

THOUGHTS ON REGISTRATION

In Volume III of the 1904 Welsh Stud Book, on page xxxv, Charles Coltman Rogers, in an article entitled “A History of Welsh Cobs and Ponies” makes the following comments on registration of horses:-

“Lord Tredegar in a speech at Abergavenny, November 17th, 1903, urging the claims and the advantages of the Welsh Pony and Cob Society upon an agricultural audience, propounded the following conundrum – What would have become of our breeds of horses had there been no registration societies? The ‘might have been’ in things equine we here leave as speculative food for minds imaginative. Another question that might be raised and referred to minds reflective is – What would have been the value now of several of our permanently and well recognised breeds had registration taken place earlier in the day than it did? What would have been its effect, moreover, upon the financial position of many of our stock-breeding farmers, is an evident corollary of this question.

From Arabia deserta came the glory of all horse-races, and through them came the flower of race-horse breed.

For 2,000 years, so the owners assert, they maintained a pure breed of the “Noble animal”. They, moreover, claimed for them the unsullied reputation of never having been contaminated by alien mixture or cross. This result they attained – there is nothing new under the sun – by resorting simply to a varied and more complicated system of registration which we, more by good luck than management, began to put in some sort of order, at the end of the 18th century in the case of race-horses, and to take up hot and strong with regard to other breeds a century later.”

As Lord Tredegar surmises, and as proven by technology, some of the claims of the Arabia do not bear minute scrutiny, but that aside, the formulation of recording the pedigrees of animals could only lead to an improvement in breeding practices, and hence the quality of the livestock; all livestock, not only equines.

Coming closer to home, in this issue of the Journal, I am reporting numerous importations of purebred Welsh ponies and cobs at the beginning of the 20th century and I cannot but wonder what exactly happened to them. There are no records of any progeny. In the Bloemfontein and Kimberley area alone, I have traced the importation of three Welsh cob stallions and ten Welsh cob mares; all three stallions and five mares were present in Bloemfontein in 1902 and three other mares and two stallions were imported in 1914. I cannot believe

that the individual importers did not know of the existence of the others. Bloemfontein at that stage only had 3 500 residents. Of course, as the main means of transport was by horses and horse-drawn vehicle, breeding of suitable animals for this would be the prime intention of any imports.

What I am now asking as Lord Tredegar did at that time, 1903, how would the history of the Welsh breeds have changed had we used the registration system for the Welsh breeds in those days. The first South African Stud Book Volume 1 was issued in 1906 where all owners were invited to register their purebred stock so that the record of purebred stock could be documented. I cannot find a record of any of the Welsh stallions or mares recorded. In fact, one of the importers John Keynon Hill of Schultz House, Monument Street, Bloemfontein was not only a member of the Welsh Pony and Cob Society in Wales, his father John Hill serving on Council as an Honorary Member because of his knowledge, but he was also on the Inspection Judges panel, even though resident in the Orange River Colony. I believe that John K Hill was the Inspection Judge who inspected and approved these mares for inclusion in the Welsh Stud Book in the UK. In fact, there were two other owners of Welsh cobs which were members of the Welsh Pony and Cob Society in the early 1900's: Basil John Holmes and Daniel Bresler and also the Vet, Dr Herbert Roberts. Thus, four members of a Society, which consisted of only 391 members, were resident in Bloemfontein at the time, and they did nothing to further the objectives of their Mother Society. What a shame.

In addition to the Welsh Cobs there were 4 Section A Welsh Mountain Ponies imported in addition to one Section B Welsh Pony and a Section C Welsh Pony of Cob Type. In total 19 registered Welsh ponies and cobs were imported into South Africa between the Anglo-Boer and First World Wars.

Why did they make no attempt to mirror the Society in South Africa and participate in the registration of purebred cobs in the first South African Stud Book? It is a question I have been toying with for some time, but cannot fathom any sensible reason. Here was the ideal opportunity of establishing the Welsh ponies and cobs in South Africa, but nothing whatsoever was done about it.

Whatever the question, the answer is that they were all lost in perpetuity, never to have made any lasting impression of the Welsh breeds in South Africa until the imports by Rose Lasbrey of the Badgemore Stud in 1948 as recorded in the first issue of this Journal in 2005.

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