



PIONEERS OF THE FANCY

Bill Paley
(retiring secretary
UK Dutch RC)
introduces you to
the late, great

Jim Read

Jim Read was born in 1893 into a late Victorian working class household in Accrington, Lancashire. In the attached abridged article Jim tells us about his early life and introduction to small livestock keeping and his first rabbit show.

At first he showed with his brother as Read Brothers but continued alone when his brother died fighting for King and Country in France in 1916.

Jim first joined the United Kingdom Dutch R.C in 1919 and soon came to prominence when he won the Adult Steel Cup in 1920. He was so confident in his ability to breed winners that he later claimed he could breed twenty winners in twelve months and would offer a Breeders Cup to the Dutch Club if he failed to do so. When he fell short of his prophesied target he honoured his pledge and presented the 'Read Breeders Cup' at the 1924 ASS.

Ironically, he was the first to win this. He did so with a Pale Grey buck which also won the Pale/Brown Grey Cup. He and a few of his friends contributed to the purchase of the 'Premier Cup', also in 1924, but whilst he came close, he never won the top award. He did, however, buy Gilbert Hodge's 1940 Premier Cup winner for a fair price. His later UK Dutch successes included the Young Blue and Young Steel cups in 1934 and Young Tort Cup in 1938.

Whilst he was associated with Dutch for most of his life he did keep and show many other breeds. He was particularly successful with Chinchillas and Rex.

Read took an early interest in the running of the fancy and writing articles in the fancy press. He wrote copiously and had a little book called "The Dutch Rabbit" published in the 1940's. This has been in print ever since.

In the 1920's he stood for election onto the Dutch Club committee and soon rose through the ranks to become a top panel judge and Vice President by the early 1930's.

He was also a leading light in the establishment of the Bradford Championship show and soon became its President. When the BRC was formed in 1935 Jim was elected and became its first and longest serving President (1935-1945).

However, his greatest ambition was to become the UKDRC President. He challenged the incumbent President George Townsend on several occasions, finally being elected in 1936.

Jim Read remained President up to his death in 1976. He judged the UKDRC stock shows and Bradford Championship shows on a regular basis and the Royal Lancashire Agricultural Show year after year. He finally retired from judging in 1974 when he turned eighty.

From a small and humble beginning Read became a very successful business man. He had a fur farm in Selby after the Second World War but this was washed away in the floods which devastated the British eastern seaboard and the North Sea low-countries in the great storm of January 1953. He had a cooperage business and had a farm in the Longridge Fells, near Oswaldtwistle, Lancashire. His herd of pedigree Friesians were known as the "Tinkerfield" herd and these too were very successful.

"Jim Read was one of those rare people who become a legend in their own lifetime. It was not a question of having a few more talents than the normal, nor even being a genius but a question of that extra faculty that enabled him to use his talents to the full to the benefit of others, yet doing it in such a humble way that he was admired and revered by people from all stations of life."

So wrote George Scott in *Fur & Feather* when Jim died in August 1976. George like most in the rabbit fancy of the time had the greatest respect and affection for a man lovingly known as "Ye Olde President".

Bill Paley



How a boy called Jim climbed a ladder

I was a rabbit fancier as a school boy from about the age of nine or ten years onwards, making my own hutches from cube sugar boxes bought from nearby grocery stores for three pence a box. I added some sort of a wired frontal with help from my father, and can recall that nails were only a penny a pound, and the wire netting equally cheap. For hinges we used strips of leather fastened with tacks.

With the passing of time I became a wage earner, starting on my tenth birthday as an errand boy for my uncle who was the premier butcher in the district.

For three years I was a pillar in the business, and in the last year as a half-timer I helped to kill the cows and sheep, make sausage and black pudding, plus sundry menial jobs for the pay of 2s 6d a week until I was twelve, and then 4s a week for unlimited hours as a half timer from schooling.

My best recollections of those times are of kindly housewives who gave me their weekly Saturday tip of one penny for delivering their orders with a bright shining face from a very clean basket and cloth cover. I had about five of these benefactresses, and can recall their names and faces to this day.

We kept both doves and rabbits in the back yard of our terraced house in a small East Lancashire town. The doves flew around in a wired enclosure running the length of the wall dividing us from our next door neighbours; but with my rabbit keeping activities growing I became sole tenant of an empty stone building in a nearby back street next to the stables and slaughter house owned by a successful master butcher.

My rent was fixed at 8d a week, to be paid fortnightly by a Saturday visit to the landlord who owned and rented a lot of house properties in the district. He had a very red face and looked very fierce but one night much to my surprise he handed fourpence back to me and said he hoped I was doing well with my rabbits. I told my mother about it and she said it would be because he had no children of his own.

This rent was a strain on my weekly income, but by then I was getting well known and selling young rabbits to other lads and young men, and recall once getting 7s 6d for a tortoise Dutch doe which I thought was a rather clever sort of sale. I built more hutches to fit the new premises and the next door butcher, sensing that I was running my business on a sort of shoestring budget, gave me an occasional armful of hay from his stable as encouragement to a striving lad.

About that time however I made a shocking blunder by paying £1 for a Dutch doe sold to me as a daughter of Champion Handyman, a famous exhibit belonging to the Blackburn partnership of Blythe and Mills, who at that time were sweeping the decks at the shows. I felt that to get hold of the blood of Champion Handyman would lead me on to fame and fortune. Some local fanciers had bought the doe direct from the breeders for thirty shillings, and disappointed with her litter, they sold her to me at a loss.

But the doe got snuffles and I could not cure same, despite the outlay of 1s plus 2d for postage for a bottle of Percy Street's then famous snuffle cure lotion. Percy in his adverts claimed the stuff never failed, but it did, and my golden sovereign was down the drain, a happening which filled me with sorrow for quite a while, for it was then a hard life keeping out of the red and remaining solvent as a junior fancier lacking in capital resources.

Joe Banny's

In those days the Lancashire towns had their small livestock pet stores, and in nearby Accrington in an old house in a quiet street just off the main thoroughfare was a place known far and wide as "Joe Banny's Trading Hole".

Here rabbits, cavies, mice, pigeons and bantams were ever on view and for sale at modest prices. My favourite brother and I walked to Accrington dozens of times to gaze in admiration at the livestock on exhibition in this old house, and it was a meeting place for many fanciers who congregated in a back room to chat up on fancy matters, and take nourishment from an iron pot of considerable size in which a supply of black pigeon peas seemed to be always simmering ready for serving.

These peas were available to visitors at a penny for a big pot full, and a half penny for a lesser size. My brother and I usually splashed ourselves on a half penny pot of these black peas which Mr Bancroft used to refer to as farting bullets.

It was while loitering over these little feasts what we listened in to words of wisdom from the lips of the much older fanciers foregathered in Joe's back hole, for so included were at least two famous breeders of show cavies named

Tom Waterworth and Harry Haworth, both of Accrington.

The self blacks shown by the first named were the best coloured blacks I ever saw, for they possessed that beetle sheen, i.e. something like a green in the black, and which could also be seen on the wings of black legorn poultry. Harry Haworth's forte were golden agouties I seem to remember, and good 'uns at that. They were both famous, and certainly very famous fanciers to us boys in the long ago.

One night when my brother and I arrived at Mr Bancroft's pet store we saw a lot of little black rabbits running about in a large pen, and wondered what breed they might be.

"What breed is these Mr Banny?" blurted out my brother to the proprietor of the emporium, a remark which brought forth the wrath of the great man.

"I'll let thee know my name isn't Banny but Bancroft, so in future thee call me Mister Bancroft." Ever afterwards we did.

It seemed the young black rabbits were Silver greys and it was explained to us they were all born black but would silver gradually as they grew older, and that they were good 'uns from a local breeder who had some good stuff at home. Also that their price was eightpence each that week, but more each week as they grew older.

We thought this over for a few days and decided we would try a couple, so returned to the pet store to negotiate the deal. "I have only a bob, Mr Bancroft, so can only buy one and a half."

This made him smile, and after quizzing my brother as to how much money he had, and finding he had nothing at all, he relented and let us depart with two of the young black rabbits in exchange for my shilling.

With the passing of the weeks and the months the two animals did silver over and one of them looked very smart indeed, and as by now we were avid readers of *Fur & Feather* each Friday, we found that an agricultural show with classes for Silvers was to be held in a town a few miles away at Padiham, with a judge named Edward Fell of Blackburn placing the cards.

We sent the postal order for 1s 6d and received in due course the box label and the admission ticket, and counted the days to the great adventure.

Two on a boneshaker

When the show day arrived I mounted the family boneshaker bicycle (original cost to us 7s 6d). My mother helped my brother to balance himself behind me with one foot resting on a piece of metal protruding from the hub of the back wheel. Somehow she tied the box containing the rabbit round his neck and

off we went, up hill and down dale for seven miles or so, never daring to dismount for fear we couldn't get mounted again,

We arrived safely, penned the exhibit and waited expectantly for the judging to get completed and the tent to be thrown open. Rushing in in due course, we were thrilled to find the rabbit had won 2nd prize.

We had picked up a catalogue on the field, and therein noted the names of all the exhibitors, and in Silvers under five months we saw our names in print for the first time – Read Brothers, 21 Grimshaw Street, Church, near Accrington. Now 2nd in a strong class! Surely fame had descended on us! We were in the seventh heaven of delight, never leaving the penside until packing up time.

A very smart gentleman who told us he was Mr Harry Woods, of Pleasington, came to look at our rabbit, and asked if we were the owners. "Yes we are," we told him, so he said: "I will buy it from you and give you thirty shillings for it."

My brother, who had never been the possessor even of thirty pence and who had been peeping through the catalogue turned round and said: "Nay, nay Mister, it must be worth a lot more than 30s seeing it has licked your rabbit which only got 3rd and which you wanted £5 for."

This made Mr Woods roar with laughter and he explained that he catalogued his rabbits for £5 to prevent them being claimed. He told his friend that we were two bright boys and said we would be good fanciers one day.

The same Silver Grey won a first prize for us at a winter show at Accrington and there was a special prize of a joiner-made exhibition box we carried home with pride that day.

My brother never got the chance to become a good fancier as prophesied by Harry Woods for he has lain in a soldier's grave in France since 1916.

In those far away times rabbit feeding was done as economically as possible. Spent tea leaves were never thrown away but mixed with bran and oats, with plenty of green stuffs collected from the fields and hedgerows.

With a biggish stud to feed I used to get up very early twice a week and ride the old boneshaker over four miles to Blackburn's wholesale fruit and market where I could get for nothing supplies of cauliflower leaves and often returned triumphant with a sack well filled and balanced on the handlebars at no cost other than a bit of youthful energy.

It was on my return from one such trip I was able to tell me mother with bated breath that King Edward V11 had died. The news had been chief topic while I was collecting the greenstuff at the early morning market.

The date was 6 May, 1910.

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RHD2 Vaccines

Latest news – filavac (RHD 1 & 2) 50 dose vials are now licensed in this country and available to your vet from their usual wholesaler. Unfortunately the additional handling costs have increased the price to 214.56 + VAT = 257.47 It will however be available on a next day delivery to the practice. For those BRC members registered with the BRC vet in Gloucester a greatly reduced price has been negotiated. Please contact the practice for more information. I understand that the single dose vial has only increased by 1.00.

The cost of eravac (RHD2 only) has reduced significantly and 40 dose vials are now available to your practice from their wholesalers (NVS, Centaur, Henry Schein) for 120.00 + VAT = 144.00. The 10 dose vial is 55.19 + VAT .

Hazel Elliott, Chairman BRC