



# The True Roast Beef of Old England

If you are thinking of a joint of beef as a treat for Christmas forget the big black beasts from Scotland that appear on our supermarket shelves in far larger quantity than are ever actually bred on our farms. Forget the breed that has been reared to conform to the modern day belief that fat is bad, lean is good. When you are looking for a really superb joint with lots of flavour it is worth seeking out Hereford beef.

Our native Hereford is a ubiquitous breed. Their distinctive markings stand out in the arctic snows of Finland or they can endure the heat of the Northern Transvaal. They are found throughout Europe, Scandinavia and as far afield as Israel and Japan. They are prolific in the outback of Australia and make up the largest percentage of registered cows in the high country of New Zealand.

Renowned throughout the world for their ability as foraging cattle, their diet consists mainly of grass and grass products and they can thrive on the poorest of farmland. The export trade began from the United Kingdom in 1817, first to Kentucky then spreading across the United States and Canada through Mexico to the great beef-raising countries of South America.

It is generally agreed that the Hereford was founded on the draught ox descended from the small red cattle of Roman Briton crossed with a large Welsh breed once numerous along the border of England and Wales. By the early 1700's the native cattle of Hereford and the surrounding area were an odd mix of colour combinations called 'mottles' or 'pigeons'. The 'mottles' were mainly dark red all over, some with brindle in their coats, and many with white spots or splotches on their faces. In contrast the 'pigeons', as their name describes, were bluegrey in colour. Cattle art of that day can be deceiving, it often depicts large heavy beasts of varying colours, often painted to flatter the animal as in the farmer's eye big was beautiful and the artist's bill was paid more readily.

One of the great assets of the strain today is the ability to put a white face on any crossbred, regardless of breed in the first generation. This attribute, called the 'Whiteface Advantage' is down mainly to one family of breeders, in the 18th century. The distinguishing marks were developed by a Hereford farmer, Benjamin Tomkins. Breeders

were always trying to improve their herds and when his father left young Benjamin, 'Silver', a beautiful red heifer with a silver head, he was determined to retain the trait. With the passing of time he discovered that he could not retain the coat colour in her offspring, regardless of the sires she was put to all her calves reverted to a mottle colour. It is not known whether it was by accident or intent but one day he mated a mottled son of Silver over one of her mottled daughters and was thrilled at the birth of a bull calf with the same colouring as the grand dam's unique coat. By the end of the 18th century the white face characteristic of the modern breed was well established. The modern colour was stabilised during the 19th century but never at the cost of the breeds other excellent qualities. Even on the poorest land the breed has a high food conversion rate. It is also renowned for ease of calving and an has an excellent temperament. Known for their longevity, many females live and produce calves beyond the age of 15 years. Bulls are capable of remaining profitable at stud to the age of 12 or more. Many breeders keep their elderly cattle until they die of natural causes and the more sentimental of them, bury them on their farms.

The Hereford Herd Book Society, founded in 1878 by Mr J H Arkwright of Hampton Court, Herefordshire, was under the patronage of Queen Victoria. The Herd Book has been closed since 1886 to any animal whose sire or dam had not been entered previously. So, for over 120 years, the purity of the breed has remained intact.

Because of the Hereford's performance as a crossing sire on commercial cattle and indigenous breeds throughout the world the impact of the beast on world beef production has been enormous. This widespread popularity has only come about because farmers, ranchers and feeders have found the Hereford to be consistently profitable under a wide range of climates and conditions. More than five million pedigree Herefords exist in over 50 countries. Their success has been spectacular and the Hereford has become the cornerstone of the beef economy in all the cattle-raising countries of the world. The Hereford beef that is enjoyed throughout the world has a good lean to fat ratio with excellent marbling giving a flavour that is second to none. The end product today offers the



*Silver - The mother of the Hereford Breed*



*Champion of English Beef*

**“Any of us would kill a cow, rather than not have beef”**

**Samuel Johnson (1709-1784)**

*by Pam Brunning*

*Editor Food & Wine*

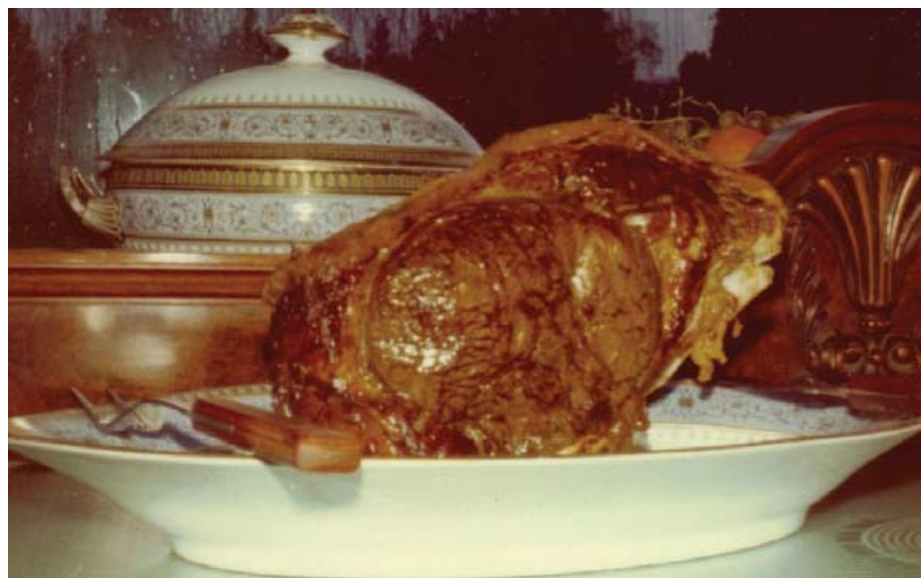
*International Wine & Food Society*

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housewife and res-taurateur alike, superb quality beef. Hereford beef from Ireland came out on top in a steak test carried out by a German food magazine. Steaks from eight major beef producing countries were tasted by an expert panel of judges evaluating flavour, tenderness and texture, as well as visual appearance. The Irish rib eye steak was chosen as the clear winner, ahead of the anticipated favourite, New Zealand Wagyu (kobe) beef, which sells for up to €150 kg. Other competitors included Argentinean Angus steak, Angus fillet from US, Florentine steak from Italy, Charolais fillet from France, bison from the US and German Simmental. They were all eclipsed by the Hereford.

Scientists at the University of Bristol have proved that beasts fed grass have a better meat colour, prolonged shelf-life and increased levels of omega-3, an essential fatty acid.

When an animal is first slaughtered the meat is generally quite tender. During the first 12 to 24 hours the meat will toughen as the muscle fibers shorten and enzymes in the meat attack the structural proteins and make the meat tough, a process called "postmortem proteolysis", resulting in slow and natural tenderization. The enzyme action has the additional effect of improving and strengthening the flavor of the beef, due to the breakdown of proteins into amino acids. Aging is generally done between 34° and 38° F to inhibit bacteria and mould growth. Beef can be aged for anything up to six weeks but because of the considerable weight loss it is often only hung for up to three weeks. This dry aging results in a loss of weight over time due to water evaporation and surface mould (which must be trimmed off), but it greatly concentrates the flavor of the meat. Sometimes the process can be taken to extremes. Food writer Harold McGee reports, "In the 19th century, beef joints would be held until the outside was literally rot-ten; the French called this mortification."



Food & Wine is the quarterly journal of the European & African Committee (EAC) of the International Wine & Food Society. The Society was formed, in London in 1933 by wine writer André L. Simon and bibliophile A. J. Symons. Today there are nearly 7,000 members in 133 branches worldwide, 18 of which are in the UK. André's ambition was to produce a publication to bring to members all that was finest in gastronomy.

The Society is divided into three areas, the EAC, the Asian Pacific Zone and the Americas. Members, who enrol through their local branch or by contacting the Membership Registrar, are welcome to attend events in branches throughout the world.

Events encompass all aspects of food and wine appreciation and education, visits to food manufacturing plants and vineyards, cooking demonstrations, tastings, lunches and dinners. All types of restaurant are patronised, often at very advantageous rates, and always with André Simon's words in mind, "The purpose of the Society is to bring together and serve all who believe that a right understanding of good food and wine is an essential part of personal contentment and health and that an intelligent approach to the pleasures and problems of the table offers far greater rewards than mere satisfaction of appetites."

The Society supports catering colleges and offers scholarships to young chefs. It also encourages the education of young people in the matching of wine and food and in the sensible consumption of food and alcoholic beverages.

Annual membership is £52 joint, £40 single. Under 36, £26 joint, £20 single.

Pam Brunning, Editor.

For more details please contact:

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It is important that animals are slaughtered locally in small-scale operations minimising trauma. This is important as stress directly affects meat quality by releasing chemicals which in turn raise the pH within the beef. A high pH causes the meat to be dry, dark and firm, affecting both tenderness and flavour.



A Woman with a Mission

Dispatches from the Fairest Cape

The True Roast Beef of Old England

If your Sunday roast has been looked after as well after slaughter as your Hereford beast has before slaughter, with several hundred years of stockmanship behind it, you will be enjoying some of the world's finest beef no matter what continent it was reared on. All that remains is for your joint to be cooked right.

The recessive character, red coat, is easily fixed by mating red with red. For a dominant character such as white face, you need to distinguish the heterozygote (one gene for white, one for non-white) from the dominant homozygote (two copies of the gene for white). This is easily done by progeny testing. When crossed to the recessive homozygote (non-white face), all offspring will have white faces if the white-faced parent is homozygous, but if the white-faced parent is heterozygous, both white- and non-white faced progeny will be produced, in about a 1:1 ratio. Once you have dominant homozygotes of each sex, you mate them and the character is fixed.

**Dr Bernard Lamb, Emeritus Reader in Genetics at Imperial College London.**