



EARLY EDWARDIAN IRISH TRAVELLING HERD IN TUNBRIDGE WELLS, KENT

RAYMOND WERNER, AUGUST, 2017

OLD IRISH GOAT SOCIETY

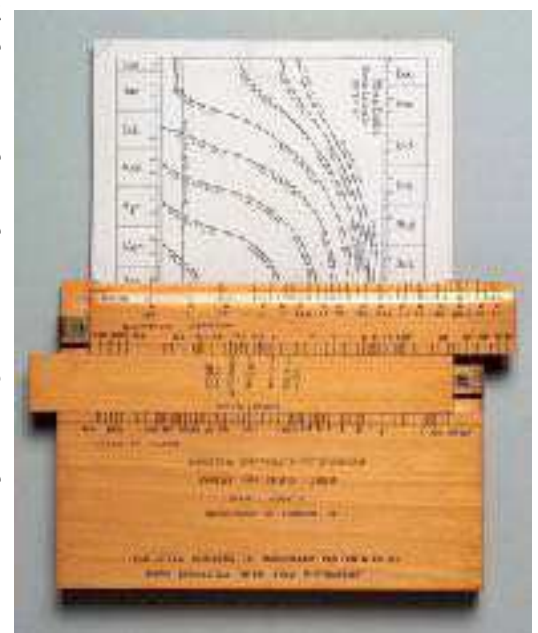


Previous research into the annual incursions of Irish Travelling herds into England during the late Victorian period has identified a group of Irish goats in a Wiltshire lane in 1887, a herd resting in Dorking a decade later, and an account of a herd being driven from Cardigan to Kent in 1891 that consisted of 300 head of goats under the control of 3 men, 3 boys and 5 dogs.

This latest find, shown above, is remarkable for showing not only the goats close up and in some detail, but also for depicting the goat man (on the left of the picture) in similarly enough detail that his features are recognizable.

The photograph was taken in 1902, and shows 9 goats at rest in Five ways, Tunbridge Wells, Kent. Passers-by are taking an interest in either the situation or the camera, whilst the goat man looks to be very relaxed as he both oversees his charges and watches the antics of the cameraman as he puts in his plate and disappears under a black-out cloth to view the goats and the goat man upside down and hope that a goat doesn't shake its head and ruin the picture during the time required to expose the plate: this being based upon a complex calculator that factored in the month of the year, the time of the day, and the weather conditions, as seen to the right.

If we incorporate this photograph into the knowledge we



have gained to date, a picture begins to emerge of one of the annual and well-trodden routes across southern England that may well have become an annual event for the goatmen of South Armagh.

Landing at a port in Cardigan Bay, the goat men would have most likely walked their charges through South Wales and into Gloucestershire, dropping a little south as they moved east, and thus into Wiltshire, this being around 80 miles west of London. Dorking- a market town in Surrey 25 miles south-west of London- then lies more or less due east; whilst further east still, and only a little south, lies Tunbridge Wells, another market town that is in Kent and 34 miles south-east of London. From there, it is almost a straight line onwards to Dover, this being on the Channel coast. What the goat men would have been doing here, was to cross the very heart of southern England by skirting around London, moving from village to village with market towns dictating their line of passage.

Another route, further north, would have taken the goat men from Holyhead, in North Wales, to the county of Shropshire, this being on the English border, and then down through middle England to the famous Barnet Fair in Hertfordshire, the county immediately north of London.



The goats are fascinating, being long-haired with dished faces apart from the goat on the extreme right, and with small pricked ears and impressive beards.



Although a dished face with a prominent stop typifies the head shape of the Old Irish goat generally, we have encountered Old Irish goats with a long head and straighter facial line, as seen in Mahogany Marvel, a female from the Burren now with the Old Irish Goat Society's breeding programme. The female in the photograph with a similar head shape is encouraging in that she

does show this head form over a century ago, and at a time before foreign imports began to influence the type of Ireland's landrace breed.

In terms of breed points generally, any of these goats could have blended in well with those being identified around Ireland as a part of the Society's National Survey, it being

encouraging to gain additional conformation that the breed yet exists, albeit in a precarious state.



When this picture was taken, the British Goat Society had been in existence for 23 years, and its members had held to the belief during the whole of this time that an Irish goat could be distinguished from an English goat by its coat length and horn shape, the former having a 'shaggy' coat and horns that grew upwards in a close curve, whilst the latter had a short coat with horns that twisted outwards, as shown to the right.

Thus it was that any English goatkeeper of the period would have recognized the goats in the picture as being Irish, reinforced by the brogue of the goat man.



But, and interestingly, such a view has been shown to have been completely wrong, with both breeds showing a range of hair length from short, through medium to long, and both equally having a range of horn types that render such distinctions untenable.



The female shown to the left is Old English, and from the College Valley herd in Northumberland. She is long-haired and has scimitar horns, and thus, along with her breed points generally, could easily have been infiltrated into this travelling herd without arousing comment.





The pictures above not only reinforce the reality that Cheviot Old English goats could have blended into Irish travelling herds, but that Old Irish goats of the present day are frequently seen to be virtually indistinguishable from the Old English goat, as noted by the fact that the third goat from the left is, in point of fact, Old Irish.

In the two paintings of Old English goats shown below, the artist being Edgar Hunt, we see on the one hand, a goat with a medium coat length and longer hair on the quarters, this female having twisted horns, whilst alongside her is a short-haired female with what was typically thought to have been 'Irish' horns. Thus, and in terms of overall breed points, there is no useful way to distinguish the two breeds.



It is summer time judging by the leaves on the trees, and it is just possible that these goats represent the vestiges of a much larger herd that has been sold off as they kidded, the point having been reached at which they will be auctioned off in this market town prior to the goat man returning home.



The goat man himself is of interest as he is clearly enough depicted to see his features, which may yet prove to be those on an old photograph in the family collection of a present-day South Armagh family, and thus open the door to giving him a name and a history. Also. His stance and look is full of personality and character, making him a genuine individual.

Also, and as a part of social history, he appears to be just as well presented as the men behind him, which is interesting considering just how far he has walked, and just how often he had slept in the open along some byway or up a quiet lane in the company of both his goats and the twinkling night sky.

The original of this photograph is archived in the Tunbridge Wells Library, Museum and Art Gallery, this being located in the Civic Centre, Mount Pleasant.