then to the MMB, and on to DairyCo Breeding+ (via the ADC and MDC) and, ultimately, to the AI companies.

A Young British Friesian Bull

The British Friesian Society has, in the past, been accused of placing too much emphasis on type over production but, conversely, an over-emphasis on production in the Holstein cow has resulted in losses in fertility with negative financial consequences. No longer do we see the great reduction sales from pedigree herds, which once were such a regular feature.

One solution is to crossbreed, but what could be better than the British Friesian outcross, able to maintain pedigree status if wished? Thankfully, farmers are taking this on board and sales of British Friesian semen have soared, exporting to 16 different countries in recent years. Although crossbreeding with coloured breeds has been promoted, the uncertain outcome, together with a reduction in value, has proved a less popular option.

Of course, it was sensible for the two societies to join forces, but let's have an honest recognition as to what the open herd book now actually comprises. The registration certificate records the ancestry, with percentage of Holstein and Friesian, and with specific classification where appropriate. The HUK website offers further up to date information on yields and progeny. The unique situation of the open herd book allows for the blending of genes, if desired, as farmers seek to develop a cow best suited to their own requirements.

British Friesian Breeders have favoured a more cautious approach, aiming for a more sustainable animal. Breeding from a background of proven performance, yields have consistently increased, whilst fertility and longevity have been retained.

The use of Index by the AI Companies in the selection of bulls has already resulted in a steady reduction in genetic diversity as evidenced by the PLI League tables.
However, the geneticists advise us that all should be well, provided the AI Companies deliver sufficient choice. They had better be right.

Already, a separate set of Major Histocompatibility Complex genes, linked to disease resistance, have been identified in the British Friesian population. These have not been found in the Canadian Holstein.
(Ellis S.A. & Codner G.)

This discovery may well prove invaluable as an outcross if the ultimate survival of the wider black and white population is to be secured.

For many years, black and white cows have been at the centre of commercial dairy farming in the UK. The challenge for the Society is to keep these farmers in its sight, and not favour an 'elitist' group promoting cattle which are too complex to manage and prove not to be commercially viable for many dairy farmers.

Maybe the Society will find a new impetus, as Holstein Breeders too, take control and join forces once again to prove bulls that are more appropriate to UK conditions.
The Society is only as strong as its membership, and will need to address the concerns of a shrinking number of dairy farmers, under the banner of a British Holstein and Friesian Society.

Chapter 14
2012 – 2025

The 13 years since this History was first published have seen the usual turmoil within the agricultural sector and dairy farming is no exception. Milk quotas had been introduced after the UK's entry into the EU, only to be withdrawn in 2015, both events without prior notification. Exiting the EU (Brexit) and a change in methods of subsidy payments have added uncertainty, compounded by the war in the Ukraine and its effect on feed prices. Globally, we seem to be experiencing an increase in extreme weather patterns, and the UK is no exception. One challenging situation after another. It is little wonder that so many have left the sector, with currently barely 7,000 dairy farmers left (2025).

However, it has not all been doom and gloom as sales of British Friesian semen globally and domestically are healthy, and there is a growing sense of cooperation with Holstein UK, our registering society, as well as the advance of the regenerative farming movement for which our cow is so perfectly suited. The Club's Genetics Committee has also made efforts to mitigate the effects of inbreeding within the black and white population and this aspect is where we will begin.

Many years have now passed since the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE) meeting at Stoneleigh in the '90s saw Geneticists take the stage to declare that, in future, they would be in charge! How relieved we were that British Friesian enthusiasts had formed the Breeders Club, as sadly we are now seeing the effects of their policies. The setting of a composite Index based originally on yield, and the encouragement from the Genetics Team at AHDB, to breed

from younger animals for genetic gain, has led to a relentless rise in the inbreeding % in the Holstein breed.

The development of Genomic testing to provide a higher reliability for young bulls has concentrated the Holstein population even more. However, the method has confirmed the ancestry for registered animals and all male calves must be tested for proof of parentage before registration.

As we had suspected, Prof. Rael Veerkamp of Wageningen University confirmed, at the 2020 Cattle Breeders Conference, that multi-breed genomic prediction, especially for numerically smaller breeds was 'not very accurate', despite protestations from those supporting the practice. With a smaller British Friesian population, we had become concerned at this effect, and it was decided to reconvene the Genetics Committee. This followed meetings with HUK and AHDB Breeding+ who agreed that inbreeding % would, at last, be available for British Friesian sires, as well as females, and HUK would publish them on their website.

With the main commercial AI Companies following Index and therefore limiting selection, independent operators started to introduce original Dutch Friesian blood lines, some direct from Holland and some proven in Ireland.

The Club's Genetics Committee continued to meet online to search out new bloodlines, working on lists of bulls with excellent type and proven genetics which were largely supplied by RBST and held in their archive semen pots. A very comprehensive list of over 3,000 females was provided by AHDB, with the addition of Classification scores from HUK. It was a the mammoth task to filter out sires who featured too prominently in the ancestry and then carefully select semen from the Rare Breeds Survival Trust archive.

The Club's first test bulls, Lismulligan Einstein and Oakalby Breakaway were born in August and September 2022, respectively. Einstein was sired by Rhosithel Nordema and an outstanding dam, Langley Bullion Ethel 2, CP, LP60, SP, BFE94(5) whose dam line carried 3 generations averaging 8 lactations. Breakaway's sire is Wilowna Excelsior who sired over 7,500 daughters in over 1,400 herds whilst the dam, Oakalby Firth Britto 39 BFE94(6) had 3 generations averaging 9 lactations in her back pedigree. Both bulls have gone on to sell well and it is obvious that breeders can see the advantage of a properly proven background regardless of PLI, as well as their own need for out-crosses.

Over the years, the Club has visited both Holland and Ireland and is working closely with the Irish Pure Friesian Club who register with the Irish Holstein Friesian Association (IHFA). A party were able to visit us for a British Friesian type evaluation demonstration by HUK head classifier, Meurig James. As the Irish use a different system of evaluations (EBL), their type is influenced by the dominant Holstein, as British Friesians used to be before we had a separate breed code. The ultimate goal would be to standardise the type evaluation for Friesians, also including the Dutch.
Being in the Holstein UK (HUK) open herd book, with separate breed codes for Holstein and British Friesian is a great bonus for pedigree breeders. They are able to cross but retain pedigree status, thereby ensuring black and whites suit the many differing systems that exist on-farm.

To quote from the New Scientist, Feb '24 'Everything that has ever lived has been the product of Natural Selection'.

This aptly describes the British Friesian breed, and it was due to a member's suggestion that HUK launched the Consistent Performer Award (CP) for cows that are both fertile and productive. The British Friesian Herd of the Year Award recognises the top performing Friesian herd each year.

As the challenges caused by inbreeding begin to emerge, both the possibility of genetic faults and loss of natural herd immunity as herds replace themselves every four years, will prove costly.

With the commercial AI companies creating genomic cross breeds, attempting to take ownership and therefore control the very lucrative market, Farmers need to secure their businesses in the face of this threat. The UK does not have a Livestock Gene Bank, as required by the FAO (The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations). Fortunately, Holland does.

Food production is fundamental to life and farmers must respond to the impact of climate change. Some will need to change their system of production, and many are already grazing deeper rooting herbal leys to protect against both drought and excessive rainfall. They will also need a wide range of available genetics from which to make breeding choices and it is farmers who must make them to ensure the future of their businesses. Breeding is a skill, not a science, and farmers need to rally round the Breed Societies, and take back control over the future of their breeds.

Mary Mead
12th August 2025

*The Low Countries comprised seventeen provinces and were a personal union of states in the 15th century and 16th century, roughly covering the current Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, a good part of the North of France (Artois, Nord), and a small part of the West of Germany.

**In 1648 the Netherlands was comprised of seven states: Holland, Gelderland, Overijssel, Friesland, Groningen, Utrecht and Zeeland

†Friesland is a province in the north of the Netherlands, the capital of which is Leeuwarden. Up until the end of 1996, the province bore Friesland as its official name. In 1997 this Dutch name lost its official status to the Frisian (Fryslân.) Nevertheless 'Friesland' is still commonly used by Dutch speaking people, being the Dutch translation of the official name.

*** It has been surmised that Holstein may have been removed from the name of the Society because of the First World War. However it appears that in fact it was to reflect the Friesian influence of the bulls imported in 1914, which set the foundation of the breed that still survives today.