

## ALRESFORD SHOW

*By*

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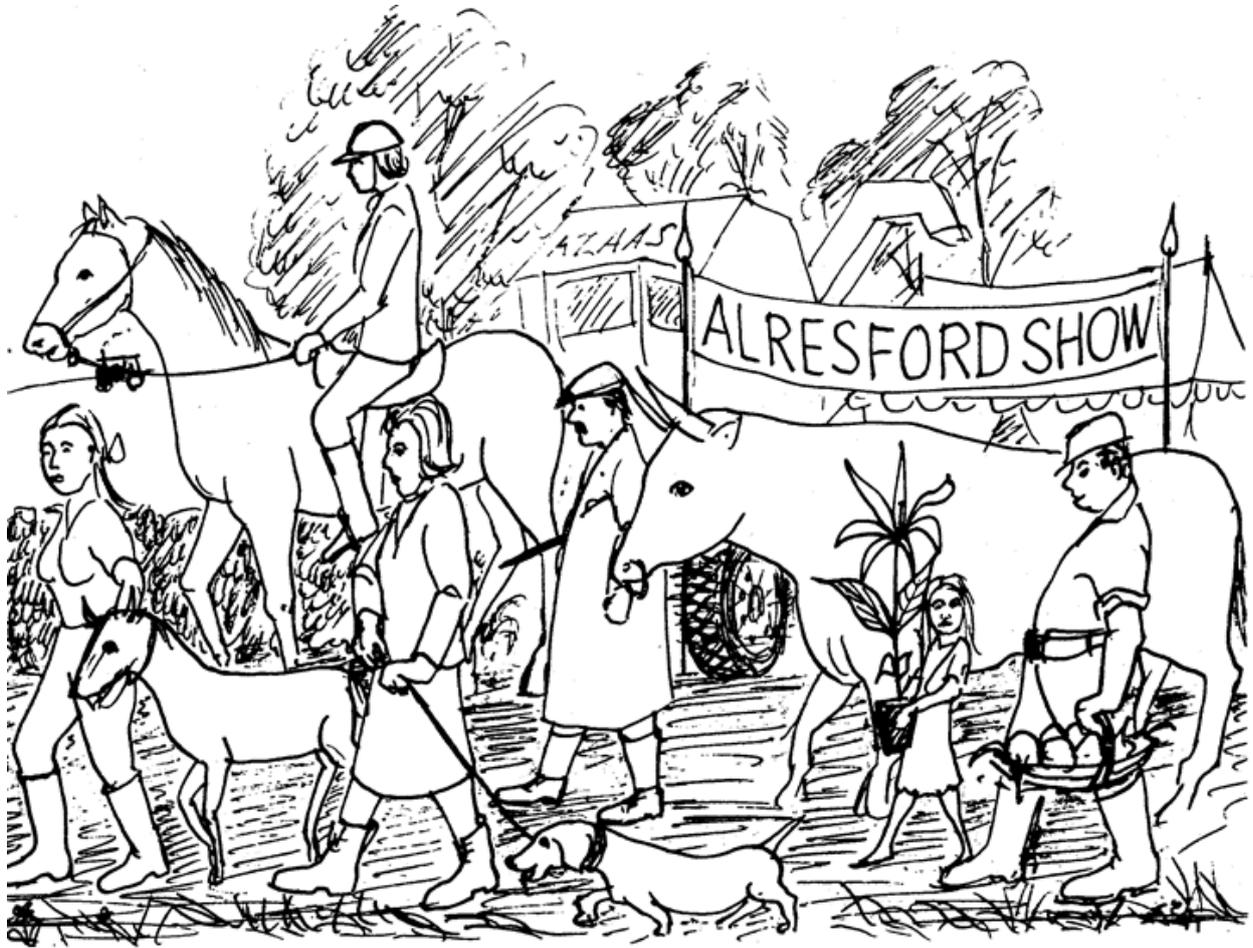
"A delightful little country show," remarked a cattle judge on one occasion, "and run by such pleasant people!"

The sense of enjoyment and success implicit in this spontaneous reaction was engendered in 1908 and has been fostered by several generations of presidents, officers and committee members ever since. As the farming year moves almost imperceptibly through changing scenes of work and weather to its culmination in the rewards of maturity and harvest, so the Alresford Shaw has developed through periods of fluctuating fortunes to its high level of excellence under enlightened management - at the same time cautious and imaginative, conservative and progressive - that has nursed it gently along from year to year, absorbing the pressures of scientific advancement, government policy and popular demand and somehow contriving to present annually a charming, traditional picture of Hampshire country life at its civilised best.

Shows can vary in size from the man who humiliates his fellow gardeners by displaying an enormous potato in the local bar to the bewildering magnitude of a great national event. The Alresford Show has grown over the years and has now probably reached its optimum. But how did it start?

Well, it was during the week when the suffragette Mrs. Parkhurst appeared at Bow Street on a charge of incitement to "rush" the Commons; when John Lee was brought before the Alresford Bench, charged with begging on Pound Hill; and when the Labour-Liberal candidate for the East Hants Division faced a hostile audience at Old Alresford School. Mr. T. C. Hankin, the landlord of the Swan Hotel (but soon to start the family motorcar business), was serving whisky at 2d a tot and beer at 2d a pint to a special group of gentlemen seated before a log fire.

Fascinating as this may seem, it was not the sole reason for their presence. They had gathered there on the evening of Monday, October 19th, 1908 to approve with great enthusiasm the resolution "that an Association be formed, to be called The Alresford and District Agricultural Society". So eager were they for action that they elected a sub-committee there and then to draw up proposals for a cattle show in December. But this was attempting far too much far too soon, and it came to nothing.



The first A.G.M. was held in January, 1909, when the president, officers and committee were re-elected en bloc as follows:

President	Lord Ashburton, The Grange, Northington
Chairman	Hon. A. H. Baring, Moth. Farm, Brown Candover
Hon. Secretary	Mr. F. Stubbs, Estate Agent and Auctioneer, East Street, Alresford
Hon. Treasurer	Mr. E.E. Snow, Union of London and Smiths Bank, East Street, Alresford
Hon. Vet. Surgeon	Mr. H. W. Billingham, Broad Street, Alresford
Committee	Mr. A. Arnold, West End, Bramdean
	Mr. W. Atkinson, Western Court & Scrubbs Farm, Bishops Sutton
	Mr. H.C. Baker, Tottenham House, Broad Street, Alresford
	Mr. B. Bond, Harcambe House, Ropley
	Mr. J. S. Gray, Abbotstone Farm, Itchen Stoke
	Mr. J.B.W. Horlock, Belton House, Four Marks
	Mr. T. E. Hunt, Fobdown, Alresford
	Mr. E. H. Lunn, Itchen Down Farm, Itchen Abbas
	Mr. D. Michie, Tichborne Park Estate Office
	Mr. F.N.W. Padwick, Manor Farm, Bishops Sutton
	Mr. P. Potter, Messrs. Collis & Potter, Corn & Seed Merchants, East Street, Alresford
	Mr. J. Silvester Lower Wield

(The first lady member of a committee was Miss Joan Little, Hill Farm, Armsworth, elected in 1927).

These founder members were described at the time as being "an influential body of agriculturalists". (A little later they had become "a body of good, sound agriculturalists", not because of a mild attack of diminuendo but because the writer had resorted unsuccessfully to what Fowler's Modern English Usage calls Elegant Variation.)

Today's early scene on show day resembles a well-disciplined gold rush as all manner of vehicles converge noisily on Tichborne Park, where officials hurry to and fro as if intimidated by an unexpected invasion. But this is an illusion; they are limbering up after an early breakfast and bracing themselves in readiness for the events of the day. The claims have already been staked and the organisers have long known precisely how every patch of ground will be utilised. The preliminaries in Edwardian times were less spectacular and in a setting more modest. But distance is said to lend enchantment, so sane detail may be justified.

The first show was held on Thursday, December 9th, 1909 on a sloping, uncomfortable field now occupied by the higher part of the caravan site in the Dean. (Saturday became show day many years later with the introduction of the 5-day working week.) Same animals were led or driven from close by; others were transported, from within an 8-mile radius and over stony roads, in horse-drawn floats, low wagons and cow-carts.

There were 410 entries comprising the following:

Fat Stock 60 Store Stock 77 Horses 65 Sheep and Pigs 37 Eggs 26

Butter 22 Dead Poultry 39 Pulled Roots 61 Corn 23

Details of some classes may be of interest:

Fat Stock ` Steers or heifers under 3 years; calves; Legs, lambs; bacon pigs, porkers.

Store Stock ` Cows in calf or milk; heifers; bulls; ewes, lambs.

Pulled Roots Swedes; turnips (yellow, white.); cow cabbages; mangels[sic]globe, tankard, intermediate).

Corn Wheat (white, red); barley; oats (white, black tartar).

Lady Tichborne exhibited a 20-inch Shetland pony with a foal about the size of an average dog.

The morning was cheerless with fog and frost, hunting was abandoned and a messy thaw followed midday sun. Some animals were under canvas kindly lent by Lord Ashburton or hired out by Mr. Charles Salter, messman, of Winchester, who also catered for the evening dinner in the Town Hall.

The after-dinner toasts and speeches in 1909 set the pattern for later occasions. After the loyal toast Lord Ashburton proposed the toast of "the Bishops, Clergy and Ministers of all denominations". (This last point was important, since many members and exhibitors were pillars of parochial nonconformity). In reply the Rev. A. A. Headley, Rector of Alresford, acknowledged (though not in so many words) that there was more than one route to salvation and that all Christians had a common enemy. The principal speakers then covered a range of subjects that assumed global proportions - Britain's interests abroad, German aspirations, the armed forces and the Empire. The speeches were interspersed with musical items by local performers, including romantic and panicky songs such as 'Come into the Garden, Maud' and 'Wait till I've Finished my Orange'.

Of all those indispensable people, the vice-presidents, none perhaps has been more flamboyant than wealthy Mr. Arthur Yates of Bishops Sutton. After a brilliant career as an

amateur jockey, he set up a training establishment there and sent the famous Cloister to Aintree in 1893, where it won the Grand National by 40 lengths, "jumping the others silly". In 1910 his special exhibits - two ponies out of an Arab mare by a zebra - were greatly admired at the show in the Dean.

When the show moved to Arlebury Park in 1920 certain improvements were made. Messrs. C. and F. Freeman of Cheriton had supplied sheds with canvas roofs before 1914, but the committee decided to bring back the date of the show, first to late October and then, in 1924, to late August/early September in an attempt to reduce the outlay on shelter. Mr. S. Judd of the Running Horse provided refreshments in the park and Dumpers, Ltd. of Winchester catered for the evening dinner. But times were hard, and many members became increasingly unwilling to pay 5/- or 6/- for a dinner and then face a long journey of up to 10 miles home. (Perhaps Mr. Judd's daytime catering had been taking its toll.) The evening dinner was abandoned after 1921.

The committee became more business-like and imposed the following charges in 1921:

Admission 1/- Motorcars 2/6 (Crossley, Ford, Austin, Calthorpe, etc) Motor-Cycles 1/- (Rudge Multi, Indian, B.S.A., Douglas, Levis, etc.)

Horse-drawn Vehicles 1/- Bicycles 3d

Arrangements were made with the London and South-Western Railway for the sale of cheap day returns to Alresford from stations between Guildford and Southampton.

After 1923 there was an important saving when a rope and stakes were used for the ring instead of hurdles, but in general there was little profit to be made in those days. A very modest investment and a small working balance was all that could be achieved between the wars. Military bands appeared as an added attraction in the late '20s and early '30s until "broadcast" music was incorporated with the "loud speaker" system of announcing shortly before the last war.

As communications and transport improved it became possible to extend the radius for entries to the show. But there were no traffic problems on show day. (In 1926 10 m.p.h. was considered a suitable speed limit for Alresford between Langtons and Perin's School.) Having been extended to 10 miles radius in 1920 it was further extended to 12 miles to include inter alia Petersfield, Froyle and Hursley Park in 1929 (in which year, incidentally, sightings of the grey squirrel were reported from various parts of Hampshire).

So much is generally known about the show in recent decades that further reference to earlier times may be of greater interest. A glance at the modern schedule will reveal a very wide range of classes. These are the culmination of steady growth, with occasional spurts, since Mt. Walter Giles of Wield won the new hurdle-making competition in 1913. When the date of the show was brought back to August/September there was inevitably a change of emphasis, and it was now both possible and desirable to increase the horse classes (which had previously been static competitions) during the '20s and '30s to include riding and jumping events, children's pony classes and tradesmen's 2-wheel and 4-wheel turnouts. These attractive innovations were the basis of today's splendid variety of equestrian events.

Despite the change of emphasis, the committee retained the roots and corn sections after 1924. But there were obvious difficulties. Apart perhaps from a few varieties of turnips, the roots could hardly reach maturity by early September and would be hopelessly behind if they had had

a bad start or had been checked by summer drought. So these entries varied greatly from year to year. When labour became costly after the war they declined, and the old 1909 root classes were abandoned in the early 1950s. Any feeding element they had provided was already being taken up by concentrates, kale, extended winter grazing and silage. (Silage made from maize, rye, grass, clover, millet or cow-peas - some preferably shredded - was being "greedily devoured" by American cattle well before the turn of the century; and American agriculturalists recommended it to British farmers at least as long ago as 1880. But for many good reasons it was slow to gain favour here.) With the passing of roots went the local waggish advice to the man thinning the young crop with a hoe: "Cu' plen'y cce wheer they be thick, bu' leave sane wheer thur ain' any!"

In the old days bad weather in August resulted at best in a delayed harvest, and the committee had to resist several attempts after 1924 either to abandon the corn classes altogether or to substitute a sack of threshed corn with 2 sheaves. But entries were irregular until the combine harvester replaced the binder and threshing drum.

Two interesting statements, made of course in the light of conditions at the time, came from committee members in the early 1920s:

Mr. F. Stubbs - " A Hampshire fanner cannot farm without sheep."

Mr. F.N.W. Padwick - " People like to see a fat animal at a show." This could well be an eternal truth, but he was actually putting in a special plea for the retention of fat stock classes when the date of the show was altered.

In 1928 Mr. J.A. Bevan (president in 1958) and Mr. G.W. Searles, M.R.C.V.S., (president in 1965) began their long and distinguished membership of the. committee, which lasted more than 40 years.

For a long time there was little change in the cattle classes, but British and Holstein Friesians and Continental breeds have gradually become more prominent since the last war. The Society's oldest trophy is the silver cup, which cost 25 guineas in 1924, presented in that year by the Alresford Coursing Club for the best dairy cow or heifer in milk. It was won outright by Messrs. J. R. Burge and Son after successes in 1954, '55 and '56 and then generously re-presented.

The Society has never taken very kindly to fur and feather, though live poultry had a good run fran 1920 until their cackling subsided in 1935, the year in which the popular and colourful horticultural section was established. But rabbits were a disaster. They were in disgrace after only one year (1929), having somehow incurred a deficit of £27.

In 1920 Mr. Stubbs thought there should be some goat classes. His wish was granted, albeit posthumously, in 1949, when 168 goats attended the show. In 1950 Alresford had "the best goat show in the county", and they have been consistently well represented ever since.

When Mr. Jon Hyde wrote "Honesty is the best policy, but advertising also pays" his thoughts were far from Alresford Show. The Society now receives many applications for trade stands and can therefore be selective, accepting highly reputable traders whose products will enhance the interest and variety of this section. Among very early exhibitors were S.C.A.T.S.'s Machinery, Fordsons and the Polienta (Cattle Oils and Condiments) Company in 1921. In 1922 the County Farm Institute (now the Hampshire College of Agriculture) displayed samples of Arran

Comrade, Kerr's Pink and Great Scot potatoes. Messrs. C. and F. Freeman were regular exhibitors of farm carts and wagons. One interesting exhibit in 1925 was the 'Swift' washing machine (local agent, Mr. Hoskin of Bighton) that would "run on oil, gas or electricity". The Alresford Gas Company in the Dean produced plenty of gas, but mains electricity did not reach Alresford until about 1933.

The Society is now flourishing, thanks to the wonderful support of so many people during and since the difficult post-war period. The dedication, strength of purpose and experience of Mr. J.I.F. Bevan, the new chairman, will compensate for the recent loss of Mr. J. Harkness, who is now continuing his public service at the Plough, East Stratton, where he is doing his best to discount the popular notion that life is not all beer and skittles. Miss P.M. Gribble is a charming and resourceful honorary secretary, and Mr. J. Tomsett handles the finances with professional skill.

Like all good Presidents, Mr. R. Isaac will be expecting a record attendance, whatever the weather, in 1984.

There have been six venues for the show, and dates are inclusive: 1909 - 1913 The Dean  
1920 - 1938 Arlebury Park

1945 - 1950 Manor Stud, Bishops Sutton

1951 - 1958 Sun Lane, Alresford, on the Rectory Glebe, now occupied by the eastern half of Nursery Road and its offshoots.

1959 A field at the bottom of Sun Hill, Alresford.

1960 - 1983 Tichborne Park (by kind permission of Mr. & Mrs. J. Loudon and Messrs. A.J. and J.R. Padwick).

There was no show in 1914 - 1919 nor in 1940 - 1944, owing to war; nor

in 1923, 1939 and 1952, owing to foot and mouth. The 1984 show will be the 62nd.

The Society has accepted its responsibilities and exercised close control over its affairs for many years. Anyone hoping to learn that all the bulls broke loose one year and killed half the population of Bighton will be bitterly disappointed. But there must have been a few interesting moments. In 1927 the committee decided, without further explanation, that stouter hurdles must henceforth be used for the pig pens. And in 1939 Mr. H.N. Walford let it be known that he would not tolerate the presence of any dog in Arlebury Park on show day. The committee reacted with great alarm, for while they could refuse admittance to an owner with dog, the stray dogs of Alresford might come nosing in from all directions. They consulted the local police, but these seemed to agree with Shakespeare that "dog will have his day", even if this should happen to coincide with show day; and it would surely be unjust to arrest a dog engaged in the peaceful pursuit of temporary independence. Foot and mouth intervened to resolve the problem.

But vigilance may still be necessary. Although there is no china shop as such among the trade stands, some mischievous, modern young bull called Kilmeston Kevin or Wield Wayne or Gundleton Gavin may yet come along to gaze with malicious intent on Mr. Pitman's porcelain and bone china or on Mr. Snagge's Tichborne pottery.

It behoves Miss Gribble to scrutinise the entry forms with great care.

