

Scottish Nursery Final: 30 years as secretary



Kim Gibson speaks with Bill Fleming

The Scottish Nursery Final was first started in the winter of 1969/1970, and is run by the Scottish Interdistrict Nursery Association. Bill Fleming took over as Secretary from David Guild in 1983. In that time, the Scottish Nursery Final had grown into a big affair, covering the whole of Scotland. "I was approached by Andrew Beatty and Christy Swan, at the Aberystwyth International where they had the trouble with the weather. I couldn't refuse them, their powers of persuasion were such". The right man for the job had been picked. In 2008, Bill was presented with Galloway Glass to commemorate twenty-five years of service, not knowing that it would be another five years before he retired as Secretary of the Scottish Nursery Final. Nearing his eightieth birthday, he thought it was finally time to hand the post over, and the new Secretary is Elaine Craig, the secretary of Wigton sheepdog trials. For his long service, Bill was given a lifetime's subscription to ISN.

Bill was born on a farm called Harthope in Dumfriesshire ('hope' meaning hill), where his father was a shepherd. One of his claims to fame is that David Carlton's Tony was also born there, at a later date. Tony Iley was the shepherd there at the time, and the pup must have been named after his breeder. His sire was Jock Richardson's Sweep, and his dam was Jace (by Bosworth Coon, and out of Tot Longton's Gyp 38336) [Gyp was second in the 1971 International, to Jock Murray's Glen at Cardiff]. Later, Bill's father worked as a stockman on the Drumlanrig for the Duke of Buccleugh. Then they moved to Kirkconnel, where Bill started to work with pedigree Ayrshires, and he has been involved with them all of his life. Bill's father always had good dogs for his work, and Bill has always been interested in the dogs; he saw his first sheepdog trial at Kirkconnel. Bill remembers John Templeton working his dogs there sometimes, and he remembers a dog called Vim being put on the train, addressed to 'Ll Evans, Church Farm, Husbands Bosworth'. At that time, Bill had a job with the council, he would go and relief milk before starting work. In 1951, Bill worked on different farms, sometimes staying in the bothys. In 1952, farm boys were rounded up after the harvest, and Bill found himself on board a troop ship at Southampton, bound for Singapore. He did two years National Service as a 'jungle' soldier in Malaya. "We were the forgotten army, there was a war raging in Korea. We were there patrolling, to look after Britain's interests in rubber and tin. Of course, I had the Scottish Farmer and the Bargower catalogue dropped into the jungle (containing information on the rolls royce of Ayrshire cows)". Five years ago, Bill was presented with the Ministry of Defence's National Service Medal, given to veterans who served their country, the Government recognising the valuable contribution that they provided to the defence of the country, both at home and abroad.

Bill married Margaret in 1956, and they settled in a lovely cottage in Sorn in 1957 where his pride and joy is his garden, and he has lived there ever since. Bill is a Senior Elder at Sorn Parish Church, he has been an Elder there for over fifty years. He is very proud of the garden at the cottage in Sorn, and thinks he takes life for granted living in such a lovely place as Robert Burns country (the poet ran a farm called Mossgiel with his brother, on the other side of Mauchline). Bill has worked with cows all his life, full-time, and part-time whilst working for the council, milking Ayrshire cows, relief-milking, and showing beef cattle. Since he's been retired, he has had some good trips with John Templeton to the Limousine sales at Perth. His favourite cow was West Mossgiel Lizzie. Bill has judged for the Ayr County Ayrshire Cattle Club. "I have had the odd dog for my work with the cows. I had a wee bitch called Jill, she was a good wee cattle bitch, she was off John's first Roy. I was not a shepherd, but I have stewarded sheep at shows, for forty years at Catrine show, I am the honorary vice president there". There are a few links between sheepdog men and cowmen, Barry Liddle's uncle won the milking trials at

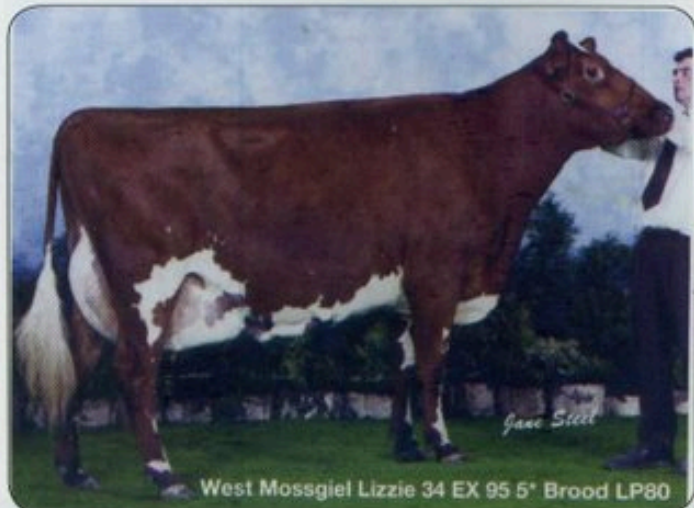


Bill Fleming

the Scottish Dairy Show in Glasgow with a cow called Knockdon Daybreak in 1953 or 1954. That show finished in the 1960s. Ian Murdoch's father, John (or Jock), was the herdsman for the Galley Lane herd of Ayrshires in 1949 or 1950 when a cow called Amoria was the Reserve Supreme Champion at the Glasgow Show.

Bill's first job at a sheepdog trial was on the gate at Sorn sheepdog trials. By 1958, he had gone from assistant course director at trials to course director, and attended his first dog trial meeting, it was for the North Ayrshire sheepdog trials. Ayrshire has two sheepdog societies, north of the River Doon and south of the river. Bill ran the North Ayrshire sheepdog trials for over ten years, and a few years back, he was presented with a Border Fine Arts piece from that committee. "There has been a lot of talent from North Ayrshire, over the years, John Templeton, Stuart Davidson, Alistair Mundell, he's now in the Borders. David Guild's Tweed was a great dog, he started in the nurseries here. The nurseries are usually started at Ashmark, I had a young man on the phone asking the way there one year, that was Neil McVicar. He ran Spot in the nurseries but I think he hurt his leg and did not make the final. For a young fellow starting out, it's not easy to get a prize in these nurseries. Roddy MacDiarmid is another".

The Scottish Nursery Final is always held on the first Saturday in March. The worst weather was in Wigton in 1987, and there was snow in 1995, and both times were judged by Willie Welsh Snr. The first Scottish Nursery final on a hillside at Corsock in Kirkcudbrightshire was comparatively a small affair, judged by



Publicity photo for West Mossgiel Lizzie



Bill with Margaret

Raymond Macpherson. The winner was William Rae with Spot, after a run-off with Bob Taylor. [Willie Rae later won the Scottish National in 1977 with Connie 84203]. Running in that first final was T T McKnight with Drift 51202, they went on to win the International Driving Trophy. Also running that year was Peter Hetherington with Nell 53708, she went on to win the Scottish National at Haddington that year [and the International Shepherds' Cup in 1973]. In 1972, Peter Hetherington won the Scottish Nursery Final with Hemp 59856. Peter won his second and third Scottish Brace trophy with Nell and Hemp, in 1976 and 1978, a mother and son team. Another notable winner of the Scottish Nursery Final was Stuart Davidson with Star in 1996, they went on to win the International in 2002. A lot of well-known dogs ran in the nurseries. Walter Beattie ran Dick Fortune's Glen in the nurseries. Glen was bred by T T McKnight. Walter had three young dogs in his kennel at one time, that he trained and sold on, and all three did well – one was Glen, one was John Angus Macleod's Cap, and the other was Bobby Lyon's Moss. Another dog that ran in the Scottish Nursery Final was Hartford Logan's Dick, Hartford was farming at Neilston. Bill remembers meeting Hartford Logan at the Aberystwyth International in 1992, saying that he did not realise that weatabix was so expensive, he had left the dog food at home, and was feeding it to Dick!

The Scottish Nursery Final is organised between the Interdistrict Secretary and the hosting local committee, as the final moves around the Scottish areas each year. "My job is a lot easier now than it used to be, the locals all have better knowledge of what's needed. The Interdistrict started originally when an old shepherd called John Ferguson presented a trophy for the best young dog in the south-west counties, Ayrshire, Wigtonshire and Dumfriesshire. Over the years, the rest have gradually

joined in. The Borders came after I joined. Lanarkshire came after that. The North were the last to join. Never in his wildest dreams did John Ferguson think it would become a national event. He was a first-class man among Blackface sheep and Galloway cattle, he judged Galloways at the Highland Show". The Highland show started in much the same way, it moved around before it was held on the permanent site at Ingliston in 1960. The 2013 show is the 173rd to be staged. One year, a cow called Hobsland Juniper calved on the showfield the night after she had won, and the calf was called Hobsland Highland Mary. The Scottish Nursery Final is a prestigious event, and can have as many spectators as at a national. It always has a full open course, with a pen and a shed.

It is with great interest every year that Bill describes the local young handler situation. A few years ago, Jock Welsh and Peter Hetherington started sheepdog training lessons at Monkwood Mains every Tuesday, bringing out very successful young handlers; John Ramsey (who is T T McKnight's grandson), Fraser Shennan (who is Davy Shennan's grandson), and Robbie Welsh (one of Scotland's Welshmen, his father is Tony Welsh who was the 2012 International Shepherds' Champion, and his grandfather is the late Anton Welsh. Jock Welsh is his great uncle). All these young men are now competently running in the Nursery finals, or winning open trials, or getting in the Scottish team and placing high in the Supreme, in just a few years.

Bill is a well-known figure in the grandstands at the International, he has hardly missed a Scottish National or International for over sixty years. He likes to watch the dogs, and meet up with friends from all over, for a chat and chance to put the world to rights. "I have met a lot of nice folk through dog trialling". One of his travelling companions is Ian Robertson from Dalmellington. Bill's first International was in 1949 at Ayr racecourse. The winner was David Daniel with Chip 4924, J M Wilson was second with Moss 5176. J M was first to run in the morning and stayed on top until near the end. The judges were sitting around a table on the course. After David had run, Captain Whittaker threw his bowler hat in the air and said "I think it's going to Wales". David won the International twice with Chip, both times in Scotland. The second time was at Inverness in 1952. "I was very pleased to meet his grandson David Daniel at the International last year. There's been some great handlers in Wales, and David and Eurwyn, were two of them. Great to watch". R J Hughes won the Welsh National Driving Championship with Jaff in 1949, and the International Driving Championship "He was an old dog at the time, and got killed by a cow or a bull the following winter".

Missing just a few Internationals since he first started going in 1949, "working with dairy cattle, you are tied up with



Looking out on a well tended garden

your work" Bill has not missed many since 1970. "I have got a lot of pleasure out of watching the dogs". John Templeton was the one of the first 'young handlers'. In 1957, he won the trophies for the youngest competitor at the Scottish National and at the International. That was with his first Roy 8993, and he won the Scottish National, was fourth in the International Qualifying Trial, and was runner-up in the Supreme to John Holliday with Moss 11241. In 1972, Davy McTeir won the Scottish National with Ben 56646 and John Templeton won the Scottish National Farmers Cup, to be turned around at the International when John won the Supreme, and Davy won the International Shepherds' Cup. I enjoyed watching John run again for Scotland at the 2012 International, that's a fair record".

"I have also always enjoyed watching Jim Cropper". Jim was Reserve International Champion in 1973 with Clyde 49960, and won the International Brace the same year with Fleet 38813 and Clyde. "1977 at Libanus was another good International, John Thomas won that year with Craig 59425, Alan Jones was reserve with Craig 72737. I think Wyn Edwards was third with Bill 78263; they went on to win the Supreme twice, in 1981 and 1982".

Bill was an ISDS director for twenty years, always taking an interest in the Society. In 2010, Bill donated a large number of ISDS trial programmes and documents to the ISDS Archive, they were given to him by Andrew Beattie for safe-keeping. It is thanks to them both that some huge gaps in the Society's trialling history are being filled, and the information is available for reference now and for the future.