

## Short Communication

# Devon Red Ruby cattle in Kenya

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**Devon Red Ruby cattle were first exported from their home in southwest England almost 400 years ago. Since then they have been exported to more than 30 countries around the world including at least 6 in Africa. Devons were first imported to Kenya in 1913 and then in small numbers from 1947 to 1973, the early imports were probably used mainly to improve size and weight of local draught oxen, later ones would have been used principally to improve the beef qualities of local zebu cattle and of male calves of exotic dairy breeds.**

**Key words:** Cattle imports, genetic modification, crossbreeding.

## INTRODUCTION

Devon Red Ruby cattle are an ancient breed of domestic livestock from the county of Devon in southwest England. Their ancestry can be traced back for at least 900 years to the 11<sup>th</sup> century AD. The first recorded exports from England were to the Plymouth colony (New Plymouth) in North America almost 400 years ago in the 1620s (Deane, 1851), to Cape Colony (South Africa) in 1800 (SASB, 1971), to Van Dieman's land (Tasmania, Australia) in 1825 (DCBSA, 2009) and to New Zealand in 1836 (NZRDCBA, 2009). By the mid-1860s Devon cattle had been exported to France, Mexico, Jamaica and Canada (Tanner, 1869). Over succeeding years Devons were exported to more than 30 countries. South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) have been the main recipients of Devons in Africa. Devons overseas were kept pure, crossed on other beef or dairy animals or used to create new breeds (Wilson 2009).

This note chronicles the history and activities of the Devon breed of cattle in Kenya.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Conventional literature sources were searched for references to the history and exports of Devon cattle. Details on exports and on cattle in Kenya were obtained from Davy's Devon Herd Book and from the Kenya National Stud Book. Davy's herd book records the pedigrees of all registered Devon cattle born or imported into the United Kingdom. The Kenya National Stud Book maintains registers of the various breeds of livestock in Kenya that do not have a dedicated breed society or a herd book of their own.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the 60 years period between 1913 and 1973 some 26 Devon cattle comprising 16 bulls and 10 cows/heifers were exported from the United Kingdom to Kenya. Not all of these animals nor their purebred offspring were recorded in the Kenya stud book. In the 29 volumes of the stud book that were published between 1921 and 1968 only 7 contained records for Devons. These entries referred to imports, births and internal transfers from one farm to another.

The first imports of a bull and 2 cows were made by the Honourable Denys Finch Hatton, a younger son of the 13<sup>th</sup> Earl of Winchelsea and one of several "remittance men" who settled in East Africa and established sometimes (or even often) tenuous links with agriculture. Finch Hatton bought land on the western side of the Great Rift Valley near to what is now Eldoret. He had little interest in farming, and turned over the investment to a partner as he preferred to spend his time hunting big game, photographing wildlife and flying small aircraft. He is most celebrated for his love affair with Karen Blixen/Isak Dineson as portrayed in the film *Out Of Africa* by Robert Redford (Wheeler, 2007). These first animals were Highfield Ploughboy 2nd, High field Darkie and Rose, the first 2 being bred by Mr Charles Morris and the third by William Tuckett although all 3 were the property of Morris at the time of their sale for export (DCBS, 1914). They were almost certainly used mainly for crossing on or with local zebu

stock to improve the weight and size of oxen used for draught power and perhaps the name "Ploughboy" is of some significance in this context.

In 1947 a single bull, Cleave Banker bred by H. R. Hopper was imported (DCBS, 1948).

This was followed in 1956 by the import of 3 bulls, Champflower Adventure, Champflower Andrew and Scorrer Lonesome (DCBS, 1957). These animals were imported by Mtarakwa Ltd of South Kinangop and full details of their pedigrees are provided in Volume 17 of the Kenya Stud Book (KSB, 1956). Mtarakwa made further imports of 4 bulls (Cotleigh Newlands, Escott Jim 4th, Hele Rentpayer, Hele Bertie) from 3 herds and 3 cows (Escott Primrose 25th, Escott Sampford 5th, Hele Bluebell 2nd) from 2 herds, from both of which they had also purchased bulls (DCBS, 1958). All 4 bulls but only 1 cow were entered in the Kenya stud book with full pedigree details (KSB, 1957). The second lot of animals may have been imported because of encouraging results in the first crossbred calf crop by the Devon bulls. The import of cows could, however, be taken as an indication of an intention to breed purebred Devons, perhaps to obviate or reduce the need for further imports from England.

A short time after their arrival in Kenya, only four of the bulls were sold by Mtarakwa to other estates that included Buchanan's Kenya Estates Ltd at Sotik, JP Barnard at Hoey's Bridge, Ol Morogi Ltd at Naivasha and Gaymers Ltd also at Naivasha (KSB, 1958). Both Sotik (Buchanan's) and Hoey's Bridge (Barnard) are in higher rainfall country where it is likely that the bulls that went there were used for crossing on dairy cattle. Ol Morogi and Gaymers are in low rainfall country around Naivasha and both kept Boran cattle in the 1960s when they were known to the author of this note: the bulls here would have been used to produce crossbreds with better conformation than the pure Boran could provide for the quality urban market. The animal that went to Gaymers (Escott Jim 4th) was transferred again only a year later to Hoey's Bridge (KSB, 1959).

In 1961 Buchanan's Kenya estates - known principally for the production of tea and especially for its contribution to the popular "Red Label" brand in Britain - made direct imports of one yearling bull (Ham Mill Dandy) and two yearling heifers (Buthay Fairmaid 15th and Leighway Dainty 30th). Full pedigrees and breeders' details of these animals were entered in the Kenya Stud Book (KSB, 1961, DCBS, 1962).

A further 2 bulls (Whitefield Marshall 2nd and Whitefield Pay Day) were exported to Kenya in 1967 (DCBS, 1968) but these were not entered in the Kenya Stud Book. There were, however, 4 entries for other Devon cattle in the stud book for 1967. These were Kenya-born animals registered by FE Jackson of Nandi hills which were all sired by the 1961 import Ham Mill Dandy and 3 were out of Leighway Dainty 30th imported at the same time. It has to be assumed that Jackson had bought these 2 animals from Buchanan's although there is no record of a transfer

in the stud book. All the young stock carried a Lower Woods herd prefix but were not all young of the year: they carried tattoos for the herd (LAN) and an individual identity number and alphabetic year identifier (KSB, 1967). Lower Woods Dainty was born on 20 June 1963 (registered as LAN 1L), Lower Woods Dainty 2nd on 24 October 1965 (LAN 1N) and Lower Woods Dandy on 4 September 1966 (LAN 2P). Lower Woods Beauty born on 3 April 1966 (LAN 1P) was sired by Ham Mill Dandy out of Lower Woods Dainty which made Beauty's sire her grandsire.

Lower Woods registered 6 animals - 2 bulls and 4 females - in the Stud Book in 1968 (KSB, 1968). Three of these had already been registered in 1967. The new animals were Lower Woods Fairmaid born 25 December 1965 (LAN 2N), Lower Woods Bouncer born on 8 December 1966 (LAN 3P) and Lower Woods Fairmaid 2nd born on 1 February 1968 (LAN 1S). These last 3 were all sired by Ham Mill Dandy and were out of the other 1961 female import Buthay Fairmaid 15th who thus produced 3 calves in just over 25 months.

During the 1970s further animals were imported direct from England. In 1970 these were Carey Pathfinder and Carey Premier (DCBS, 1971) which were both polled. Quarme Pilot was imported in 1971 (DCBS, 1972). The last recorded import was of 1 bull (Furlong Gentleman 4th) and 2 heifers (Cushuish Betsy 5th and Cushuish Pink 27th) (DCBS, 1974).

Devons were imported to Kenya in very small numbers over a time span of 60 years but most were imported between 1947 and 1973. With the exception of the very first imports in 1913 most others were from less well known herds and not from those that dominated British exports to the main strongholds of Devons overseas such as Brazil, Australia, South Africa and the USA. This does not mean, of course, that the imported animals were of lesser quality and value.

Imports of bulls outnumbered cows/heifers by a ratio of almost 2:1. This would indicate that the intended use of the Devon breed was as a crossing bull on both dairy and beef females to improve size and meat quality in the Devon x local offspring. This supposed principal use of the Devon is supported by the fact that not all imported animals were entered in the Kenya Stud Book. There is some evidence, however that a very small number of owners intended to breed Devons as pure bloods, hence the imports of females. Pure bloods could only have been reared in small numbers and the intention here was probably to produce bulls locally, reducing the need for imports whilst still making exotic blood available for crossing on local stock. Only one breeder, apparently, was sufficiently interested in his pure blood animals to register them in the Kenya Stud Book.

Devons have been successful as pure blood animals in several countries where, in addition to established purebred herds, they have been used for crossing purposes.

In Kenya the very few Devons imported had less influence on the genetics of local cattle than other British breeds, including Aberdeen Angus, Hereford and Galloway up until the 1970s and have totally failed to compete with Continental breeds such as the Charolais and Simmental in more recent years. Imports of Devons by private individuals are an example of the willingness of such farmers to undertake their own “farmer designed and farmer executed” on-farm trials. Such applied research, since the 1980s and to the present, has been and is being promoted by many international and national agricultural research systems. Kenya farmers who imported Devons are an example of that human “breed” that is prepared to take its destiny into its own hands. This type of initiative also underlines the maxim that progressive farmers quite generally are ahead of research establishments in identifying gaps and constraints to improving the production and productivity of their enterprises.

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