

The Hillhurst Herd

The Hillhurst herd of Sussex cattle is owned by my mother Mrs Carolyn Hardy. The family has farmed here at Sandling since 1897. There are 1200 acres split roughly in half arable and grassland. There is a further 500 acres of rented extensive grassland on the Isle of Sheppey. The main arable crops grown are wheat, oats, oilseed rape and spring beans. There are 130 Sussex and Simmental cows and 1100 breeding ewes mostly North Country Mules crossed with a Suffolk ram.

1902.] COWS, WITH PRODUCE. 87

Sylph 3rd, 7705, calved March 4, 1898, Vol. XVII., p. 63.

Breeder and Owner, Mr. W. O. HAMMOND.

Sire Nobleman 8th, 1377.

Dam Sylph 2nd, 6253, *by* Golden Horn, 754.

G.d. Sylph, 4166, Vol. XVI., p. 55.

NAME, &C., OF PRODUCE.	BRED BY	SIRE.	DATE OF BIRTH, AND SEX.
Sylph 10th , 8915	Mr. W. O. Hammond	Gladstone Prince 2nd, 1710	1902, Dec. 20, C.C.

Sylph 4th, 7975, calved May 21, 1899, Vol. XVII., p. 64.

Breeder and Owner, Mr. W. O. HAMMOND.

Sire Claude, 1177.

Dam Sylph, 4166, *by* Ruby 2nd, 721.

G.d. Fairy, 3222, Vol. II., p. 207.

Sylph 9th , 8916	Mr. W. O. Hammond	Gladstone Prince 2nd, 1710	1902, Sept. 1, C.C.
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HARDY, Lawrence, M.P.,

Sandling Park, Hythe, Kent.

SANDLING SARAH, 8917, calved May, 1901:

Breeder, Mr. DANIEL SWAFFER, Kingsnorth, Ashford.

Owner, Mr. LAWRENCE HARDY, Sandling Park, Hythe.

Sire Wurting Prince, 1893.

Dam Mumford Plum.

G.d. Sultanella M 6, 3354, Vol. II., p. 221.

SANDLING SNOWBELL, 8918, calved 1898.

Breeder, The late Mr. A. E. SCHREIBER, Woodchurch, Kent.

Owner, Mr. LAWRENCE HARDY.

Sire Standen, 1936.

Dam A Hengherst Cow.

*Herd Book Volume XVIII
(Was I really named after a cow!)*

The Hillhurst herd was started by my father Alan Hardy in 1956. The name first appears in the 1957 herd book with the registration of 10 heifer calves (also the year he registered me, his first daughter as well!). His grandfather Lawrence Hardy who lived at Sandling Park had a herd of Sussex cattle prior to the First World War which had the prefix Sandling. To my father's great sadness when he came to start his herd the Society had allowed someone else to use the Sandling prefix and he was unable to get it back. To start his herd he attempted to purchase cows which had bloodlines going back to his grandfather's cattle. Looking in the 1957 herd book the calves registered were Charmer's, Daisy's, Mabel's, Olivia's, Pearl's (originally Darkey's) and Snowdrop's. We are still registering Charmer's Olivia's, Daisy's and Snowdrops today.

He continued to buy in other female lines including Diana's, Finch's, Princesses's and Clementine's and gradually built the herd up to about thirty cows in the early 70's. He had decided on an autumn calving herd with all the steer calves being sold off in the autumn as forward stores – the heifers were reared on either as replacements or sold for breeding. In 1978 my father purchased Roussillon Wellington 4th, a bull that had a great influence on the herd. He and his son Hillhurst Wellington 2nd who followed his father as stock bull both sired some of the very best cows in the herd and even at this time when the Sussex numbers generally were still high it was extremely hard to find a bull to replace him. The Wellington bulls around today go back to Hillhurst Wellington 2nd. It is at this time that the herd was probably at its most well known. The cattle were shown with considerable success at some of the summer shows and always at Smithfield, and some Hillhurst heifers were also exported to Zambia. Much of the credit for the fortunes of the herd at this time must go to the Norton brothers –many of you will remember them. First Royle Norton was our stockman and when he left his brother Jack worked with us until he retired.

At the start of the eighties my father, with the growth in popularity of the continental breeds, purchased a Charolais bull to cross with some of his Sussex. At that time he was very much against the idea of breed development and so had decided to go to with a straight cross. All the crossbreds were sold as forward stores and at that time were making £100/head more than a Sussex steer of equivalent age so for financial reasons only the very best Sussex cows were put to a Sussex bull. This led to a situation where the selection of Sussex heifers was very limited and in fact some years all heifers were kept just to keep the numbers of Sussex up and gradually increasing. In the early eighties we started a small pedigree Simmental herd as well and at this stage the herd started to grow quite considerably in numbers so that by the mid eighties we had grown to a hundred cow herd with calving now split between autumn and spring (largely due to Simmental cows being purchased calving at all times of the year!)

After using a Sussex bull who did not leave a great mark on the herd and, through lack of selection, the cows in the herd had begun to lose size, financially the continental crosses were looking increasingly attractive. The time had come for a decision to be made as to whether we stayed in pedigree Sussex or just kept a pedigree Simmental herd and had a commercial Simmental x Sussex herd alongside.

In 1990 Will and I went to Maidstone to look at the Sussex bulls and came home with a certain amount of trepidation and told my father that we had bought Trottenden Premier 4th – (Charlie). In one generation it was obvious that this bull had a huge effect on the herd, adding size and shape to his daughters and we were lucky enough to have several heifers in his first crop of calves. To our great sadness Charlie damaged his back after two years and despite resting him for a year he never worked again. We still have two of his daughters in the herd both now fourteen! Charlie was followed by Elbridge Intelligent who added great colour to his daughters and even more shape. He is also renowned for getting four of my best Simmental replacement heifers in calf when I had been assured by my husband that he was far too lame to work! He was followed by Goldstone Duke 2nd bought in a hurry because Intelligent had gone lame. Goldstone Duke 2nd was another bull who has left us with some superb daughters – by the time they are fully grown at 4 years they are some really big cows. He also had the extremely good feet and locomotion – a trait he has also passed on to his progeny. Duke was sold to Laurel Stevens in 2003 aged 7 years and it was wonderful to see him still looking and moving so well at Laurel's dispersal sale last autumn then 10 years old and going on as a herd sire!

We bought Holm Place Premier 3rd in 2002 to use on Duke's daughters a bull again with good shape and with the figures to maintain our beef value in the herd. Unfortunately he broke his leg in September 2004 a great disappointment to us all but he has left us with some strong daughters, the first crop of which are calving now to our present herd sire Boxted Major 2nd. We have also kept a son of Holm Place Premier 3rd.

In February 1999 my father died and so Will and I have carried on with the management of the Sussex herd for my mother. My father never lost interest in his Sussex cattle and there is no doubt of the two breeds we had the Sussex were always his favourite. Today we have seventy pedigree Sussex cows and heifers alongside fifty pedigree Simmentals and a few assorted crosses! We still calve both breeds autumn and spring but hope to rationalise this over the next few years and bring all the Sussex to spring calving and the Simmentals to autumn calving to make best use of both breeds. Both breeds are Signet recorded and replacement heifers are chosen on their EBV's.

In 1999 with ever increasing numbers of cattle on the place it became clear that we needed more grazing. At that time some grazing became available on the RSPB bird reserve at Elmley. We have been going back there ever since and now have the grazing over most of it. It is very extensive grazing and is using the cattle to obtain the correct height of grass for the maximum number of birds to nest! It is an arrangement however that seems to work very well for both us and the RSPB. The Sussex spring calving cows can also out winter up there with feed blocks until mid January. All the Sussex cattle now summer up there as well as much of the youngstock allowing us to make silage and hay with some of our grass back at home. We also grow maize for silage as well.

Under the new regime of the Single Farm Payment and the gloom and doom forecast by the farming press for beef the Sussex breed looks most attractive with its ability to be either outwintered or wintered relatively cheaply indoors. There is no doubt also that our native breeds will be needed environmentally - the RSPB admit they can not get the results they want without grazing cattle. Interesting times I think!

Sarah Hurley
April 2006