

## Crocky's Memories of her veterinary work at the White House, Hadstock



From about 1950 until 1975, Jock Dawson, then a Veterinary Officer with the Min. of Ag., carried out research into infertility in dairy cows working at The White House. Cows were sent in for examination ending in post-mortem for most of them. They came from many herds and of all breeds, with some great characters among them. There was an old Friesian called Hussy; so quiet that you could take the bucket and stool out to her in the field, sit down and milk her and she would just stand until you had finished. On a halter, she walked along like a dog on a lead. Jasper Rootham at Lower Farm used his fields to fatten bullocks; when they had to be moved between fields, we would take Hussy along and open the gate; the bullocks came running and followed Hussy to the next field or to his barn with no trouble at all. An Ayrshire cow, named Darling, was very different! I fear we called her everything but Darling as she did her best to attack, with her long horns, anyone who came near her. Poor thing, she could not help it, but she was very dangerous to deal with. Luckily, one very nice Jersey cow, Crinoline, got in calf again and Jock bought her as a house cow. Crinoline taught me to milk. I found myself one Saturday evening with a barn full of cows needing feeding and Crinoline needing milking and only me on the premises, so I got the bucket and stool, sat down and got started. She stood like a rock where any other cow would have kicked me out of the barn; she looked round with a pained expression occasionally but endured to the end.

We had a nice little Guernsey in for a while; she would also lead like a dog, but she was an



escapologist. She used her horns to lift a gate off its hinges or lift out a fence post and would take herself for a walk; Crinoline went too. We fetched them back very easily from all round the parish. One day, Lettice and I tracked them up on to the aerodrome but could not follow them on the concrete runway. Olive Crawley drove by and stopped to ask what we were doing. She drove home, phoned the police and came back to fetch us as the cows had walked down to Park Farm in Chesterford. We took the Land Rover and Trailer and drove there. The farmer said he met them walking side by side down the track from the aerodrome, opened the gate into his little paddock, and they just walked in. He was amazed at how they came when called and let us halter them and just walk them up to and in the trailer. The Guernsey went soon after that and Crinoline never went walkabout again.

We usually had a young bull running with the cows; one in particular was called Felix; he loved having his head scratched and was very helpful. When Jock had to examine the cows, we went to the field and called "Felix" and he came running bringing all the cows with him into the pen. The bulls had to go when they got to about three years old as they can become dangerous then. I was taking one in the old lorry to Cambridge when, just past the old Four Went Ways roundabout, a young man thumbed a lift; the bull bellowed just then, and the young man hastily cancelled the request!

Jock also had a Dexter house cow called Bronx; her grand-daughter Mimi was a quarter Jersey and a bit lighter and taller than granny. We used to go to an archaeology course at Linton and the lecturer described Iron Age cattle as being short-legged, sturdy and black. Lettice said "I've got one of those at home". The lecturer came, surveyed Bronx from all angles and said "yes". This led to Bronx and Mimi being taught to plough for a BBC programme, but this is another story.

Soon after Mr. Higgs, the archaeology lecturer, had inspected Bronx, the BBC rang up asking Jock Dawson if he would take part in a farming experiment to be held in Wiltshire on the strip lynchets – fields, on the chalk hills terraced by early agriculture. Jock agreed and we started to teach Bronx (14- year- old Dexter) and her grand-daughter Mimi, to go in a yoke - just a cross bar with two pairs of bars to go over their heads and against their shoulders; there was a pole between them with pram wheels on the back, to which we could add logs to increase the weight pulled. It was the best we could do with the heavy clay soil here. Bronx loved it and came hurrying over as soon as we



**B**RONX and Mimi, two cows at Hadstock, near Saffron Walden, are being trained to pull an Iron Age plough. Miss Patricia Croxton-Smith leads them out for a training session with a yoke and bar. This training is part of an experiment being carried out by Dr. F. L. M. Dawson, of the White House, Hadstock, who is doing research on ancient agriculture. The cows are to pull a plough which only penetrates about three inches into the soil.



appeared. Mimi (quarter Jersey) was not so good and had to be persuaded to walk beside grandma - she was used to being a bit behind her. In September 1966 the two were loaded onto a lorry and delivered to Stoke Farm, Broadchalke, near Salisbury. The farmer, Mr. Thomas, was delighted when they walked down into his little stone-walled yard, with a barn for shelter, as they immediately started to eat the stinging nettles (Bronx's favourite). When the day came for filming, everyone was surprised by the huge crowds that turned up. More and more fields were turned into car parks. The BBC team, the archaeologists, the farming and the national press, and many locals had all brought their families for a sunny day out.

The cows were harnessed to a replica ard plough; just a beam between them from the yoke down to a piece of pointed wood covered by metal, with a handle for the ploughman to steer and hold the plough into the soil. The plough worked well and produced a good tilth about 4 inches deep. A weighted hawthorn bush was then dragged over as a harrow and corn was sown. A team of women (including me) tried ploughing; hard work as the ropes dug into our shoulders and we moved in a series of jerks as the plough dug in and then pulled free. Iron Age women were thought to have done this in poorer areas where they could not afford cattle.

Pits were dug in the chalk, lined with wickerwork, and were filled with corn, covered by more wickerwork and clay. When opened the next year, the top and edge few inches had got mouldy, but the rest had stored well and was used for animal fodder and to sow another crop (germination was good). It was a very successful experiment. The young daughter of the archaeologist in charge offered the cows a handful of dairy nuts: cows do not usually take titbits from the hand and Mimi did not but Bronx thought it a marvellous idea and got spoilt by everyone. Once home again, every time we went into her field, Bronx marched up and stuck a very rough tongue into our pockets; we dared not go in without dairy nuts or oats for her.

The television programme was duly transmitted, and articles appeared in The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Guardian, The Field, Farmers Weekly etc. as well as the local press. The Butser Iron Age Camp was founded a few years later.

