



CELEBRATING A TRUE CENTENARY AT **BRANCHAL**

One of only two herds to have been in continuous ownership since the foundation of the Herd Book in 1909, the Branchal herd was set up late in the Nineteenth Century by John Telfer. Sarah Liddle went to meet the current owners, James and Maureen Telfer, to find out what has happened to the herd over those 100 years

Since 1897, cows have been milked every day at High Branchal, about 10 miles from Glasgow in West Scotland. Set up by John Telfer, it makes the *Branchal* herd, which was registered pedigree in 1909, a massive part of the Society's history. It's run now by John's great grandson James Telfer, with help from his wife Maureen and two sons, Andrew and Calum, who see themselves as having a custodial role in maintaining and continuing the herd that has remained in the family for a century.

It was an incredibly interesting opportunity to visit the only family run, black and white pedigree herd listed in Volume 1 of the Herd Book. It is also rewarding to hear the family say that pedigree status

has been invaluable to the herd's continued existence, as the higher value of pedigree stock has enabled the herd to be split many times through the generations to establish siblings on other farms. In addition someone has moved forward each time, continuing to milk cows under the *Branchal* prefix at High Branchal. To date, the union of John Telfer with Margaret Gibb has led to connections with 12 other pedigree herds in Scotland at one time or another; the *Priestside, Craigbet, Craighburn, Craiglea, Pittendriech, Blyth, Barnshake, Craigends, Bellfield, Halket, Raith* and *Auchingree* herds.

James' father, Jim, is still involved on the farm, feeding calves each afternoon and he remembers that his father said a Society panel came to the farm to inspect cattle for inclusion

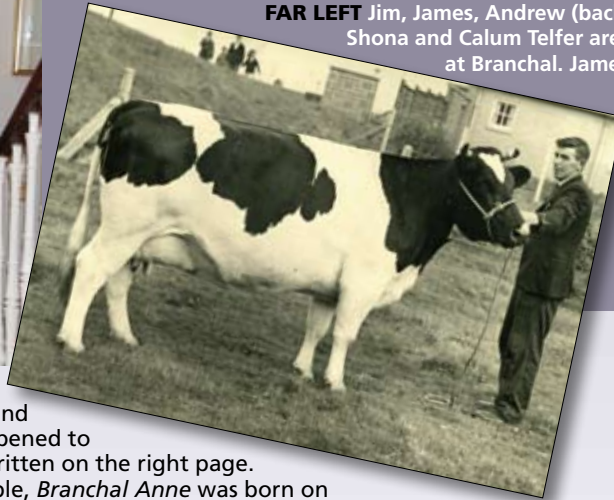
TOP LEFT Born in 1944, Branchal Jean Dixie won 12 Championships for the Telfers in the 1940s and 1950s.

BELOW LEFT & RIGHT High Branchal in Renfrewshire, home of the Branchal herd for 100 years.





FAR LEFT Jim, James, Andrew (back row l-r) and Maureen, Shona and Calum Telfer are the current custodians at Branchal. James holds Volume I of the Herd Book.



LEFT Over 550 Babette descendants of Neasham Jan Babette have been registered since her birth in 1958.

in the first Herd Book, which resulted in a simple acceptance or not. Over the decades, the herd has been decimated by disease. In 1938, it numbered 30 cows until TB struck, leaving only eight cows to re-establish the herd. Thirty years later and Brucellosis was a further blight; the Telfers have always considered themselves relatively progressive and were one of the first herds in Renfrewshire to be classed as Brucellosis free after surrendering their herd, which unfortunately means none of the families in the herd today originate from the 1909 registrations. However, 12 animals were bought from Paisley to help rebuild the herd at this time and many of the current families go back to these purchases.

It is fascinating to look at beautifully hand scripted, detailed records from the early part of the century which were kept meticulously at High Branchal. Looking back at an animal register for example, there is name, herd book number and other animal details on the left hand page, while all her

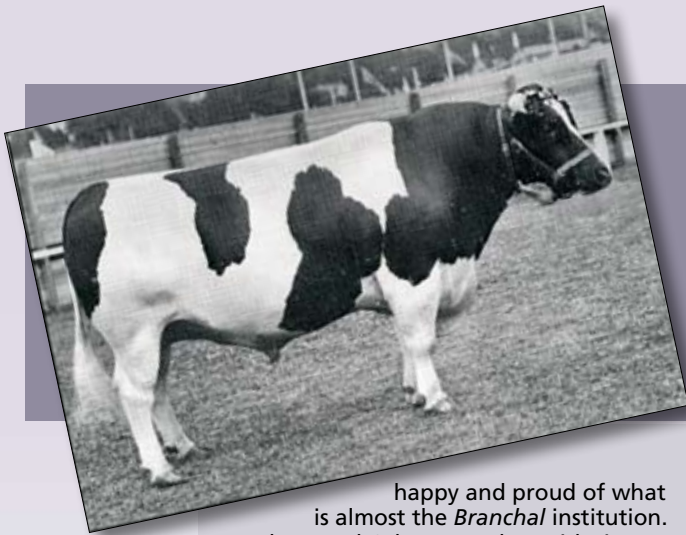
progeny and what happened to them is written on the right page.

For example, *Branchal Anne* was born on 28 March 1909; she had three daughters all by *Colton Performer*, while one of these born on 20 May 1915 was sold in October 1920 for £350. The records themselves would make many members envious of the history they hold.

The *Branchal* herd was split in 1954 when James Telfer Snr remained at Branchal while half the stock (25 cows) moved with his brother John to form the base of the *Halket* herd. James and Elizabeth then had three sons themselves. Eldest son Colin left the farm in 1989 with a third of everything to establish the *Raith* herd near Fife, which is still in operation today. Then youngest brother Iain went off in 1998 to register the *Auchingree* herd, with half of the herd. Iain sold his herd in 2003, with a top price of 3,200gns and a 1,300gns average and is now a butcher with a farm shop.

During the herd's evolution, the Telfers have aimed to move forward all the time. *Branchal* installed one of the first parlours in Scotland in 1963, a 6/12 Gascoigne, followed by a 20/20 De Laval in 1980. They were one of the first farms to make silage - remarked on by many as, 'dung - it'll never take off!' Later splits of the herd hampered progress, not only due to the stock numbers and shortage of replacements but also the need to buy quota which made the last couple of splits seem all the harder. However, despite the ups and downs the generations of Telfers have shared, they are





happy and proud of what is almost the *Branchal* institution.

Andrew and Calum together with sister Shona are now three of very few dairy farmers in the local Young Farmers Club. There used to be 17 dairy farms in the area while now there is only three or four. At *Branchal* though, the next generation is keen, in fact almost desperate (an enthusiastic desperation), to take *Branchal* forward for the foreseeable future.

Cattle breeding has always been an instrumental part of the business. Going back to 1909, the first daughters registered at *Branchal* were by a bull called *Able*, a Dutch bull who was imported by a friend of James' great grandfather, and crossed onto the Ayrshires he worked particularly well. Delving back in time, we hear stories from James Snr of cows being walked miles and moved larger distances on trains merely to be served by a bull of repute. It also explains in part why the auction at Paisley (whose first lot sold was a *Branchal* cow) was located next to the railway station.

Two of the most influential animals in the herd are considered to be *Branchal Jean Dixie* and *Neasham Jan Babette*. Born in December 1944, *Dixie* was imported from Canada in 1946. Sired by *Dixie Lad Lancelot* and out of *Spruceview Glenda Pabst*, she had a coveted show career including 12 championships. She was Reserve Supreme Champion at the 1950 Royal Highland, at that time held at Paisley.

Babette was born in 1958 and had nine heifer calves herself as well as being Supreme Champion at Loch Lomond Show. The *Babettes* have always been prolific heifer breeders, accounting for the registration over 550 *Babettes* in numerous Telfer herds over the last fifty years.

The *Parkhouse* herd of Tom Allen also shaped the *Branchal* herd, with many herd sires purchased from Tom, a good friend of James Snr. The *Anna* family in particular influenced *Branchal* in the 1960s and originate from *Parkhouse*. Bulls such as *Parkhouse Advance Galore* are also worth a chapter in the *Branchal* story, because heifers by him sold in 1964 and 1965 made between 800 and 850gns. *Parkhouse Gregor* followed on from this and he is really the first sire James remembers. He was by *Terling Highwayman*, from the *Anna* family again, being out of *Parkhouse Anna 123*. Through the 1970s, *Gregor* was used alongside the 1970 born *Lawthorn Circassian* who was bred by Robert Laird.

In the 1980s, a trip to the *Ullswater* herd made James Snr change

FARM FACTS

- Herd moved to High Branchal, Renfrewshire, Scotland in 1897
- Branchal herd recorded in Volume 1 of the Herd Book
- Herd is 220 cows with 320 followers
- Now run by fifth generation, James Telfer, wife Maureen with help from sons Andrew and Calum
- Herd average is 8,800 kg at 3.91% fat and 3.34% protein
- Bulls selected for type, longevity and reliability, currently using Loader and sexed Lucente
- Ration includes grass silage, wholecrop wheat, Supergrains, Intermix meal and Challenger (both 18% from BOCM Pauls)
- Staffing includes James, Maureen, Andrew, Calum and two part time milkers
- Farm extends to 870 acres, and also includes 300 North Country Cheviot ewes
- Only half the herd currently classified, including 5 EX and 37 VG

ABOVE LEFT In the 1930s, Dutch breeding illustrated by *Branchal Ver Klaske* shaped the herd.

BELOW Current *Branchal* herd members include the cow on the right, *Branchal Babette 451*, an EX90 *Jurnal* daughter now in her fourth lactation.

direction towards Holstein. In the early '80s, *Ullswater Royal Bandit* was bought, a wise investment for a bull from the *Beatexus* family who subsequently went into AI with the SMMB. The herd was then bred to Holsteins, in particular sons of *Elevation*. AI has been used for many years alongside a stock bull, which evolved from an *Ullswater* sire to *Hunday Pride 3* from the *Princess* family. Of late, *Annandale* sires have been popular as James thinks they have put in size but have kept the type and certainly provide milk. *Annanadale Perfection* and *Chairman* are examples of bulls purchased for *Branchal* from the *Armour* family, while the latest purchases have been *Annandale Flautist* (*Capri x Idellas*) and *Kaiser* (*Bradley x*





Dockenflat Kims). The Telfers have also kept an odd homebred bull and at the moment like the daughters calving by *Branchal Lord Lily*.

The herd has always had a lot of Friesian blood in it, and currently most animals in the herd run at 60-70% Holstein. For the future, the Telfers are concerned that the pure British Friesian perhaps lacks diversity in its gene pool as well as limited proofs, and current bull selection has an emphasis on high reliability bulls. When James was building up numbers again post the 1998 split, he had 70 cows which he wanted to last eight to ten lactations and this was his last foray into pure Friesians.

Meanwhile, *Elite Mountain Donor* has had the most influence on the current herd, he has bred well over the entire herd, and the Australian sire has around 70,000 daughters in his country of origin - reliability indeed. Since then, *Moet Lookout* is a popular sire as he has straightened up pure Friesians, adding milk and dairyness. Although the herd was not classified for a period extending to nearly 20 years, scoring was carried out in September and will now see the remainder of the herd scored at the next visit.

Current breeding is focused on the use of sexed semen, which James considers a way forward to produce milk. He has used sexed semen for the last three years, and will calve *Galaxy Speed* heifers soon. The impetus was the need to get females on the ground to increase numbers, and he has had in the region of 60% conception rate. *Shaker, Ron, Lucente, Phil* and *Dictator* have all been used. Breeding



ABOVE LEFT Heifer rearing in a purpose-built shed for 110 head.

ABOVE RIGHT Branchal cattle are characterised by width, power and hardness.

LEFT Volume 2 of the Herd Book lists a number of Branchal cattle.

considerations are based on chest and rump width; cattle need to be hardy to survive and, with the farm located where it is, cattle can have an eight month winter. Holsteins have contributed to a lack in milk quality so now positive fat and protein deviations are prerequisites, as well as good feet and legs as the Telfers do their own foot trimming.

Moving forward, the addition of a new shed to house 110 cubicles for heifer rearing has enabled replacements to be reared in an environment where they are easier to work with and manage - the facilities have yokes, for example, which aids AI work. This improved environment is delivering a better and slightly younger fresh heifer to enter the herd. There are 52 heifers to calve in the summer, which will form the core of 50 head to be sold by Harrison & Hetherington at Carlisle in August, celebrating 100 years of *Branchal*. The 28-year-old parlour was replaced by a 24/24 Westfalia herringbone in 2007 and offers the capacity for further expansion.

The past is important to *Branchal*, and something of which they are justifiably proud, the present is James and sons Andrew and Calum constantly swapping jobs and responsibilities on the farm, while accepting the value of pedigree registration, classification, and the ability of technology to merge records (such as 1stop). This is working with cows that are hardy, and have bulk and strength with a capacity to milk. The future? Well maybe a bi-centenary celebration in 2109 if the current Telfer family have anything to do with it.



TOP ABOVE James' grandparents, Margaret and John, who started the Branchal legacy.

ABOVE The 24/24 Westfalia herringbone installed in 2007 milks the 200 plus herd today.