

'THE THEORY WAS SUCCESSFUL'

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOAT MEN OF SOUTH ARMAGH TO A VICTORIAN GOAT REVIVAL IN ENGLAND

RAYMOND WERNER, NOVEMBER, 2017

OLD IRISH GOAT SOCIETY

INTRODUCTION

The exploration of the history behind the droving herds of Old Irish goats that became an annual event in the British Isles from Victorian times onwards had its roots in English references. These described the way in which large travelling herds landed at varying ports, then fanned out all over the Hebrides, Southern Scotland, England and Wales; the drovers selling both milk and goats along their well-trodden routes. Finally, they would auction the remaining animals before returning home. Such was the effect that these drovers had on village and market town life, that it became a tradition in Northern England that the appearance of these travelling herds- with their drovers colourfully advertising their wares and shooting great jets of freshened milk into the air- became associated with the arrival of spring itself. Effectively, they became the 'harbingers of spring'.

From the English perspective, it was assumed that these drovers came from various parts of Ireland, and that they were everyday stockmen. It was only when an opportunity arose to continue the research in Ireland that the magnitude of the real story behind these drovers became apparent. They came, in point of fact, from a single community in South Armagh, were 'pahveeing', meaning sellers of cloth and scrap, long before they took to trading in goats, and obtained their stock from afar afield as the west coast of Ireland ever before they embarked for the British Isles.

The unfolding story of the 'Goat men of South Armagh', and their importance to the overall history of goat keeping in England, would never have emerged had Michael J. Murphy not filled in the vital gaps that made this possible. As a local historian, he recorded how the goat fitted in to community life in the Slieve Gullion area, and, importantly, he also told the story of the goat men. In fact his very first broadcast on the BBC, which took place in 1937, was entitled 'The Goat Men of South Armagh. This talk was fascinating beyond words, and opened the door to an understanding of the true significance of Irish droving in relation to not only the Victorian goat in England generally, but the vital part that these traders in goats played in the Victorian Goat Revival of the 1870's.

The real stuff of history is grounded in the everyday lives of people and communities, but sadly is not always recorded. Michael J. Murphy redressed this oft-times neglect in relation to Dromintee and its people, and the goat men he wrote about also opened the door to a better understanding of a fascinating aspect of the story of Victorian goatkeeping. So much so, in fact, that aspects of this story are so directly linked to Slieve Gullion's present-day community that individuals may see, in the faces of Victorian photographs of goat men, echoes of their own family members.

BACKCLOTH: A QUIET WILTSHIRE LANE IN 1889



This late Victorian photograph is a story told in three parts. To the fore, is a herd of goats. Some are idling, and others are browsing the roadside hedges. It may be the first part of the day or early evening, but whatever the time, the goats are manifestly Old Irish. They may have been acquired as far afield in Ireland as Galway or Mayo, and they are a part of a travelling herd.





The second part of the story is the man in the midst of the goats. He is a drover.... A goat man and thus a goat man from South Armagh. He has walked his goats from a landing point on the west coast of Wales, driven them through Cardigan, and is most likely heading for Kent.

The third part of the story centres on the man in the distance. He is on a tricycle, an early Victorian invention, and he is hurtling towards the drover and his goats at what was then a great speed. In fact we have a contrast here in that the goat man has been walking his charges along country lanes just like the one in the picture for some for weeks, and at a leisurely pace of around two miles an hour, whereas this apparition is closing in on them at around twelve miles an hour: this being the speed of a trotting horse.



What we are witnessing is the beginning of a clash of cultures, the goat man having come from a 'world' in which the goat was an everyday essential, whereas, and by complete contrast, it is perfectly possible that the Englishman on his tricycle had never, or hardly ever, seen a goat.

If this be the case, then his first experience of a goat would involve an Old Irish goat travelling herd.

This, then, sets the scene for a hitherto untold story: the vital part that the goat men of South Armagh played in reinstating the role of the goat in England.



To set the scene, we firstly will look at the popularity of the goat in Nineteenth Century Ireland. This will contrast with the scarcity and unpopularity of the goat in England at this time. We will then move on to consider the role of the goat men in awakening an interest in goats in Victorian times; following on from which we will unravel the vital part that the goat men of South Armagh played in the Victorian Goat Revival of the 1870's. Finally, the goat men's lasting legacy will be reviewed.

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GOAT TO IRISH HISTORY

The role of the goat throughout Irish history has been of vital importance. It arrived as a herding animal, and quickly became established as an uncomplaining multi-purpose goat that was virtually predator-proof. It could subsist on rough browse, and under harsh conditions, that did not suit either the cow or the sheep.

It continued as an essential part of the **Celtic** farmstead, giving not only milk but hair, fat, horn and hoof for everyday essentials.

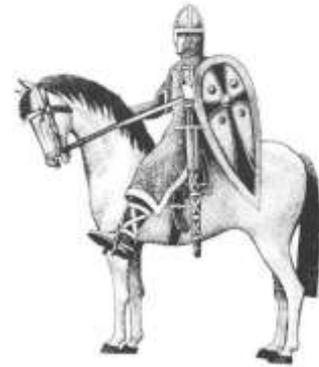




When the **Vikings** arrived, they built townships, and the goat was expected to adapt to a cramped and unhealthy environment in which they were treated as a useful dairy animal.

When the **Normans** arrived, the husbandry practice as it related to the goat turned full circle,

for having originated as a herding animal, then gone through phases of being a farmyard, then town, goat, it metamorphosed back into being a herding animal again, and this due to a centred system that held resources in common. This applied to woods and pasture as much as fishing, and the goat was again able to take advantage of the large areas of wood, scrub, waste and marginal land that characterised village life under a feudal system.



As time went on, this practice continued by way of 'commonage', along with the goat being the little survival tactic that stood at the cottage door, as well as run loose on the fields to keep the cattle healthy.

By the Nineteenth Century, then, the Old Irish goat was firmly entrenched in the tradition and day to day lives of Ireland's rural communities, it being said that it was highly prized for the virtues of its milk and contributed materially to the welfare of the Irish peasant. No wonder then that large numbers were bred annually, the livestock census of 1881 suggesting that Ireland harboured 266,553 goats, of which 74,163 were domiciled in Ulster alone.



WHAT OF ENGLAND AT THIS TIME?

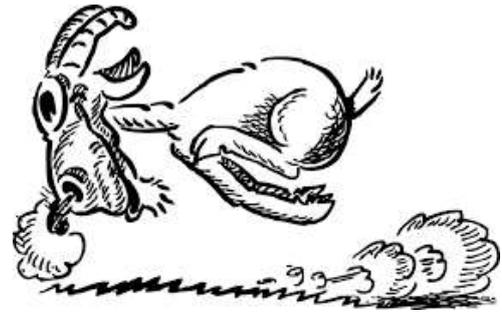
Interestingly, goat numbers were known in terms of an annual census for 21 of the 23 countries across Europe at this time, the two countries that didn't have a clue being Denmark and England.

Why then, could France, by way of example, know that they had 1,794,837 goats in 1881, whereas England had absolutely no idea what their goat population was? The answer is quite straightforward, and relates to the extent to which the goat was valued. In France, as in Ireland, it was integral to the rural economy, whereas in England the goat was generally despised, both in terms of the animal itself and its milk. The farmer thought of it as being destructive, and it was uncommon enough for many people to have never seen one.

Typical comments of the time, as published in The Field Magazine for 1861, make the point adequately. In one review, the magazine wrote of 'the well-known evils of introducing goats into the

country, whilst in another, it was emphasized that ‘few could nowadays venture to harbour (unless confined) such mischievous and dangerous (near roads) animals’.

To all intents and purposes, the little Old English goat had virtually become public enemy number one!



So here we have a stunning contrast: in Ireland, the goat was common, popular, absolutely necessary, and highly prized; whereas in England, a breed that was virtually the same in appearance and productivity was disliked, being thought of as mischievous, smelly, destructive, hard work and unpleasant, and with a product that was undrinkable to boot.

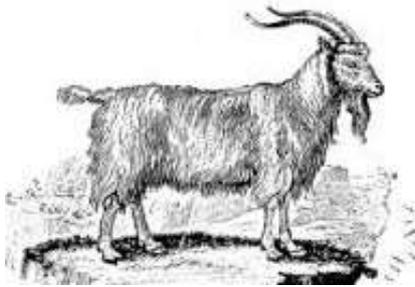
A STEP BACK IN TIME

Given the foregoing, we need to take a step back in time to understand how it was that the Old English goat could have started out as being equally useful and popular as the Old Irish goat, and then fallen from grace to the extent that it was entirely side-lined in mainstream agricultural practice and ignored by the community that most needed it: the cottager and labourer.

As illustrated below, the ancient landrace goat breeds of Ireland and England had a common origin and are virtually identical phenotypically. On the left is Ned, the main stud goat of the Old Irish Goat Society’s attempts to save the breed in Ireland, whilst on the right is Edward, the stud goat of The Cheviot Landrace Goat Research and Preservation Society, he being the foundation male of a similar attempt to save the Old English goat



As mentioned previously, the Old English goat had a parallel history to that of the Old Irish goat until recently, being firstly a herding goat, then a Celtic farmyard animal, following which it was a Viking town goat, being kept in Norse York in exactly the same way as it was kept in Norse Dublin. However, and as with the Old Irish goat, its heyday was under the Medieval Manorial system



Because we have grown accustomed to the idea that before mechanization in farming blossomed during the Agrarian Revolution, it was the horse that pulled the plough, the cow that gave the milk, and the sheep that was sheared for its wool, it is little understood that during the early Middle Ages, the sheep was the main milker, the horse was ridden or pulled carts, and the cow was kept to breed plough oxen.



This meant that the goat was ideally placed within the village economy, for the sheep gave between 7 and 12 gallons of milk in a lactation, the cow gave between 140 and 200, whilst the goat gave not less than 70 gallons, and potentially much more. This meant that the dairy product of one goat was equal to that of between 6 and 10 sheep, which of itself was compelling. But add to this the fact that sheep needed good grazing, and to be kept near to the settlement in relation to potential theft, whereas the goat was hardy, uncomplaining, able to subsist on rough fare and almost predator-proof as well as being multi-purpose, its popularity was assured in terms of being an independent herding animal and a mainstay of milk production.

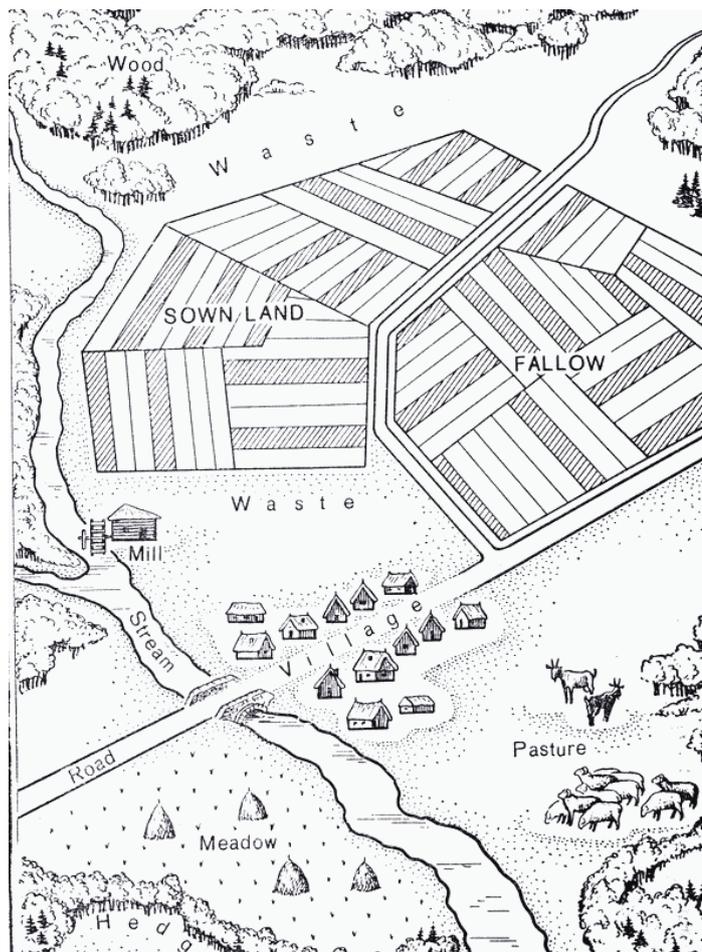


Just where the goat fitted into the manorial system is illustrated by an example from the Domesday Book (1086), and as it pertains to the village of Lamarsh, in the county of Essex:

Lamarsh, Essex. 2 ploughs; 8 smallholders; woodland for 70 pigs (54 pigs kept); 7 cobs and 5 foals; 10 cows and 8 calves; 20 sheep; 60 goats; 6 beehives.

Here we see that the maintaining of 10 cows and 8 calves were associated with '2 ploughs', meaning the maintenance of not less than 8 plough oxen. Horses were kept as well, and bred on the manor. Their role is summarised by terms such as 'harness', 'riding' and 'pack'. The ratio of pigs to woodland acreage was calculated, and bees were important. However, and in terms of ruminants, the manor held 6 goats for every cow, and 1 sheep for every 3 goats, an indication of the importance of the goat.

Just why the goat thrived under this system is illustrated by the attending map of a typical mediaeval manor. The 3 large and commonly held fields were divided into strips, and each villager had a quota that was scattered across these to ensure an equal share of the better land. But this implied dividing bulks that were left unattended, and a useful browsing ground for stock in the autumn. Also, there was waste and wood, and a potential for grazing the meadow after the hay had been brought in. Overall, then, a significant percentage of a manor was less suitable for cattle and sheep than for goats, the critical factors being the fact that the goat was a natural browser whereas the sheep and cow are basically grazers, whilst the rough hinterland was where livestock was vulnerable, but less so in the case of the goat.



The only real set-back for the goat in terms of the landscape was the Royal Forests, these not universally being treed, nevertheless. Royal forests were, in essence, the private hunting grounds of royalty and nobility, the chase of the deer being the main attraction. There was at this time an entrenched belief that deer abhorred the scent of the goat, and if this was detected, they would quickly vacate the area. This meant that the goat became associated with the potential ruination of a good day's hunting, and for this reason goats were banned from royal forests.

The nobility still appreciated the product of the goat, even so, it being recorded, by way of example, that on the Berkeley Estates during the reign of Edward III, upwards of 300 kids were eaten at the Lord's table annually. In fact one Medieval writer summarised the worthiness of kid meat at this time when he wrote that 'Young kyddes fleshe is praised above all other- although it is somewhat dry'. Another comment was that kid meat equalled that of chicken, although the flesh of adult goats was not so highly praised!

The nobility also maintained goat stock in their castles, an indication of its milking uses. The Medieval castle was a mini society within itself that maintained a community of people with a range of skills and trades, and which needed feeding. Within this enclosed way of life, the goat provided dairy products, hair, horn, hide, fat and meat. To the left is a representation of Baynard's Castle in London, and the present writer was fortunate enough to work on the goat remains that were unearthed there. Osteologically, they were in keeping with the Old English goat, and goat remains in keeping with the caulking of goats in Medieval London tell the same story.

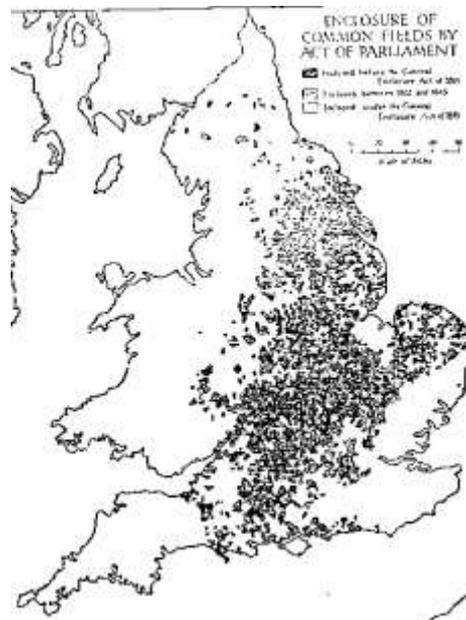


What we have, then, is a picture of just how indispensable the Old English goat was to Medieval life, be it on the manor, within the castle walls or in town life. If we fast forward to the early Nineteenth Century, the story is a different one altogether, and we have to ask ourselves what happened in the intervening centuries to alter the landscape with regard to its popularity.

What it comes down to is a double blow to how goatkeeping was thought of. Firstly, came enclosure, followed by the Agrarian Revolution. Quite simply, the way in which the goat was thought of in England couldn't survive either event.

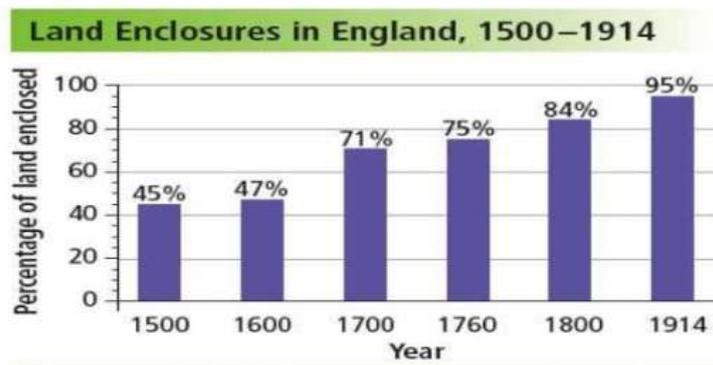
THE EFFECTS OF ENCLOSURE

The map to the right gives us an indication of just how all-embracing the manorial system was in Medieval England. It affected Yorkshire down to the midlands, and then onwards to central and southern England, embracing much of East Anglia on the way. To the extreme north, the Old English goat was herded, this often involving a shieling system that was similar to the transhumance system in Wales. In both regions, the livestock was taken to higher land for the summer, but brought back down for sheltering in the winter. It was common practice for goats to escape roundups or to be simply left to fend for themselves during the bad weather, and this has echoes of the comment of Michael J. Murphy that on Slieve Gullion, the feral herds originated from kids that were not rounded up during the cycle of commonage that saw the goats 'up for the summer and down for the winter'.



The other regions of England where the manorial system did not thrive was the extreme south-west (West Country) and the extreme south-east. In the former case, the Celtic system of small isolated farmsteads persisted- field dividers tending to be stone walls rather than hedging- and the goat thrived as a farm and small herding animal. In the South-East, the land wasn't always suitable for a manorial system associated with flat arable land, the North Weald and South Downs being upland, and much of the area forested. The goat there helped to maintain the heathland, even so.

As the Middle Ages drew to a close, a creeping enclosure movement was feeling its effects, with only a little over half the land being open field when Henry VII was setting the scene for the Tudor Period. By 1700, enclosed land accounted for nearly three-quarters of the landscape, this edging upwards to 95% by the outbreak of the First World War.



This period of rural change was marked by both a reduction in common land where goats could be grazed, and a rise in a class of independent yeoman farmer based on a farmhouse surrounded by hedged-in fields. This process was underway in the 16th Century, and accelerated in the 18th Century.



We are now dealing with a breed in total retreat: a prejudice against it having developed across the whole class system. On aristocratic estates, there was a perceived need to protect their ornamental gardens, hedges and woodland, whilst the independent farmer was comfortable with dairy herds and flocks of sheep contained within hedgerows, but was haunted by the spectre of a 'destructive' browsing goat.

At the bottom of the pile was the landless labourer and the dispossessed cottager, both of whom had traditionally relied upon the goat, but which now grew to despise it and its product. Why?, one may ask, and the answer to this is difficult to fathom. Commons still existed, as did waste land, and a

goat could always be tethered on a roadside verge. It was easy to keep, needed minimal attention, and suffered well a lack of shelter. At least as tellingly, without it there was little prospect of a poor family ever tasting milk or affording cheese. The only answer to this burning question that has surfaced in relation to historic evidence is that the prejudice is a 'hand-me-down' from their so-called 'elders and betters'. This would imply that if the Lord of the manor wouldn't touch goats' milk, then why should the commoner?

All this is very sad, for part of this prejudice involved a belief that the milk of the goat was tainted and virtually undrinkable, although those who developed this view came from generations of forebears who happily drank it with no fear of a taint.

Whatever the truth of the matter, by the Eighteenth Century England's landscape was more akin to a patchwork of fields divided by hedges than any form of open vista, and just looking at such a scene speaks of there being no place for the goat.

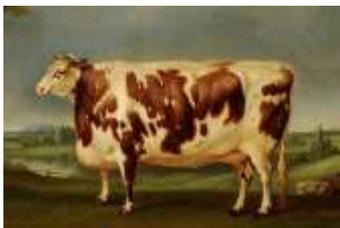


A DOUBLE BLOW

As if the ebbing away of the open field system wasn't bad enough, there came in the mid-Seventeenth Century the agricultural equivalent of the Industrial Revolution. This, not unnaturally called the Agrarian Revolution, brought mechanization and other improvements to farming.



One outcome was a focus on improvements to livestock, this fundamentally being to increase productivity in relation to meat, milk and wool.



This improvement touched upon every animal known to the farmyard bar the goat. It was, once again, completely side-lined, its potential being overlooked.

The overall outcome was that the Old English goat was neither valued as a primitive landrace that could fill a niche in the economy of the rural poor, nor visualized as an improved asset to the farmer.

By the early Nineteenth Century, it was a breed in near total eclipse, being a rare sight indeed at this time. This state of affairs is confirmed by William Cobbet, a parliamentarian who was intrigued by the state of the rural economy, and rode around southern England, collecting and recording data on this.



His findings were published in 1822 in a book entitled 'Rural Rides', and in this he comments that he travelled vast distances without ever seeing a goat. This intrigued him, opening up such questions as why did he so rarely see them, and why was it that the labourer would not keep them.

At this point, Cobbet's perplexed musing that 'I wondered how it happened that none of our labourers kept goats' opens the door to a consideration of the role of the goat men of South Armagh in a revival of the fortunes of the goat in the very part of England that Cobbet noted for being denuded of goats.

ENTER THE GOAT MEN

Without Michael J. Murphy's recording of life on and around Slieve Gullion generally, the role of the goat in this area, and the story of the goat men as it pertains to Irish travelling herds, a vital part of the history of the goat revival in Victorian England would have been forever lost.



The key evidence for this lies within the broadcast he made on BBC radio in 1937, this being entitled 'The Goat Men of South Armagh'. As a part of this, Michael J. Murphy said the following:

It is not too clear how the trade originated, but goats, apparently, must have been rather scarce in England during that period. Indeed, judging from some of the stories which the goatmen tell about their travels with the goats through England, many of the English people of that time could not have even heard of an animal called a goat.

However, a business-like mind is a well-known characteristic in we Northerners, and the South Armagh men soon remedied matters so that the English people knew a goat in more light than they bargained for.

Herein lies virtually the whole story. The Pahvees of South Armagh held to a long tradition of selling waste, rag and cloth, journeying to many parts of the world to do so. As canny businessmen and opportunists, they noticed that whereas the goat was a commonplace back home, it was rare or never seen in large parts of England. That many English people had not even heard of a goat was translated into a potential customer base, the outcome being, as Michael J. Murphy put it, 'the Pahvees remedied matters'.

The only issue in doubt is when this trade in goats began, although it was certainly flourishing in mid-to late-Victorian times.

The foregoing in relation to the Pahvee observation that people in England hardly kept goats is confirmed by the following comment, this being made by John G. Buchanan, in 1908:

There is scarcely a place where an agricultural labourer could not keep a goat or two if he could be induced to do so; but the prejudice which exists against goat's milk is something remarkable

I have often sent out milk puddings made with goat's milk to poor people, but if I happened to mention that they were made with goat's milk they would be refused with scorn and indignation

Buchanan lived in rural Shropshire, was a middle-class goatkeeper and a member of the British Goat Society, and he sometimes bought goats from passing Irish travelling herds.

Buchanan's statement also has a bearing on that of Michael J. Murphy as he continued his historic BBC talk:

The men from the Slieve Gullion district of South Armagh used to go to England for the summer months, and some of them probably realised that as milk was scarce then, goats could be sold to the English people if the superb qualities of the goat's milk was extolled

The theory was successful, and for some years the goatmen made what would be regarded in those days as a handsome fortune.

When Michael J. Murphy also commented that the Pahvees overcame the prejudice against the goat in England with a business-like mind, the magnitude of this endeavour is again highlighted by Buchanan, for how was it that Buchanan found that poor people treated the very idea of goats and their product with 'scorn and indignation', and yet along would come a Pahvee and manage to get the very same class of person to buy goats and their milk!

By way of summary, the goat men most certainly filled a niche in the scarcity of goat's milk, and in doing so converted the very idea from smelly and undrinkable to a dairy product with 'suburb qualities'. Their business-like mind did not only relate to product sales tactics, even so, for the price had to be pitched right. At this time, the average price of a goat was 36 shillings, whilst a poor labourer earned only 29 shillings a week by comparison. To sell a goat to a class of people who had long assumed that such an animal was beyond their pocket would therefore have meant pricing the sale just right.



Historical research is as much about being proven wrong as enlarging and confirming our knowledge base, and in the case of the routes taken by the Irish driving herds, assumptions made with regard to the likelihood that the drovers came from different parts of Ireland encouraged the drawing up of the map shown to the left. Now that we know that the driving herds were centred upon Pahvees from one area of South Armagh, our thinking will have to be revised.

Although the Pahvees targeted country districts, market towns and even industrial areas where poorer members of the community had hardly heard of a goat- winning the day and filling a void in these areas- it is clear also that they met with some success in relation to selling their goats to established goat keepers. Such a class were more well-to-do, and may well have been British Goat Society members. Again, we refer to John G. Buchanan of Shropshire, who commented in 1908 that:

I started with purchasing nannies out of travelling Irish herds which occasionally came through the village....my experience of them was on the whole a fairly satisfactory one

Such goats would have looked just like Grey Pied, the female shown right that is a part of the Old Irish Goat Society's breeding programme. This female, according to Kevin Murphy, is of the exact same type as the traditional Old Irish goats of Slieve Gullion.



Further evidence of the Old Irish goat reaching the middle class goat keeper is to be found in the magazine entitled 'The Bazaar, Exchange and Mart'. Out every Tuesday, it was the means by which almost anything could be offered for sale. There was, of course, a section on goats for sale, and typical examples in relation

to this are as follows:

- July, 1875: Large Irish goat in full milk,
- August, 1875: Large, handsome Irish goat
- August, 1879: Irish goat in milk. Splendid milker
- August, 1885: Large, white Irish, giving 4 pints daily

In comparing the prices of the generality of goats offered for sale with those that related specifically to the Irish breed, it was found that prices were comparable.

Then came a revival in the fortunes of the goat generally in England, this being in the form of The Victorian Goat Revival,

THE GOAT REVIVAL OF 1875

This revival was sparked by a letter to the very influential Times newspaper in January, 1875. The writer was Baroness Burdett-Coutts, an immensely rich aristocrat who had inherited two fortunes and dedicated much of her life to philanthropy. This took many forms, and ranged from housing schemes for the working class to drinking fountains for dogs.

In the letter to The Times, she turned her attention to the state of the rural poor, and in particular to whole generations of country children who were being brought up without benefit of milk. Here, she alluded to their 'pinched faces' and vulnerability to illness, and then pinpointed the problem, this being 'milk trains'. This one phrase alluded to the fact that with the coming of a national railway network, the practice in country districts was to churn the milk from the dairy farms, then take it to



be loaded on the first trains of the day. From thence, they would be delivered to the blossoming industrial towns with their teeming populations. Thus, the term 'milk train'.

The outcome of this was that a poor family of labourers living alongside a dairy farm might well pass the milk churns being taken off to the station, but never have the benefit of its milk.

Lady Burdett-Coutts's suggestion was that the goat could fill the void, or, as she put it: 'why not keep goats'.

What must be acknowledged here, even so, was that although Lady Burdett-Coutts was aware of a dearth of goats in the countryside, and had a justification for remedying this, the goat men had got their first.

This letter to The Times was the opening salvo of a campaign to promote goat keeping in England, the first of what become regular goat shows taking place in the Crystal Palace, Surrey, in June of that year. It was, by any standards, an aristocratic and middle class affair, and it led to the founding of the British Goat Society in 1879.

At its first meeting, the membership was represented by:

a professor; a civil servant; a Duke; a baroness; 2 earls; 2 female aristocrats; a Sir; 24 ladies; 20 clergymen; 11 medical men

The 'civil servant' in question was none other than one Steven Holmes Pegler, who had published in 1875 the first book to be written in English that was devoted entirely to the subject of the goat. It was he, in point of fact, who had inspired the founding of the British Goat Society, and we will meet him again in the near future, and this time in the context of the Old Irish goat.

The avowed intentions of the society was fourfold, and as follows:

- Counter prevailing prejudice against goats
- Encourage goatkeeping amongst Poor/labourer
- Increase/introduce goat's milk into rural areas
- Utilize large tracts of waste land in rural districts

Of these, the goat men of South Armagh were already achieving the first three, whilst the fourth was in every way a spin-off from these.

As it happened, it was vital that the Irish travelling herds were still arriving on a regular basis, for the British Goat Society soon found itself diverted into a focus on goat improvement for shows and productivity that used foreign goat stock.

As it happened, this focus on improving goats of mainly foreign import origin to a standardized show form, along with aiming for an ever increasing milk yield, did not wane. The consequence of this was that as late as 1920, for example, whole swathes of the English countryside remained unaffected by any influence from the British Goat Society, meaning that they had been ineffective in countering a prevailing prejudice against goats, encouraging goat keeping, and introducing the milk of goats into rural areas. Fortunately, such an endeavour remained in the hands of the goat man, this role being carried-out quite effectively.

Turned on its head: but for the goat man:

- Rural children would still have been pinch-faced for want of milk
- Labourers and cottagers would still have been refusing to drink goat's milk
- And the goats would have remained rare or unknown in many country districts.



'NOTHING SHORT OF AN INVASION'

Less, at this point, there is a temptation to wonder whether the role of the goat men of South Armagh has been exaggerated with regard to promoting the goat and its product in rural areas of England, we quote the comment of Bryan Hook, writing in his book 'Milch Goats and Their Management', published in 1896:

'By far the larger number of the goats that are to be seen on any piece of waste land in our country districts are of Irish origin'

He then further commented on the influence that the Old Irish goat- by way of the goat men- had had on the other parts of Britain:

'Both Wales and Scotland possessed each a breed of goats as distinctive as that of Ireland; but at the present time the all-pervading Irish type seems to have absorbed the Welsh and the Scotch'

THE OLD IRISH GOAT AND GOAT SHOWING

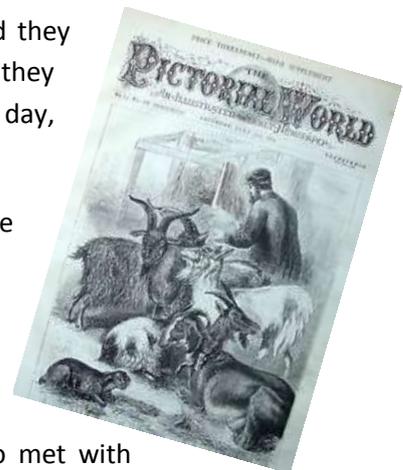
This part of the goat men's story is most intriguing, for not only did they achieve the original aims of the British Goat Society for them, but they even managed to sell their goat stock to the elite goat breeders of the day, who then introduced them into the show ring.

This is most extraordinary, given that the little Old Irish goat was the complete antithesis of what a typical British Goat Society member avowed to be the ideal milch goat. The Old Irish goat was small, horned and hairy, whereas the standard for the show ring was a smooth coat and large size, along with no horns if possible.

Not only did the Old Irish goat win rosettes in the ring, but it also met with considerable success in the milking competitions.

To illustrate this, we here unfold Betsy's story, she being an Old Irish female that most likely began life in Ireland, was walked across England and sold off, then found her way into goat shows to compete successfully with the pedigreed improved goat stock of her day.

Her story begins at the Crystal Palace Goat show that was held in June, 1883.



Here she came second in her class in the show ring, along with coming second in the milking competition. In the latter competition, Betsy exhibited 'abundant proof of being a good milker,' giving 3.75 pints daily.

This of itself is no mean achievement, although even more interesting is the fact that she was owned by Steven Holmes Pegler himself. Pegler was in the vanguard of goat improvement, and he was a judge at shows. That he owned an Old Irish goat, and was optimistic about showing her, is a huge accolade for the breed at a time when long hair was generally not approved of in goats, and horns were considered a nuisance.



Sadly, no illustration of Betsy has come to light; although we like to think of her as looking very much like the beautiful female Old Irish goat that the Old Irish Goat Society encountered on Slieve Gullion last year.

We next encounter Betsy at the Goat Show held at the Royal Aquarium, June, 1886. She was then owned by H. Appleby, and came 2nd again in the ring.

She was here described as being 'Handsome', and was said to have had 'an udder little inferior to that of a Kerry cow'.

It was also said of her that Betsy 'showed its milking power to great advantage, though with kids at its side, it violently resisted all attempts to test its merits in this respect'.

So, here we have a female Old Irish goat that was a show winner, a milking competition winner, and which had a very impressive udder. To cap it all, she had twin kids at the time of the Royal Aquarium Show, and proved to be a very protective mother that took no nonsense from anyone who got between her and them.

Of such was the stock of the Irish travelling herds made.

Moving on to The Goat, Mule, and Donkey Show held at the Alexandra Palace, July, 1881, it is of great interest that there were three separate classes for 'British and Irish goats'. The following was noted from the show review:

- Goliath (Irish) won in Class III: He goats without horns
- In Class VIII: Male kids, Big Ben (Irish), sired by Goliath and Beauty, and Charlie (Irish) a black and white kid, were entered
- In Class X: Selling Class, Piebald (Irish) was entered

Again, we have no illustrations of any of the above, although any of these males would have looked no different to the lovely young male that we encountered on Slieve Gullion last year.



THE ROLE OF THE GOAT MEN

In summary, the vital role that the goat men of South Armagh played in the goat history of Nineteenth Century England and beyond may be summarized as:

- **Popularised the goat in remote country areas**
- **Overcame the severe prejudice against goat milk**
- **Became the harbingers of spring to remote communities**
- **Anticipated the Victorian Goat Revival**
- **Achieved what the British Goat Society struggled to do in rural areas**
- **Introduced the Irish goat to Middle class goat keepers**
- **Introduced the Irish goat to goat showing**
- **Brought goats into London and industrial towns**

To have been instrumental in popularizing the Old Irish goat in England at a time when firstly goats were generally disregarded, then bred to a show standard based upon imported foreign stock, was an outstanding achievement, as attested by this Edwardian picture.



Here we see on the left an example of the Swiss Toggenburg breed. The Swiss began a policy of goat improvement from around 1830, so this animal represents 70 years of improvement to a dairy goat standard. Below her is a Nubian goat from the Sudan, this also representing a popular import in terms of breeding to a dairy standard. In the middle and to the right are two Anglo-Nubian goats, a British made breed based upon the Old English goat and a number of 'eastern' lop-eared breeds. These darlings of the British Goat Society speak of the efforts of a group of dedicated goat keepers to breed an improved dairy goat to a pedigree show standard over a quarter of a century. But, and given that these goats are the crème de la crème of the goat world, what do we find? Nothing less than a long-haired Old Irish goat at ease in their midst.

THE END OF AN ERA

Having trod the same lanes as the goat men, witnessed them promoting the goat and its milk to a generation of cynical country folk who detested both the goat and its product, then seen their achievement as businessmen resulting in the Old Irish goat becoming not only the commonplace animal of country districts but holding their own in goat shows, our story is drawing to a close by giving thought to how the trade came to an end. Likely, the outbreak of the First World War had an effect, although there is reason to believe that the trade revived to some extent after the armistice.

As to why it stopped in total, we draw again on the expertise of Michael J. Murphy:

When goats became so plentiful in England as to become a nuisance, the trade naturally collapsed.

One goatman still alive in Dromintee, South Armagh, remembers the first goat which he brought to a village adjacent to the Manchester Ship Canal, where, today, herds of these animals may be seen grazing on the banks in numbers just as large as those herds that roam the hills of South Armagh at the present time.

Here then, within the microcosm of a small village on the banks of the Manchester Ship Canal lies the story from beginning to end. Simply told, it was a village without goats; a goat man opened the door to keep goats; goats then became plentiful; there was no need of more. Even the reference to the feral goats of South Armagh in 1937 has its place in the wider story.

BACK TO REAL EVERYDAY HISTORY

The picture below was taken in the market town of Dorking, in Surrey, in 1897. It shows 33 Old Irish goats at rest, three goat men from South Armagh, and a cow and watchers on the fringe. This then is the market square, and it is likely that the goat men are about to auction the last of their travelling herd before heading for home.



When we enlarge the pictures of the goat men, these being two men and a boy, we see the everyday human side of what it was to have been a part of the Irish travelling herd trade. More to the point, the links to South Armagh remain strong, for any one of these three could have been the great-great grandfather or other relative of people living today in Dromintee.



Their story is in their dress and their stance, and at this point they may have walked nearly 400 miles across Ireland and back, 600 miles across Wales/England, meaning that they would have walked 700 miles when the photograph was taken. On top of this, they would still have had 300 miles to walk before reaching home; this with enumerable stories to tell that are the mainstay of what we call history.

But the focus must not only be on the goat men themselves, for their stock played an equally important part in our unfolding story. Here, we have a little Old Irish goat, the picture having been taken in 1920, and published by the English Goat Breeders' Association. This association was dedicated to not only saving the last of the Old English breed in the wake of the British Goat Society deciding to exterminate it, but to saving and promoting the Old Irish goat as well.

Walter Paget, the society's founder, had much to say about the value and use of the Old Irish goat, and this may be summarized as it being the best goat for



Highland crofters where winters are 'rigorous'; it having a long coat that acted as a natural thatch; it being hardy and serviceable it being able to find most of its living out of doors; and it being inexpensive to keep and trouble free.

Finally, we will give thought to the way in which the dna studies carried out by the Old Irish Goat Society to date have confirmed the influence that the Old Irish goat, by way of the goat men of South Armagh, have had on British goat stock.

A seemingly puzzling outcome was that two dna samples collected from Mulranny feral goat males were found to align with two samples of male feral goats from Scalpay Island, in the Inner Hebrides.

Scalpay Island is just north of the Isle of Skye, and the two males in question, both of which were white, had been trophy shot on Scalpay in the 1890's. Why, then, would they have been closely related along their matrilineal lines with goats still living on the Nephin Mountains in Mulranny, County Mayo?

The answer lies in the fact that goat men from South Armagh travelled to the west coast of Ireland to acquire animals for Irish travelling herds that were then sold in an interweaving pattern along the Scottish Hebrides as far north as the Orkney Islands. There is one record of a travelling herd of 600 goats being sold off in this way, and Old Irish goats were a popular buy due to their milking capacity.

Coincidentally, Pat. Moran, a sheep farmer in Mulranny, has the mounted head of a male Mulranny Old Irish goat that is dated to the 1890's. This male belonged to the Moran family's domestic herd of this time, and the way in which ownership was displayed is visible in this male's ears.



These three goats tell their own story of an interweaving pattern of relationships.

At the base level, nannies that were related to the Mulranny goats were taken to the Hebrides, most likely sold on Skye, and then they or their descendants ended up in the feral herd on Scalpay.

At a more intriguing level of possibilities, the mounted Mulranny male may have been closely related to the two Scalpay males; Pat Moran's grandfather may, as a boy, have known the females from which the Scalpay males descend; and the father of Michael J. Murphy, who was involved with the travelling herds that made their way through the Hebrides, might just have had a hand in the transactions that took goats from the west coast of Ireland to the Isle of Skye.

Thus, dna outcomes with regard to the Old Irish Goat Society's attempts to establish the relationships between the Old Irish and Old British goat breeds has inadvertently confirmed so many aspects of the Irish travelling herd story, the downside to this being that the Scalpay feral herd is now extinct and the Mulranny feral goat herd is hurtling towards a similar destiny due to introgression with goats of modern dairy type.