

ART. II.—*English Park Cattle*. By T. H. B. GRAHAM,
M.A., F.S.A.

Read at Carlisle, June 22nd, 1932.

SEVERAL parks, situate in the heart of royal forests and enclosed, for the most part, in Henry III's reign, contained small herds of wild cattle. Their colour was invariably white. Some had black ears, others red ears; some had horns, others were polled. The old naturalists were of opinion that they were the last surviving descendants of the wild urus* (*bos primigenius*) much reduced in size, and modified, in every respect, by their diminished range and contact with man. For example, Rüttimeyer considered that the wild cattle of Chillingham are unmistakable though dwarfish descendants of *bos primigenius* (quoted by Lubbock, *Prehistoric Times*, p. 206).

The Gothic races called the wild ox *ur* or *aur*. Hence the Latin name, urus, and the modern German, aurochs, i.e. ur-ox (Millais, *Mammals of Great Britain and Ireland*, vol. iii, p. 184).

Cæsar, in describing the wild denizens of the great German forest beyond the Rhine mentions:—

Animals called uri, in size little inferior to elephants,† but in appearance, colour and shape, bulls. Great is their strength, great their speed, and they do not spare man or beast when they see him. People are keen in killing them when caught in pitfalls. But the animals, even though taken very young, cannot be accustomed to man and tamed. Their horns differ much in spread, shape and appearance from those of our own animals (*De Bello Gallico*, vi, 28).

* The urus must be distinguished from the Pleistocene bison (*bison priscus*) and the modern European bison (*bison bonasus*) of Lithuania.

† It is evident that Cæsar had not seen a live specimen of these monsters.

Remains of the urus occur in the Pleistocene deposits of Britain. It seems to have survived there until the Bronze Age, but not (as on the Continent) until the historic period.

At the dawn of that period, the oxen of Britain were the Celtic shorthorn (*bos longifrons*) represented to-day by the small dark-coloured mountain cattle of Scotland and Wales (Boyd Dawkins, *Cave Hunting*, pp. 77 and 89) and the somewhat larger *bos frontosus*. But the Venedotian Code, compiled in the tenth century, shows that the Welsh of a later age possessed a superior breed of cattle, resembling that of Chillingham, and presumably imported from beyond the seas:—

The fine (*saraad*) for injury done to the king of Anglesea (*Aberfraw*) is to be paid as follows: a hundred cows for each district (*cantrev*) of his dominion, and a white bull with red ears to every hundred cows. But if they should be black cattle, a black bull to every hundred cows, and that augmented by one-half (*Ancient Laws of Wales*, Record Commission, pp. 7 and 234).

And in King John's reign, William de Briouze* was Norman lord of Abergavenny and Over Guent (Cokayne, *Peerage*). His wife, Maud, gave to the English queen 400 cows and a bull, all white, except their ears which were red (Holinshed, *Chronicle*, vol. ii, p. 301).

The mere fact that those Welsh cattle were white raises a presumption that they were not of originally wild stock.

White is, as a rule, an uncommon colour in animals, but probably only because it is so conspicuous. Whenever it becomes protective, as in the case of arctic animals, it appears freely enough. Under domestication, white or parti-coloured breeds are freely produced (Wallace, *Darwinism*, p. 230).

The leading authority on the subject of this article is Storer, who compiled a careful monograph on "Wild White Cattle," about the year 1875. It was published after his death and is now scarce.

* Cf. the surname de Brus or Bruce.

The principal English herds of that species are arranged below, under the headings of the counties in which they severally occurred.

NORTHUMBERLAND.

Chillingham. The steward's account book contained the following entry: " May, 1692. Beasts in the park, my lord's sixteen white wild beasts." (Quoted by Storer, p. 154).

Bewick, who published his *Quadrupeds* in 1790, gives a description of the breed.

Their colour is invariably white; muzzles black; the whole of the inside of the ear, and about one-third of the outside, from the tip downwards, red; horns white with black tips, very fine and bent upwards. Some of the bulls have a thin upright mane, about an inch and a half or two inches long.

He adds, in a footnote, some very interesting particulars:—

About twenty years since, there were a few at Chillingham with black ears, but the present park keeper destroyed them, since which period there has not been one with black ears. Tame cows are frequently turned out amongst the wild cattle at Chillingham. The calves produced by this means are invariably of the same colour with the wild breed, white with red ears, and retain a good deal of the fierceness of their sire (6th edition 1811, p. 39).

CUMBERLAND.

Inglewood Forest. In 1322, the king permitted Andrew de Harcla, earl of Carlisle, to take six wild cattle and six deer in Inglewood Forest (Bain, *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. iii, p. 145).

Naworth. Lord William Howard, in January, 1629-30, removed some wild cattle from Thornthwaite, Westmorland (an estate which he had lately purchased from Sir Henry Curwen) to Naworth Castle, Cumberland (*Surtees Society's Publications*, no. 68, p. 264). They seem to have been brought there in carts (*ibid.*, p. 271).

Sandford, in his MS. history of Cumberland, written about 1675, relates that there were formerly upon the moors near Naworth Castle white wild cattle, with ears only black.

DURHAM.

Bishop Auckland. Leland, writing *circ.* 1533, says: "There was a very ancient manor-place, belonging to the bishop of Durham, at Auckland. There is a fair park by the castle, having wild bulls and kine." (*Itinerary*, edit. Hearne, 3rd edon., vol. i, p. 73).

Sir William Brereton's MS. 1635 contains the following passage: "At Bishop Auckland, a dainty, stately park, wherein I saw wild bulls and kine which had two calves runners. There are about 20 wild beasts, all white; will not endure your approach, but if they be enraged or distressed, very violent and furious (*Cheetham Society's Publications*, vol. i, p. 80).

Barnard Castle. In 1626, Charles I made a grant of the demesne lands of Barnard Castle, the Broad park and the Colt park, together with all the deer and wild cattle contained in those parks (Hutchinson, *Durham*, vol. iii, p. 245).

LANCASHIRE.

Blackley. Leland writing in Henry VIII's reign, states that "wild bulls bred, in times past, at Blakele" (*Itinerary*, edit. Hearne, 3rd edon., vol. vii, p. 49). Blackley is now a suburb of Manchester.

Middleton Hall (near Blackley). Leigh, author of the *Natural History of Lancashire*, 1700, writes (Book ii, p. 3) "In a park, near Bury in Lancashire, are wild cattle, belonging to Sir Ralph Assheton, of Middleton. They have no horns." In 1765, Sir Harbord Harbord, afterwards Lord Suffield, removed the same herd to Gunton Park, Norfolk, where it became extinct about 1853. At

the last-mentioned period it is described as white, with black, or sometimes dark-brown ears, and without horns (Storer, p. 303).

YORKSHIRE.

Gisburne. A footnote in Bewick's *Quadrupeds* records: "At Gisburne, there are some perfectly white, except the inside of their ears, which are brown. They are without horns, very strong boned, but not high. They are said to have been originally brought from Whalley Abbey in Lancashire." Whitaker, who published his *History of Craven* in 1805, adds:

It is highly probable that the breed was kept up by the abbots of Whalley, in the "lord's park," and fell into the hands of the Asshetons, who acquired possession of that rich domain, soon after the Dissolution. Without horns, they are white, save the tips of their noses; which are black; rather mischievous, especially when guarding their young. They breed with tame cattle (3rd edon. 1878, p. 52).

In the copy of Whitaker's work contained in the library at Gisburne Park, the first Lord Ribblesdale has inscribed a note: "The ears and noses of this species of cattle are never black, but most usually red or brown" (quoted by Storer, p. 289). The herd became extinct about 1859 (*ibid.*, p. 286).

Burton Constable, near Hull. Bewick writes:

Those at Burton Constable were all destroyed by a distemper, a few years since. They varied slightly from those at Chillingham, having black ears and muzzles, and the tips of their tails of the same colour. They were also much larger, many of them weighing 60 stone, probably owing to the richness of the pasturage in Holderness, but generally attributed to the difference in kind between those with black and with red ears, the former of which they studiously endeavour to preserve.

Storer, in a schedule (p. 359) classes them as a hornless or polled variety.

CHESHIRE.

Lyme Park. Hansall (*Hist. Cheshire*, 1817) says: "In Lyme Park is a herd of upwards of 20 wild cattle, chiefly white with red ears. They have been in the park from time immemorial." The park was anciently parcel of Macclesfield forest. Storer considered (p. 253) that the Lyme herd, in size and shape of horns, more nearly resembled the urus than any other existing park herd.

Vale Royal, formerly an abbey. "Here was an ancient domesticated herd of white cattle, with red ears, now extinct" (Storer, p. III).

Somerford Park contains a domesticated herd of great antiquity, pure white, with black ears and without horns (Storer, p. 259). Somerford was in Maxwell forest.

STAFFORDSHIRE.

Chartley Park. The account book of the steward of Chartley contains the item: "1658, paid a moiety of the charge of hay for the wild beasts" (quoted by Storer, p. 220). Shaw writes (*Hist. Stafford*, 1798, vol. i, p. 92):

Chartley Park, near Stafford, is among the few places where the indigenous wild cattle are now to be found. Their colour is invariably white, muzzles and ears black, horns white, fine, tipped with black. Their native wildness appears with the first approach of men.

Chartley was on the border of Needwood Forest. The Chartley herd was purchased by the duke of Bedford, and removed to Woburn in 1905 (Millais, *op. cit.*, p. 198).

NOTTS.

Annesley. Lord Chaworth writes, in 1669, from that place, to the countess of Rutland:

I have made bold to present your ladyship a small taste of a white wild ox from my park, killed by my own hand. I had not presumed so much, but that I have heard my lord of Rutland say they were originally his, at Beskwood Park, from whence I had that breed (*Victoria Hist. Notts*, vol. i, p. 181).

Beskwood (now Bestwood) was in Sherwood Forest.

Wollaton. The ears and noses of the wild cattle preserved at Wollaton Hall, near Nottingham, were black (Bewick). An old inhabitant described them as white, with black noses and black ears. He did not recollect any with red ears. They had a very fine circlet of black round the eyes, were polled or without horns, and were known as the "old park breed." They became extinct in the first quarter of the nineteenth century (Storer, p. 269). Wollaton is on the verge of Sherwood Forest.

It is desirable to notice one of the Scottish herds, because it resembled the wild cattle of the adjoining county of Cumberland.

DUMFRIESSHIRE.

Drumlanrig. Pennant, in 1772, says: "These cattle are of a middle size, have very long legs, and the cows are fine horned. The orbits of the eyes and the tips of the noses are black" (*Tour*, part i, p. 124). Bewick remarks in 1790: "The breed at Drumlanrig Castle have black ears." They are described, from memory, in 1838, as being "all white, with the exception of the ears and muzzle, which were black, and without manes" (Storer, p. 328).

Storer arrived at the conclusion that the wild white cattle were indigenous to Britain and roamed at large in the royal forests. During the middle ages, many of the king's subjects, ecclesiastical and lay, were permitted to enclose great tracts of forest land with a pale, so as to form parks, into which the wild cattle, along with deer and boars were driven and therein preserved for many centuries in a quasi-wild condition. But recent authorities on natural history take a different view of the circumstances. Alston writes:—

The evidence appears overwhelmingly to prove that the modern park cattle are not wild survivors of the *urus*, but are the descendants of a race which had escaped from domestication, and

had lived a feral life, until they were enclosed in the parks and chases of the medieval magnates.

And Millais adds (*op. cit.* p. 187):—

The colour of these ancient herds is white, or yellowish white, but this has only been achieved artificially, by careful elimination of the black, brown and reddish calves, which have frequently appeared among them, and which prove that white is not the true colour of these animals. The white cattle of England and Scotland are undoubtedly the descendants of the semi-domesticated cattle of the Romans, Saxons or ancient Britons, which having been captured, or retained in certain parks, have, after centuries of isolation and selection, formed constant types.

There can be little doubt that the urus is ancestor, in a *very* remote degree, of several existing breeds of oxen. It has been suggested that races of mankind, which inhabited the Continent of Europe in early times, captured and tamed wild calves, and so introduced the urus strain into their domestic herds. One of our old Welsh types, the black Pembroke ox, seems to furnish a link (especially as regards the shape and curvature of its horns) between the urus and the semi-wild cattle of Chillingham. Moreover it has been observed that whenever the Pembroke ox exhibits a tendency to become white, its ears and muzzle still remain black, or very dark grey (*Encyclopædia Britannica, sub voce* Aurochs). It is therefore possible that the Park Cattle assumed their peculiar characteristics in Wales, and it is remarkable that the first mention of similar animals, white with red ears, occurs in that country (see *supra*).

At any rate, they are *semi-albinos*, a condition which is always the result of domestication, and one which cannot arise in a wild state. So one may regard them as the progeny of individuals belonging to a fancy breed, which escaped, in days of old, into the waste, and ran wild. Their conspicuous colour distinguished them from other forest strays, and they were deemed worthy of inclusion along with deer, in medieval parks, where their marked features have been carefully preserved.