

### THE ELBRIDGE HERD

John Holdstock, who was actually 'the son' referred to in our business name of E.H. Holdstock & Son, bought his first four Sussex females in 1946. They were a Cherry, a Rose, a Snowdrop and a Ruby and they produced three heifer registrations in 1947. The first bull we registered was Elbridge Rover in 1952.

Elbridge Farm has traditionally been a very mixed farm business. In addition to the cattle, we had sheep, hops, vegetables and arable crops. Over the years the existing cross bred cattle were replaced by increasing the number of pedigree Sussex. During the 60s and 70s, cattle were regularly shown with our exhibiting experience starting with the local shows of Heathfield, Guildford and the Kent. The Norfolk and Royal shows were then included in our schedule and we occasionally went to the South of England.

Achievements have been faithfully recorded in the records of the Society, but particular highlights included being the first winners of the Monty Sillars Trophy at the Royal and winning a Championship for a cross-bred animal at the World Congress of the Sussex Society at the South of England Show.

By the early 1970s cow numbers had increased to 70 and between 1963 & 1979, a total of 30 bulls and 26 females were exported to various countries including South Africa and Zambia.



*John Holdstock (centre), Mr. Butcher of South Africa (right)  
and Tom Best with one of the exported bulls*

Unfortunately, when the door closed for live exports, only semen could be sent abroad. However Elbridge bloodlines were used extensively and a good deal of the Australian and New Zealand cattle can be originally traced back to the Elbridge Herd.

Over the years, three bulls have been sold to MMB/Genus:



*Elbridge Keystone 3rd*  
*Born 04/04/70*



*Elbridge Intelligent 7th*  
*Born 18/09/93*



*Elbridge Monarch 19th*  
*Born 18/09/82*

In 1972 James Holdstock joined the family partnership which now had a business farming 1000 acres, with cattle, cereals, peas, potatoes, vegetables, apples and pears. During the 1980s, the Elbridge Herd, along with several other producers, took part in the Breed Development Scheme. Over the years, this has proved very beneficial to our cattle, but it has required very careful selection for the additional desirable traits of the Limousin, namely length, muscle depth, leanness and ease of calving. At the same time, it was necessary to ensure we maintained the especially desirable Sussex traits of good temperament, milkiness, sound feet, longevity and good food conversion.

The Elbridge Herd was one of the first herds to join the MLC/Signet weight recording scheme. This has been a very useful tool when making comparisons between animals, prior to selection, for both bulls and heifers. These are either used as our own replacements or otherwise sold as breeding stock to different herds. Over the years, we consider that both frame and type have improved and live weight gain has increased despite minimal concentrate use.

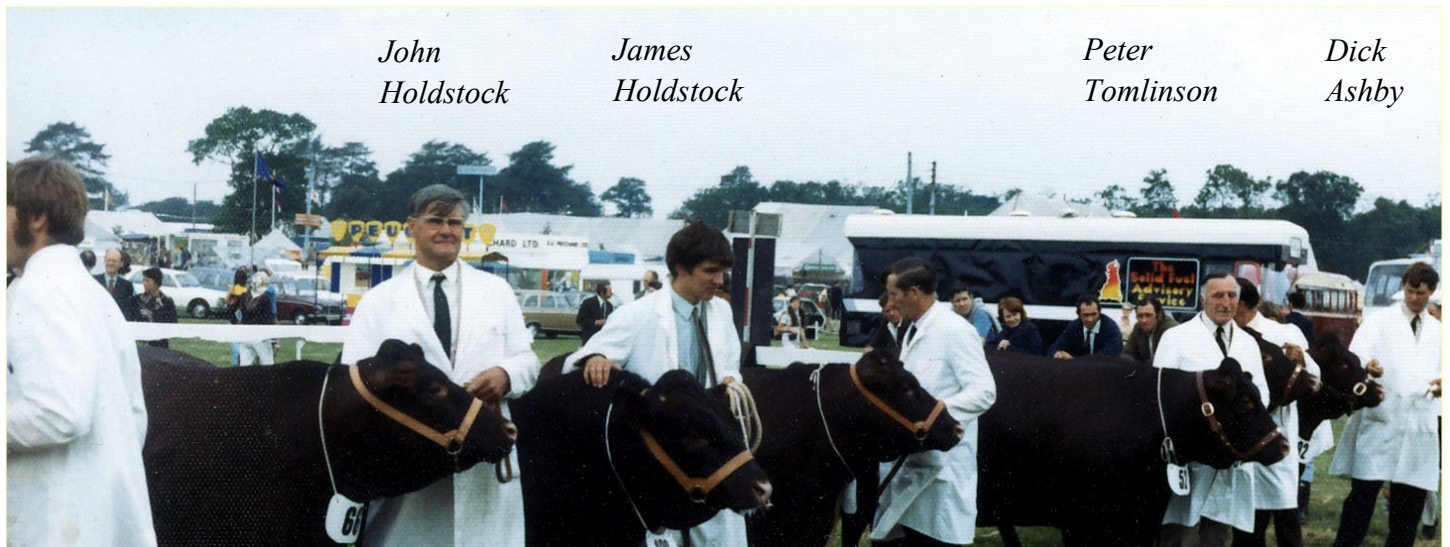
Today, we farm over 1600 acres with a farm staff of 5 full time employees. The enterprises are similar to those in 1972, with a larger contribution made from our 70 acres of apples and pears. The cattle are an intrinsic part of our mixed farm. They graze all the low grade pastures including three SSSI's and silage and hay are harvested where possible. During the winter the cattle are fed on arable by-products in addition to forage. Waste potatoes are fed extensively and concentrate feed is kept to a minimum.

The herd is split into spring and autumn calving, enabling the stock bulls to be used for most of the year. The spring calvers are out wintered on stubble turnips and straw. Additionally, many cattle are

'housed' in open yards made from big bales of linseed straw which even the Sussex cow won't normally eat! Covered yards are at a premium and kept for young stock and autumn calvers. As more grazing has come available locally, the cow numbers have increased to 170. Nearly all the males are kept entire which greatly assists bull selection, delaying it until the yearling stage. The bulls that are not sold as breeding stock, are sold direct to an abattoir aiming for a 350kg carcass at 18 months of age.

Any heifer not retained or sold for breeding, is slaughtered locally and sold as Premium Grade, often not having received any concentrate feeding in their lives.

The Elbridge Herd has greatly benefited from a succession of dedicated stockmen, Tom Best, Peter Tomlinson, Dick Ashby and Justin Amos. It is a great tribute to them that the herd has grown as it has and achieved several triumphs in the show ring and Herd Competition.



Finding and maintaining bull lines is easier with a larger herd, although fresh lines are perennially being sought. In the 1970s Martin General 8th and Elbridge Keystone made a major contribution to herd type. Snowdrops have become the predominant female line and Elbridge Snowdrop 1000th should put in an appearance before too long! A first for the breed?

We are firmly convinced that the Sussex breed is ideally suited for modern beef production. The qualities of easy care cows producing premium beef, for quality markets, from forage based diets, should prove to be a winning combination and guarantee the Sussex breed a popular future. May we take this opportunity to thank the Society for its invitation to write about our herd and wish all the members a successful season.

*James Holdstock  
April 2008*



*John Holdstock (left)  
with John Hancorn (Sussex Cattle Society Secretary until 1979)*