THE ROYAL BATH & WEST OF ENGLAND SOCIETY

2020/2021

Journal

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REPORTS | EVENTS | CHARITABLE GIVING | LIFE AFTER COVID | PAST AND FUTURE SHOWS

FRONT COVER:
The NHS Team on the opening day of the Large Vaccination Centre at the Bath & West Showground

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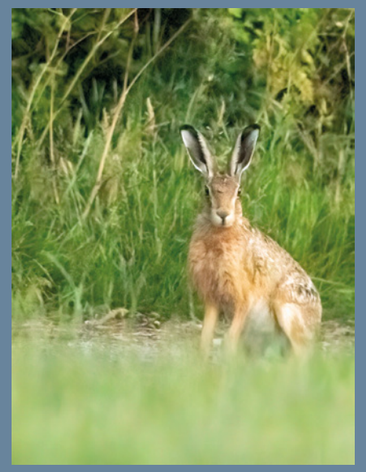
Welcome



Overcoming adversity characterises our great Society as much as agricultural innovation and celebration of rural life. Wars, disease and bad weather have affected us many times over nearly 250 years. We have received a great shock as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and we are learning to adapt to the new situation. In this Journal we look back at some of the great things we have done in previous years and look forward with positivity to when we can resume a more normal existence. I hope that the following pages will remind you why it is so important that the Society should continue to flourish.

RUPERT ULOTH HON. EDITOR

"Overcoming adversity characterises our great Society as much as agricultural innovation and celebration of rural life."

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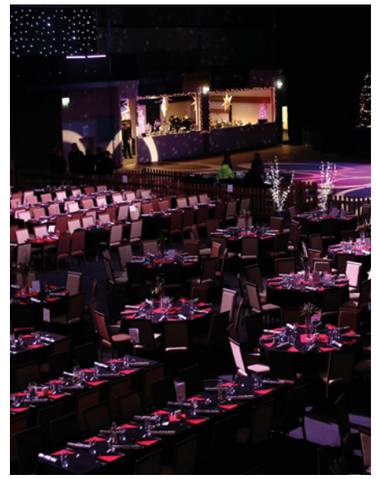


"I have been in this position for an extended period because of the Coronavirus pandemic and this has allowed me to witness at close quarters the affect it has had on many walks of life in the South West."

President's Statement

ANNIE MAW
HER MAJESTY'S LORD LIEUTENANT FOR SOMERSET

Annie Maw has kindly agreed to continue as President for 2021

Having lived in rural Somerset for much of my adult life, and having watched the life of those who work at the rural industries which sustain us all, it has been a supreme privilege and a great pleasure to serve as President of your great society. I have been in this position for an extended period because of the Coronavirus pandemic and this has allowed me to witness at close quarters the affect it has had on many walks of life in the South West.

I have seen the demands that this crisis has imposed on those with the wide responsibilities that you have, and marvelled at the way that you have managed to fulfil them. We, your neighbours and the people who depend on you, owe you a boundless debt of gratitude. You have fed us, you have maintained our surroundings, preserving their beauty and their sustainability, and against great odds, you have carried on. I am filled with admiration and with pride.

I need not remind you that you are the members of one of our country's oldest agricultural societies. It is an example of that unspoken camaraderie, of fellowship and of friendship which is beyond value. I would like to thank you, also, for allowing me to be at your helm through this exceptionally difficult time. I have learnt so much about ingenuity, about courage and resilience from you all.

There are no words that are adequate to sum this up but may I offer you my deepest gratitude on behalf of us all, the people of the South West of England.

The 1933 opening ceremony

ROBERT DREWETT DL CHAIRMAN

Chairman's Review 2020

It has been a difficult year, but we are looking forward to returning to normal

As I sit down to write this article, I'm painfully aware how much life has changed in the period since I last wrote in ways that we could never have imagined possible. Gone are face to face meetings and instead are an array of electronic meeting platforms. These are definitely not a substitute for meeting in person, but as chairman I have to admit that there are times when the "mute all" button can be an attractive ally!

As a Society that has been in existence for 243 years, we have had our share of ups and downs and have teetered on the brink of disaster on more than one occasion. The last time this happened was in 2001 when we were hit by Foot and Mouth and had to close down from February to September. That had a severe impact on the Society's finances as we were, as in this year, unable to run a show or let the showground and, as is currently the case, received no support from central government.

That left the Society with a considerable challenge but, with careful stewardship and a renewed willingness to look at ways to maximise the use of our assets, we were able to trade our way back to a position of surplus.

The current circumstances suggest that the disruption to our activities will be considerably extended and the Board has planned accordingly. We find ourselves, in common with many others in the hospitality sector, at the eye of the Covid storm, in the sense that it has hit at the heart of all that we do. We have arranged financial support, in the form of a loan, secured on the showground, to give us an opportunity to continue to tick over and

WE DO HAVE AMBITIONS TO RUN A SERIES OF SHOWS IN 2021, COVID PERMITTING, STARTING WITH GRASSLAND IN MAY.

TEAM SPIRIT

Ultimately this Society has always been about people and it is because of that, and the reaction and support of you all, that gives me the confidence that we can weather this storm.

Rupert Cox

yet retain capability to be able to resume activities when we are able to do so in a safe manner.

But you will appreciate that faced by a situation where our income dries up almost overnight, but our overheads still need to be paid, requires some fairly drastic action. The bulk of our overheads are salaries, as we are, ultimately, a people organisation and that has meant the need, regrettably, to review how we operate. Whilst we have been able to use the furlough scheme introduced by the government, and are looking at the new schemes now being introduced to seek to find ways to maintain our headcount, there has inevitably been a reduction in numbers. Some of this has been caused by retirements or resignations, where we have not sought to fill the vacant role, but we have also regrettably had to recognise that some roles have become redundant. We have sought to keep these to a minimum and it is a source of regret that we have had to reach this conclusion, but our aim remains to retain as many of our excellent team as possible.

This is a national crisis and we do not expect any special treatment but the agricultural shows industry seems to have been completely overlooked in the myriad round of grants that have been announced. There seems to be a perception in government that such organisations are of no great significance, whereas the reality is that we make a significant contribution to the local economy through the activities that we hold and host.

It is not all doom and gloom. The showground has now been transformed into a large vaccination centre, as we recognise that the sooner that the vaccination programme can be rolled out, the better our chances of again being able to welcome visitors to the showground. Matt Johnson and his team have been working hard since the start of December to support the NHS Logistics team as they convert the Showering Pavilion and the Wessex Pavilion into a mass vaccination centre and we are delighted to be able to support the amazing work being undertaken by the NHS to provide the vaccination to as many residents of Somerset as possible.

Thanks to the generosity of members who responded to our mid-summer charity appeal, we have been able to provide more than £20k of funding to the Charity Committee, who have still been able to invest in some of the most important charitable activities that we like to support:

- Four young people have been supported to attend Brymore School
- Three students have been funded to undertake higher education qualifications or projects
- We continue to be the accountable body for the Somerset Mental Health in Agriculture Group
- We have honoured the second-year commitment of the two-year Art Scholarship bursary

Jersey Cattle Society Competitor at the Dairy Show 2018

We were particularly sad to say farewell to our Chief Executive, Rupert Cox, as he decided that the time was right for him to explore other business interests. Rupert joined the Society in January 2015 after nine years with the Somerset Chamber of Commerce and in his time with us he has led a period of evolution of the Society's business model. The creation of the Rural Enterprise Centre and the major refurbishment and expansion of the Wessex Pavilion restaurants were initiatives led by Rupert together with the return of live entertainment to the Showering Pavilion after a 20 year break, which brought big names such as Bill Bailey, Boney M and "the Yorkshire Shepherdess", Amanda Owen to the Showground.

Rupert was also instrumental in promoting a greater emphasis on the promotion of regional food & drink, musical entertainment under the Pilton Big Top and improving the visitor experience while maintaining the agricultural content of our Main Show. As a farmer in an earlier life he also understood the importance of good husbandry and his attention to detail showed itself in the enhanced appearance of the showground for our shows.

The Society's charitable objectives have been enhanced by the introduction of the Field to Food education day and the launch of the Somerset Mental Health in Agriculture Group as well as continued financial support for young people wishing to study agriculture and other land-based disciplines. Rupert's energy, determination and natural ebullience have made him a pleasure to work with and will be much missed.

Looking ahead we will be putting in place plans to appoint Rupert's successor as Chief Executive once the Covid fog has lifted and the future is looking rather clearer. But in the meantime, we have every confidence in the ability of our Senior Management Team to deliver the programme of shows and other events planned for 2021 and to which we are all looking forward.

In doing this a key issue will be a need for us all to be prepared to be more flexible and also more efficient. We will need to seize opportunities to generate funds as and when they arise. This applies to both our staff body and also all of our supporters. If ever there was a year to ask you to roll up your sleeves and help, this is it! As part of this process we will need to ask everyone to be willing to multi-task and we will also need to use technology far more effectively. If we are to survive the challenges with which we are currently presented we need to work as efficiently and effectively as possible. This will include limiting entries to an online basis only and looking to increase, as far as possible, the use of electronic communications with all our supporters. I hope that is not an unreasonable demand, as nearly every other aspect of our lives demands this, and I would ask for your support.

THE STAFF TEAM HAS BEEN INCREDIBLE AND WE ARE VERY GRATEFUL TO THEM FOR ALL OF THEIR SUPPORT.

What I can say is that the staff team has been incredible during this period and we are very grateful to them for all of their support in what has been a very challenging period for them. We take no joy in having to resort to schemes that ask them to work reduced hours and our aspiration is that we should get everyone back to full hours as soon as we can. But they have all been prepared to go the extra mile to support the Society and underline how lucky we are to have such a dedicated team.

I have also been enormously cheered by the messages that I have received from supporters in answer to my occasional (normally rather gloomy) missives. It is really good to know of the affection in which the Society is held and it certainly provides me with the necessary resolve to do all that we can to see us through these current difficult times.

We do have ambitions to run a series of shows in 2021, Covid-permitting, starting with Grassland in May. This has been redesigned so that it will utilise our own land for the trial plots, as in this way we can much more easily control our costs. As with all shows that we would like to run we will be rigorous in reviewing their finances and will only run the show if it meets pre-determined criteria. Equally, we will introduce a series of key dates and will only move to the next stage if we are satisfied that the prospects of being able to run the show remain realistic. Our aim is that we should not, if at all possible, find ourselves having incurred liabilities, only to have to cancel the show. The aim of the loan that we have taken out is to keep us running for as long as possible to give us the best chance of continuing until some degree of normality returns and this means that we must, by necessity, be hard-nosed about how we operate during this interim period.

Royal Bath & West Show 2011 Royal British Legion 90th Anniversary Muster

This will particularly apply to what we do with what is intended to be our main show offering, now schedule for August. We do not think it is realistic to look to stage a complete show in its normal form, not least because we anticipate that there may well still be restrictions in place as to the numbers permitted to attend mass gatherings. But we hope to stage an alternative version that will showcase the best of what we offer, and which will provide those involved in the rural economy with a chance to display their wares, as well as offering a day out in a Covid-secure environment. We know that whatever we do will not find favour with all, but our aim is to do the best that we can to promote agriculture and the rural economy.

We continue to explore other opportunities for a variety of shows, designed to support all aspects of our activities, subject to them being viable. Equally we continue to look for opportunities to stage events on the showground and to enable us to support the organisations that work with us on a daily basis.

This has not been an easy year for any of us, but I am very grateful to all of you who have provided support in some shape or form. Ultimately this Society has always been about people and it is because of that, and the reaction and support of you all, that gives the Board the confidence that we can weather this storm and continue to serve and promote agriculture and the related rural economy in the West Country.

Moving to more domestic matters, two long serving members of staff had already indicated their wish to retire this year. These were Sarah Jane Chick (known universally as SJ) and Paul Hooper. It was very sad that both should have been denied the running of the Show, which would have been a chance for them to say goodbye to the many friends that they had made over the years. SJ had for many years been our Entries Officer and understood the many intricacies of the different breed societies like no other. She had made great efforts to produce an entries system fit for the 21st century and remained the lynchpin of the entries department for many years. We are very conscious that she leaves large boots to be filled. As for Paul, he will be known to many of you but for more, please turn to the article later in this Review when we highlight his great contribution to the Society.

On the Board front we said good bye to both Richard Ash and Richard Calver this year, and I was able to expand on their respective contributions at the AGM. Suffice to say that both made very significant contributions to a variety of aspects of our work and both will be very much missed.

However, as one door closes, so another opens. I am very pleased to say that Paddy Thomson has agreed to join the Board. Paddy is an experienced businessman who lives with his family near Bruton. As with all good institutions he was introduced to the Society by his father-in-law, Peter Redwood, and has served his time in the Grandstand at Show. We very much look forward to welcoming Paddy and benefitting from his advice.

Finally, I am very conscious that our President, like office holders everywhere this year, has had a pretty raw deal. I was delighted that it was agreed by the Board and Council that Annie Maw should be asked to stay in post for 2021, and a particular thank you to James and Charlotte Townshend for agreeing to step back a year. We very much hope that we will be able to welcome them all to one or more of our shows in 2021, but in the meantime, I am very grateful to Annie for the leadership that she has provided during the year.

Left to right: Richard Ash and Richard Calver

ANTHONY SMALLWOOD
MEMBER OF THE BATH & WEST LIBRARY & ARCHIVES COMMITTEE

Beautiful, producing fine milk and unique to Somerset, Sheeted Somerset cattle are being re-introduced to the county, but to go further, those involved need to overcome several obstacles, as Anthony Smallwood explains...

Return of the native

Professor David Low's groundbreaking 1842 'Breeds of the Domestic Animals of the British Islands' lists 21 British and Irish cattle breeds, together with illustrations by the artist William Shiels. Arguably the most striking is the 'Sheeted breed of Somersetshire' which Low described as red with a white marking 'like a sheet over the body'. Shiel's illustration shows two Somerset Sheeted cows, one from West Camel and the other from Montacute.

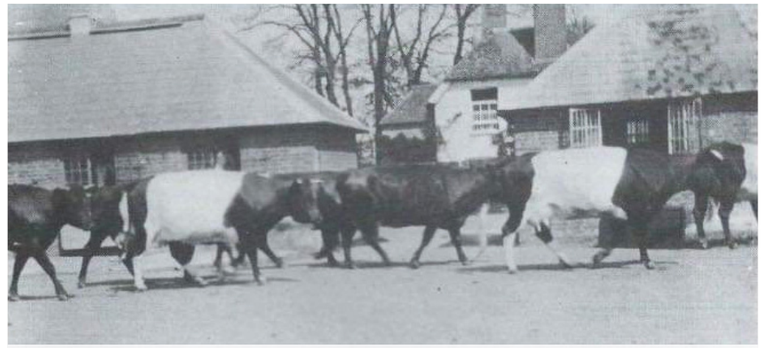
Sheeted Somersets would have been highly valued estate cattle because of their attractive markings and easy and hardy nature, but they were already rare which Low regretted because he considered them excellent dairy cows. The breed further declined and the last examples were culled in the 1930's because of TB.

The original Sheeted Somerset cannot be revived by selectively breeding from known bloodlines or throwbacks. But they probably resulted from cross breeding local West Country red cattle with Dutch Belted/ Lakenvelder cattle introduced into Somerset in the 18th century by Dutch immigrants.

Lakenvelder ownership was restricted to wealthy and aristocratic Dutch families who prized them for their looks and milk. When ownership became more widespread in the 17th century, they became popular house cows and many Dutch families who settled in the British Isles would have brought their prized Lakenvelders with them. Those that settled in Scotland probably introduced the belted gene into native Galloways; and those that settled in Somerset almost certainly did the same with local red cattle.

Lakenvelders – Devon crosses would have appealed to local gentry as park cattle and what better to call them than 'the Sheeted Breed of Somersetshire'? It is telling that the only known painting and the last known photograph of Sheeted Somersets both feature cattle from well-known country estates.

Sheeted Somersets would also have been popular with cheese makers because of their superior milk quality; Cheddar was already well known and Professor Low specifically links Sheeted Somersets to cheeses made in the area. Even today some Somerset farmers have introduced Lakenvelder genetics into their dairy herds to improve milk destined for cheesemaking.



Last herd of Sheeted Somerset. Photo taken at Broadlands Estate 1930s. Reproduced by kind permission of the Broadlands Estate Trustees.

THE SUCCESSFUL RECREATION OF THE SHEETED SOMERSET WOULD BE AN EXCITING ACHIEVEMENT, AND THE SSCS HAS PUT REAL EFFORT AND RESOURCES INTO GETTING THINGS STARTED.

The early 20th century proved terminal for the Sheeted Somerset. WWI saw the break-up of country estates and their decorative herds, and demand for house cows disappeared with urbanisation, milk delivery, and the development of more productive dairy breeds. Similar factors affected European rare breeds too, but many survived and remain valued for their cultural value and as a source of genetic diversity in a new world of industrial scale beef and dairy production. There are many well organised groups working to revive Europe's rare cattle breeds, and the farmer-led Sheeted Somerset Cattle Society (SSCS) is amongst them.

The EU supported European Regional Cattle Breed (EURECA) project which looked at at-risk breeds across Europe, identified a surprisingly strong emotional attachment – including amongst farmers – to old local breeds for cultural, historical and aesthetic reasons. Rural tourism and popular concerns for the environment and food quality reinforce this factor.

The genetic diversity arguments for rare breeds do not apply to Sheeted Somersets and official support from government for the SSCS project have been lukewarm at best. But popular and local media support is encouraging and at least two cheesemakers have shown clear interest.

SSCS project leader Andrew Tanner and his colleagues have been clear from the outset that:

- the project assumes that Sheeted Somersets evolved from Lakenvelders imported into Somerset and subsequently crossed with local breeds.
- new Sheeted Somersets can only succeed if they have a commercially attractive end use. The SSCS project has prioritised the development of a beef variant.

It is early days for the Sheeted Somerset project but calves with good markings are now regularly born, the breed society had its first formal Annual Meeting in 2019; there is a temporary CTS breed code (LVSP/Lakenvelder Somerset Project) with some 35 calves registered each year; calves are sold as Sheeted Somersets in the Sedgemoor and Frome livestock markets; and there were plans to have Sheeted Somersets at the 2020 Bath and West Show, sadly cancelled because of Covid19.

But there are problems too, notably with the SSCS's poor relations with DEFRA and its agencies. The BCMS consider project calves to be overwhelmingly Lakenvelder sired LVX or LVSP and will not grant a CTS Sheeted Somerset breed code, and DEFR/ FAnGR have not approved the SSCS breeding programme and recently withdrew their recognition of the SSCS. The SSCS sees this as obstructive and bureaucratic but DEFRA/FAnGR appear equally exasperated at what they see as a failure to understand the basic criteria for native breed recognition.

The SSCS should probably be clearer on its criteria for approving pedigree status and more convincing on measures to improve the breed. And it could learn from other projects in using molecular genetics which have transformed our understanding of how cattle breeds evolved.

The successful recreation of the Sheeted Somerset would be an exciting achievement, and the SSCS has put real effort and resources into getting things started. But much better mutual understanding between the SSCS and DEFRA is essential. Some language on both sides has been unfortunate but it points to real issues that should be addressed. And both parties should better appreciate the strong societal, emotional and historic factors that are also involved. In the meantime, the Bath and West is actively monitoring developments, and it is hoped that one or more of the Sheeted Somerset calves that have been bred will be on display at the next Royal Bath & West Show.

Rare breeds cannot compete in terms of pure efficiency with the modern industrial 'super breeds' but as one of the farmers in the EURECA study said, 'local cattle breeds are an important part of our living inheritance' in a way that the new super breeds can never be; and their continued existence helps build a saner balance between society and agriculture which we pretend still exists. In short, the revival of the Sheeted Somerset can be seen as serving 'a public good', and that will require a change in thinking by ministers and their departments, together with real support and funding too.

The full version of Anthony's article is available at **www.bathandwest.com/blog/returnofthenative**

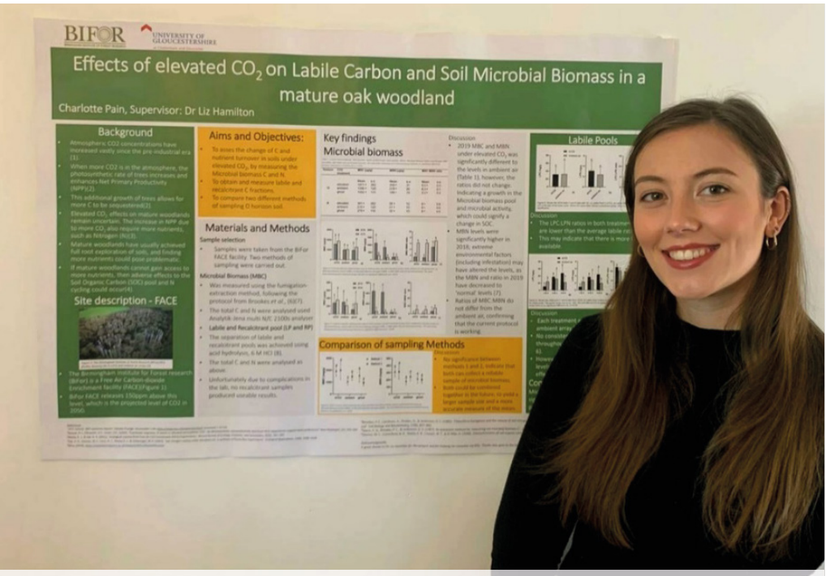
SHEETED SOMERSET CATTLE

Charlotte Pain was awarded a Bath & West grant to further her studies into soil carbon storage and sequestration and here she reveals what she has discovered...

42m km²

Forests and woodlands cover 42 million km² of land.

Effects of elevated CO_2 on soil carbon storage and sequestration in a mature woodland



Charlotte at her end of year poster presentation

I owe my greatest thanks to the society for helping me fund my MSc degree in Ecology at the University of Gloucestershire. I learnt so much, and it has really set me up for a future in the environmental sector.

After my undergraduate degree I worked in an office for a year, quickly realising that the desk life wasn't for me. I decided to pursue a Master's degree in something that wasn't only of great interest to me, but of massive global importance as well. I decided to study Ecology; the interactions between organisms and their environments; touching on global issues such as biodiversity and species loss, sustainability and climate change. I studied modules such as pollution and remediation, environmental governance and policy and a module full of practical ecological field skills. I was also strongly encouraged by the university to link with outside organisations by offering my help. From this encouragement and assistance, I had the pleasure of working with organisations such as: the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust, the Woodland Trust, BIFoR (below) and the Soil Association.

I always had an interest in studying climate change; it was one of the reasons I chose an MSc in Ecology. However, the inspiration and confidence I received from my lecturers and supervisor is what lead me to my final project. For my thesis I went underground and looked at the effects of elevated Carbon-Dioxide (CO_2) on soil carbon storage and sequestration in a mature woodland; this project helped me recognise the importance of every single living thing in an ecosystem, right down to the individual microbe.

Forests and woodlands cover 42 million km² of land, ranging in tropical, boreal and temperate climates, the equivalent of 30% of the terrestrial land cover. Forests deliver many natural global services, from homing vast pools of biodiversity, maintaining food provision, regulation of the hydrological cycle and acting as a sink for nutrients. The role of forests in influencing the climate through chemical exchanges within the atmosphere is an important one, and carbon sequestration may be the key to reducing CO_2 in the atmosphere. The terrestrial biomes are responsible for sequestering more than a quarter of the global carbon stocks every year. Where there is more CO_2 in the atmosphere, the rate of photosynthesis increases, this enhances tree and plant growth. This subsequently can promote greater carbon storage; known as CO_2 fertilization.

This increased storage of carbon in forests has been considered the most important factor in the recent carbon uptake. However, it is also the most uncertain factor as well. The future of carbon uptake and storage in forests is uncertain; as CO_2 fertilization stimulates plant growth, plants will need to take up more nutrients from the soil to sustain such a growth, such as nitrogen and phosphorus. The act of taking in more nutrients under CO_2 fertilization could become a problem in a mature forest, as nutrient availability in the soils is generally low, due to full exploration of roots in the soils. If mature forests cannot gain access to more nutrients in the soil, then it could have critically harming effects on the current and future carbon store in the soil.

Soil is the largest terrestrial pool for carbon, and the global soil organic carbon (SOC) pool has been estimated to be about four times larger than the atmospheric CO_2 carbon pool. Any changes to the carbon stocks could potentially have great adverse effects on ecosystems and feedbacks to the climate. The SOC pool can be further subdivided into smaller pools depending on their rate of decomposition. The 'labile' pool has a decomposition rate of days to weeks, whereas the 'recalcitrant' pool has a decomposition rate of thousands of years. Within the labile pool you get the microbial communities, that are responsible for breaking down the readily decomposable labile carbon (such as plant litter). As plant and tree growth increases, the input of readily decomposable labile carbon also increases, this input stimulates the microbial communities to breakdown the labile carbon. It is a worry that this stimulation of the microbial communities will also stimulate premature decomposition of the SOC, therefore reducing the amount the soils can store.

Arial view of the BIFoR FACE facility. **Credit: https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/bifor/about/index.aspx**

However, we can detect changes to the SOC pool, before the effects of climate change become irreversible, by monitoring the microbial communities. As these microbial communities can influence carbon storage and the flow of other nutrients, any slight changes can indicate future changes in the soil carbon storage. And that is exactly what I did in my project.

I had the opportunity to do my project with the Birmingham Institute of Forest Research (BIFoR) at their Free Air Carbon-Dioxide Enrichment (FACE) facility. The BIFoR FACE facility is an experimental forest that is investigating the impact of climate and environmental change on woodlands over 10 years. Part of the forest is fumigated under an enhanced concentration of CO_2, it is increased to the concentration level that is expected in 2050.

> ANY CHANGES TO THE CARBON STOCKS COULD POTENTIALLY HAVE GREAT ADVERSE EFFECTS ON ECOSYSTEMS AND FEEDBACKS TO THE CLIMATE.

My final report observed a mix of results, from increasing, decreasing and no changes to the microbial communities. I had only observed the changes over a one-year period and am happy to have contributed data to the BIFoR's overall 10-year project, and for future researchers to use. I am beyond grateful for all the skills and knowledge I have learnt throughout this project and the 18-month Master's course.

Due to COVID-19 my plans for this year had to be put on hold, but I hope to be studying for a PhD in sustainability and soil science come next autumn.

Information references and further reading if applicable:

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DEBBIE HOWARTH HEAD OF COMMERCIAL ENTERPRISE

This has been a devastating year for our showground activites but now that the site is becoming a vaccination station things are already looking brighter for 2021 as Head of Commercial Enterprise, Debbie Howarth, explains...

2021 A fresh start and a new beginning

Westfest 2019 in the Showering Pavilion

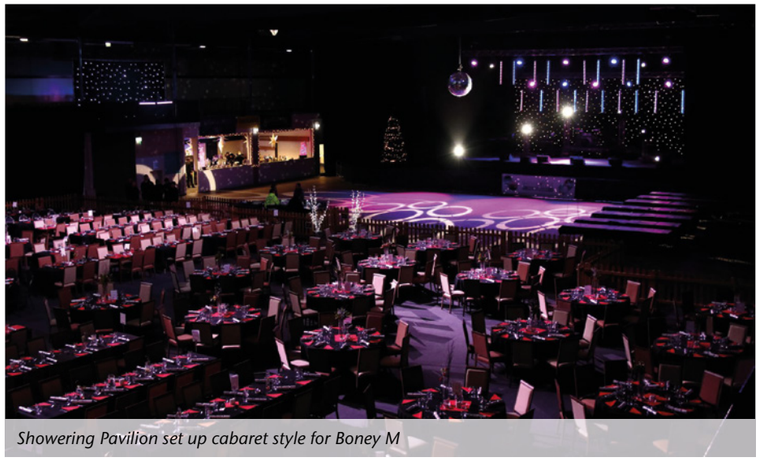
After the challenges of 2020 we are looking forward to a fresh start in 2021. COVID-19 has torn through the economy cancelling events, hospitality and live entertainment. The knock-on effect for the showground as a venue has been catastrophic, but we now need to look to the prospect of a brighter future.

With the introduction of a nationwide vaccination programme, we are extremely proud that the NHS have selected our site as one of the main South West vaccination stations. As we go to print, logistics are well under way to have this up and running imminently. It does mean the site is taken out of use from December 2020 until the end of March 2021 but with the likelihood of no events taking place within this timeframe, it has come as not only a welcome income boost, but must also be recognised as a splendid way for the Society to show support to the NHS, our local community and of course the residents of Somerset.

So, with everything crossed, we remain positive for events to make a return from Easter onwards and if we are able to make a good start, the calendar looks packed for the rest of 2021. It has been important that we are supportive of our regular clients who have also felt the harsh effects of COVID-19 and welcome the majority of these back albeit with some changes to their normal dates and in some cases, size of their events. In addition, we are hopeful for some new events to take place and are in negotiations with organisers for new music events, vehicle shows and a version of the popular Comicon craze-themed exhibition in the summer.

What 2020 has taught us all is the need to diversify and make better use of our huge and vast open spaces; we are brainstorming ideas to generate more income, outside of regular staged events by way of specialised markets, drive in-type productions, outdoor activities and all sorts of training options. With all of this in mind, we have had an amendment to our premises license approved by the local authority to give us more flexibility in the type of activities we can host on site.

Boney M at the Showering Pavilion December 2019



Showering Pavilion set up cabaret style for Boney M

Giant Flea Market Summer 2019

2021 will not be without its challenges as we seek to return to normality following a very rough ride and it will take time for us to regroup and pick up where we left off. But one thing is for sure, Bath & West Enterprises will continue to remain a market leader at the forefront of the region's hospitality industry seeking new opportunities to keep the showground's standing as the number one events venue in the South West.

WE REMAIN POSITIVE FOR EVENTS TO MAKE A RETURN FROM EASTER ONWARDS AND IF WE ARE ABLE TO MAKE A GOOD START, THE CALENDAR LOOKS PACKED FOR THE REST OF 2021.

Past Show highlights...

1896

2016

1955

2012

2019

2018

1991

2015

2009

1968

...the Show will go on!

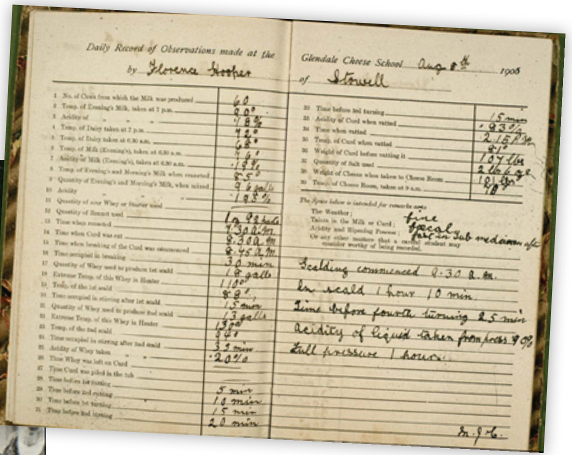
DR JANET TALL HEAD OF ARCHIVES AND LEARNING FOR THE SOUTH-WEST HERITAGE TRUST

How the Bath & West transformed butter and cheese making more than 100 years ago

THIS BUTTER BE GOOD

Below left: The butter school at Clevedon, 1890

Below: A page from the cheese school notebook of Florence Hooper, 1900



Daily Record of Observations made at the Glendale Cheese School Aug 8th 1906
by Florence Hooper of Stowell

The Weather: fine
Scalding commenced 8.30 a.m.
In scald 1 hour 10 min
Time before fourth turning 25 min
Acidity of liquid taken from press ·90%
Full pressure 1 hours.

The Bath and West has a long tradition of identifying needs and providing support to specific agricultural sectors.

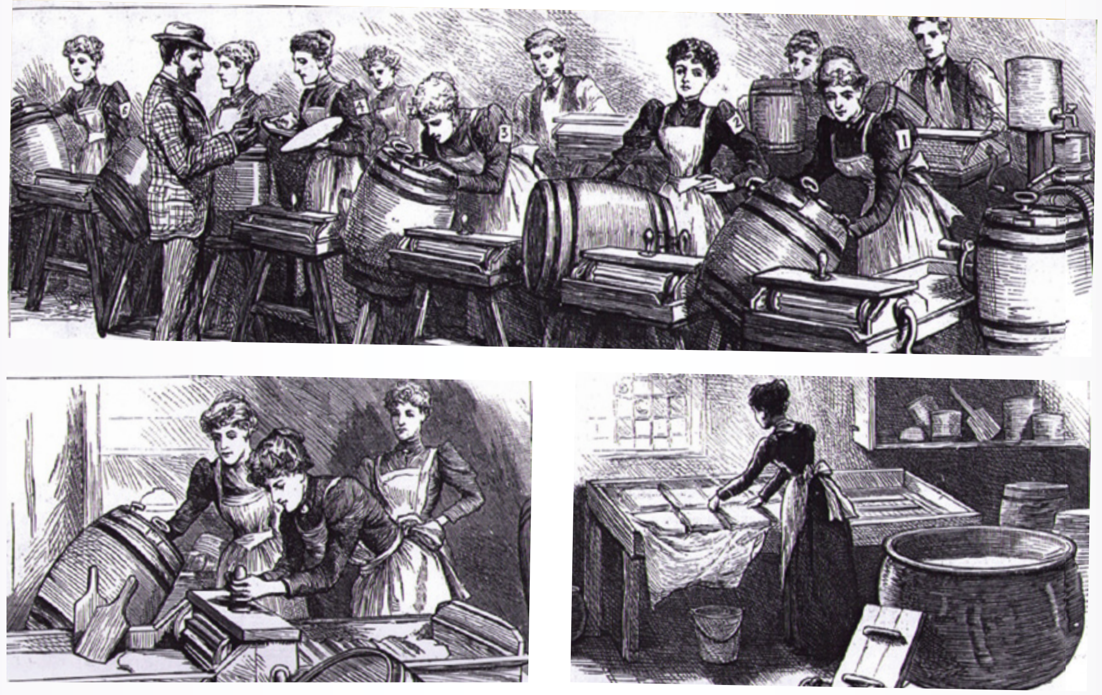
In the later nineteenth century, the Society responded to falling demand for cheese and cheap imports of standard factory products by introducing working demonstrations at shows and became the first regional society to introduce a working dairy at their Tunbridge Wells Show in 1881. The first butter school opened in Swindon in 1888, rapidly followed by one at Shepton Mallet. They soon became an important part of the Society's work and were predominantly held in Somerset.

Cheese schools were the most serious form of education so far attempted by the Society and involved finding farms willing to accommodate schools for an entire season. Formal agreements between the Society and farmer were drawn up, and the first school opened in 1890 at Palace Farm, Wells. Pupils could enrol for courses from a few days to four weeks, and students were predominantly girls and young women. Students completed notebooks, designed with daily charts and a section for notes and observations. This provided the discipline of measuring temperatures, and timing procedures, and could be kept as a permanent guide. Local methods of cheese making were taught, especially the Cannon system, developed by the Cannon family of cheesemakers.

Butter and cheese-making tuition was largely carried out by women, and for women. The first cheese school advertised that, 'The school is especially intended for the wives, sons and daughters of dairy farmers and dairymen, priority being given to these'. (Somerset County Gazette, 10 May 1890). The Society's secretary, Thomas Plowman, described how, 'The large majority of the students are … females, and farmers' wives and daughters have mainly predominated, but all classes may be said to be represented, for, not infrequently, the working dairymaid has churned side by side with the squire's daughter. (Agricultural Gazette, 6 October 1890). The Society needed to reach significant numbers of rural women to have an impact. An additional audience was reached through spectators who were encouraged to learn by watching. This was particularly the case for butter schools, which were held in local halls. Circulars and newspaper adverts encouraged people to come and 4,461 spectators attended butter schools between 1891-94.

During the 1890s many instructresses employed by the Society were local West Country women, educated on farms noted for prize-winning butter and cheese. A notable example was the Cannon family. Three out of four daughters became cheese school instructresses in Somerset between 1890-1909. The growing influence of national qualifications for dairy teachers is also evident. Jessie Stubbs, the itinerant butter instructress from 1905 was educated at Swanley Horticultural College, and Norah Musgrave, the butter instructress from 1908, held the National Diploma in Dairying. Leading members of the Society encouraged young women who they saw winning prizes at the Shows. For example, Thomas Dyke Acland encouraged E A Maidment of Churchill, Somerset. She followed his advice and trained to become one of the first generation of professional dairy instructresses.

Peripatetic tuition was perceived to be more appropriate for young women than attending a central dairy school. It was thought centralised conditions might be 'too perfect' for useful teaching, as students would be unlikely to have such high-quality equipment on their farms. It was also more socially acceptable as, 'It is scarcely to be recommended that young women of this class should attend colleges at a distance from their homes'. (Journal of the Society of Agriculture, 16 Mar 1888). By the early 20th century instructresses were also visiting individual farms on request. Visits varied from one to seven days depending on the issue, such as taints in milk, or the level of tuition needed. This was popular and effective, with the instructress Jessie Stubbs having a waiting list for visits.



Illustrations of the butter school, 1892

THE SOMERSET DAIRY SCHOOLS RECEIVED GREATER SUPPORT FROM THE FARMING COMMUNITY THAN ANY OTHER FORM OF AGRICULTURAL EDUCATION.

It's also possible to get glimpses of what the pupils themselves learned from the classes. Charles Acland arranged for the publication of a prize essay by Miss Vellacott of Exford about her experience. She described the butter making taught, from milking, separating and ripening cream and churning, through to dry salting the finished product. What she described was very practical, and minimal scientific theory about milk constitution was given before more detailed descriptions of the various methods and utensils.

The Somerset dairy schools received greater support from the farming community than any other form of agricultural education. This was because the Society had identified a real need and found the right solution for the time. To stay competitive farmhouse cheese and butter production needed to develop and be able to serve specific markets. This was achieved by teaching standard methods and, for example, by teaching Caerphilly cheesemaking for the South Welsh market. The schools also provided chances for those involved in the dairy industry to meet, exchange ideas, and gain encouragement. Farmers and dairymen endorsed them by demanding tuition in their locality. For example, in November 1895 the Society received a letter requesting a cheese school from 34 farmers on the Polden Hills. They could see that Cheddar cheese made at the schools consistently sold at good prices. By 1906 the average price of cheese was 65s 5d across the season, with the main summer draft selling for 68s per cwt. It was reported that farms selling cheese for as little as 30s per cwt transformed themselves following attendance at a school. Enthusiasm was also helped by competitions at local agricultural shows for dairy school pupils. Winners received County Certificates, a sign of prestige in local dairying circles that helped secure future sales of produce. The only potential barrier to attending the dairy schools were the fees. These were heavily subsidised by the Society and County Council but were too high for poorer farming families. However, offering half fee studentships helped ensure that the tuition was widely available to the rural community.

Dairy tuition was the Society's flagship in terms of agricultural education in Somerset. It succeeded due to almost complete support from the agricultural community, who could see its direct value to their livelihoods. The tuition was local, generally affordable, and had a positive impact in terms of improved prices for butter and cheese.

Dr Janet Tall is Head of Archives and Learning for the South-West Heritage Trust and a member of the Bath and West's Library and Archives Committee

ROBERT DREWETT DL CHAIRMAN

Robert Drewett pays tribute to retiring Paul Hooper, one of the Bath & West's most longstanding and loved members of staff, who has been at the forefront of the Society's success for more than four decades

"Paul always championed the traditions of both the Society & the Show."

HOOPS!

I am, I suspect, one of only a few who can claim to have been about for the whole of Paul's tenure at the Bath & West.

Having been brought up in Bristol, Paul had always aspired to join the Society. Matters were brought to a head in the summer of 1977, after Paul had sat his O Levels. A discussion with his teachers concluded that the world of academia was not beckoning Paul, so instead he applied to the Society and was appointed a clerk in the Accounts Department under Ralph Stacey, our then accountant. This was in the relatively new offices on the Showground and at the time that we had just celebrated our bicentenary, with a five day show and the new grandstand. This was undoubtedly an exciting time for the Society under the leadership of Lord Darling, and Paul much enjoyed his introduction to the world of showing.

Paul at the beginning of his Bath & West career

What became clear over a period of time was that finance and Paul were not necessarily natural bedfellows but that where Paul excelled was in getting things done. As a result his role morphed into something of a "gofer" extraordinaire. Over the next 40 odd years Paul excelled at being the person who knew the answers to all the "who, what and where" questions and who lifted the burden of many tasks off the shoulders of a series of Chief Executives. It is a proud boast for Paul that he served under six Chief Executives and seven Chairmen (if my maths is correct), all of whom have nothing but good things to say about Paul. It is a pleasant twist that my father was appointed as Chairman in 1978 and so saw much of Paul in his early days at the Society and that I now find myself as Chairman some 43 years later, saying farewell and thank you to Paul.

During that intervening period Paul has, for many, become the face of the Bath & West, such is the breadth of his acquaintances. There are few in the world of showing or its ancillary spheres that are not known to Paul. Equally, in the wider community it is not uncommon for me to find, when I say that I am involved with the Society, that I am asked if I work for Paul. I have discovered it is much easier just to agree, as the reality is, of course, that is exactly the position. I might have thought years ago, with the arrogance of youth, that I had some say in the matter, but I quickly came to recognise that the reality was that quite often a decision had already been taken by Paul and that any resistance would be futile!

Paul always championed the traditions of both the Society & the Show. For a Society like ours we need someone willing to espouse those values, and Paul fulfilled this role incredibly ably.

What more of Paul? In his early years he was active with the British Show Jumping Association (BSJA) and used to officiate for them at weekends. He became active in working for the Association of Show and Agricultural Organisations (ASAO), following a decision by the Society to allow Paul time to work for them. He also became a magistrate. He even dallied with becoming a district councillor, but the electorate did not share Paul's enthusiasm and so he wisely re-focussed his efforts elsewhere.

As Secretary of the ASAO he has been at the heart of the Shows movement and has been able to help a wide range of agricultural show societies, especially on tricky areas such as the rules and regulations around stock movements. It was entirely fitting that these efforts should have been recognised in 2016 with the award of the OBE to Paul for his services to the agricultural shows industry.

One of Paul's greatest loves has always been military bands, and over the years Paul has got to know every band and bandmaster well. It was a proud claim of Paul's that we were always able to field a military band at Main Show, and an achievement from which we all benefitted, even on those occasions when Paul was let loose on the conductor's rostrum.

Paul with the Society's Vice Patron HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO

Paul receiving his Long Service Award at The Royal Bath & West Show 2017

Paul used to be quite an athletic young man with his trademark moustache. By the time that I spent three months at the Society in early 1983, helping to deputise for the then sick James Myatt, Paul's enthusiasm for exercise had started to wane. I remember that the staff had agreed to do a sponsored walk and so many took active steps to increase their fitness. With commendable independence Paul's preparation was restricted to opening his bedroom window at night!

For many of you reading this Paul will have been your primary contact with the Society. He knew all there was to know about the running of the Society and, as mentioned above, was a keen guardian of all of its traditions. In this he very much mirrored John Davis, for whom he worked for many years and whose contribution he always sought to emulate. We in the Society have been enormously lucky to have employed men such as John and Paul, who were prepared to devote their whole working life to the good of the Society. I fear that we will not see the likes of Paul again, but this only serves to underline the very considerable contribution made by him. It is one for which we are all incredibly grateful.

We still very much intend to find an appropriate time when we can celebrate Paul's long period of service and when all of his many friends can gather together to demonstrate to Paul the respect and affection that is shown for him within not just the Society but also the wider showing world.

In the meantime, it's hard to know how best to finish this article other than to say…

"THANK YOU PAUL FOR ALL THAT YOU HAVE DONE – YOU'RE A LEGEND!"

JESS CHIPLEN ASSISTANT HEAD OF SHOWS

Depression and suicide are increasing for those working in agriculture and the Bath & West is supporting an excellent initiative to help tackle the issue, as Jess Chiplen explains...

Mindful approach

ADDRESSING MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN THE FARMING COMMUNITY

The Somerset Mental Health in Agriculture group (SMHAG) was formed to support, promote and address the growing issue of poor mental health for those working in agriculture. Levels of depression within the farming industry are increasing in the UK and suicide rates, particularly for males under 40, are among the highest in any occupational group. More than one farmer a week in the UK dies by suicide (ONS). It has been widely documented that mental health, in general, has plummeted during the COVID-19 health crisis, accelerating even further the need for this provision.

The SMHAG is working on the development of networks intrinsically connected to rural communities to empower people to have the confidence to have the conversation if they are concerned about another's mental health, providing knowledge of where and how to signpost for help.

The Royal Bath & West Society are delighted to be involved with the SMHAG by becoming the accountable body, providing bid-writing skills and seed-corn funding to make sure that those in the farming community struggling to cope with the traumas of COVID-19 have the support they need.

THE GRANT WILL BE UTILISED TO DELIVER TWO MENTAL HEALTH FIRST AID TRAINING COURSES IN SOMERSET.

The group's first initiative, the Z Card, an information flyer which sets out some of the symptoms of mental health and what to look for in others, has already been widely distributed via outlets including Mole Valley Farmers. The group has also held Mental Health Awareness talks with NFU, Trading Standards and the Farming Consultancy Network.

SMHAG aims to deliver mental health awareness training to local agricultural clubs and groups with New Leaf as delivery partners. 12,307 people are directly employed in agriculture in Somerset, and it is the aim of SMHAG to ultimately have trained one in 20 of those to become mental health first aiders. The group are also seeking funding to create mental health awareness resources in the form of short films and podcasts specific to the sector and distribute through our networks as well as becoming a central hub for resources for mental health support in Agriculture with the development of a signposting website.

Bridgwater Agricultural Society and most recently a £4,250 grant from the Somerset Community Foundation. The £4,250 will be utilised to deliver two Mental Health First Aid Training Courses in Somerset. The courses will be free to attend to anyone working within the agricultural sector and will equip attendees with a deeper understanding of mental health, providing them with the skills and knowledge to apply the appropriate support where necessary.

SMHAG is a unique collaboration which brings together businesses and organisations committed to helping manage the mental health of farmers and their families and The Royal Bath & West Society will do all we can to make it a success.

"Albert Cook was the best sort of West Country farmer: a superb stockman and devoted family man who served his local community for over 60 years as parish, district and county councillor."

ALBERT COOK
Legend of the Show Ring

ALBERT COOK, WHO DIED IN JANUARY 2020 AT THE AGE OF 95, WAS ONE OF THE VERY FARMERS OF WHOM IT COULD BE SAID THAT HE WAS A LEGEND IN HIS OWN LIFETIME.

He farmed at Filleigh in North Devon, where he and his late wife Ruth bred the Devon Closewool sheep with which he won dozens of breed championships at the Bath & West and Devon County Shows from the 1940s, through to his retirement from the show ring in 2009.

But he was perhaps even better known in the show world, certainly in his younger days, for his prowess at sheep shearing. He first competed at the Bath and West in 1948 and ten years later, when the Bath & West was staged jointly with the Devon County Show at Plymouth, he carried all before him to win the very first English National Shearing Championship. Even as recently as 2010, when he was President of the Devon County Show, he could still shear a sheep in under four minutes. He served for many years on the Bath & West's Sheep Shearing Committee and was respected as a sheep judge the length and breadth of the country.

Albert Cook was the best sort of West Country farmer: a superb stockman and devoted family man who served his local community for over 60 years as parish, district and county councillor. He always had a twinkle in his eye and a kind word for everyone he met. I last met him at the 2019 show – his 70th Bath & West!

Besides farming and family, Albert Cook's other great love was cricket. He was the great uncle of former England cricket captain and record run-scorer, Sir Alastair Cook, now farming sheep himself in Hertfordshire. If Alastair turns out to be even half as good a farmer as Albert, he'll be a very good farmer indeed.

WRITTEN BY ANTHONY GIBSON OBE

2020/2021

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As at February 16th 2021

The Society would like to record with sadness the following deaths over the past year:

Michael Barnes

Rev'd Trevor Farmiloe

Commander Rupert Best DL

The Lord Vestey KCVO

PAST SOCIETY PRESIDENTS

1970	The Lord Ashburton KG KCVO
1971	Col CT Mitford-Slade
1972	Brig The Lord Tryon GCVO KCB DSO
1973	The Lord Dulverton CBE TD
1974	The Earl Waldergrave KG TD DL GCVO
1975	Col CT Mitford-Slade
1976	The Lord Digby
1977	HRH The Prince of Wales KG KT
1978	His Grace The Duke of Wellington MVO OBE MC DL
1979	Col. W.Q. Roberts CVO CBE DSO DL
1980	Sir John Wills Bt TD
1981	HRH The Duke of Edinburgh GCVO KG KT GBE
1982	The Marquess of Salisbury DL
1983	Lt. Col. G.W.F. Luttrell MC
1984	The Lord St Levan DSC DL
1985	Field Marshal Sir Roland Gibbs GCB CBE DSO MC DL
1986	HRH The Princess Anne, Mrs Mark Phillips GCVO
1987	Lord Romsey
1988	Mrs Susan Williams MBE JP
1989	Major The Lord Darling DL
1990	Sir John Quicke CBE
1991	Mr Marmaduke Hussey
1992	(Deputy President) Col GWF Luttrell MC
1993	Admiral of the Fleet, Sir Henry Leach GCB DL
1994	The Lord Vestey
1995	The Earl of Selborne KBE
1996	Mr RW Drewett DL
1997	The Lord Armstrong of Ilminster GCB CVO
1998	The Rt Rev James Thompson, The Lord Bishop of Bath & Wells
1999	The Countess of Arran DL
2000	The Rt Hon The Earl Cairns CBE
2001	Rt Hon Viscount Cranborne DL
2002	HRH The Duke of Gloucester KG GCVO
2003	Lady Gass Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Somerset
2004	The Rt Hon The Lord King of Bridgwater CH
2005	The Marquess of Salisbury PC DL
2006	Lord Waldegrave of North Hill
2007	Lord Cameron of Dillington DL
2008	Angela Yeoman OBE DL
2009	The Earl of Devon
2010	HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO
2011	HRH The Countess of Wessex GCVO
2012	Sir Henry Elwes KCVO
2013	The Rt Rev'd Peter Price Bishop of Bath & Wells
2014	HRH The Duchess of Cornwall GCVO
2015	The Lord & Lady Fellowes of West Stafford
2016	Michael Eavis CBE
2017	Sir John Cave Bt DL
2018	Mrs Mary Prior CVO MBE
2019	Earl and Countess Bathurst
2020	Mrs Annie Maw Her Majesty's Lord Lieutenant for Somerset

When the Showground was closed during the summer the quantity of wildlife across the site increased with ducks and heron returning to the lake and hares aplenty in the car parks – much of which has been captured on camera by one of the Rural Enterprise Centre Tenants, Mike Duberry.

THE ROYAL BATH & WEST OF ENGLAND SOCIETY

PATRON HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN
VICE PATRON HRH THE COUNTESS OF WESSEX GCVO

The Bath & West Showground, Shepton Mallet, Somerset BA4 6QN
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