

**BERWICKSHIRE NEWS 25 OCTOBER, 1949**

### **CENTENARY OF AYTON COW CLUB**

Ayton and District Cow Insurance Society celebrates its centenary this year, having been founded in 1849. It was formed for the purpose of insuring the few cows kept by small farmers, individual landholders, farm workers and others, who produced the milk chiefly for their own use or to sell to neighbours.

At that time, many persons had small plots of land attached to their houses, from which they produced fodder for their cow or cows. Some villages possessed common grazings, on which village cow keepers had the right to graze their animals during the grazing season. Of course, there were then few of the sanitary regulations affecting byres or dairies that pertain today. On farms, 20 or 30 years ago many more workers possessed cows than is the case today. It was to assist these small cow keepers that the Society was originally founded, each member paying an annual subscription for each cow in his possession. In the event of the cow dying, or being slaughtered by order of a veterinary surgeon, a compensation payment was made to the owner, this payment being a valuable contribution towards the purchase of a new cow.

Unfortunately, the early records of the Society have been lost and it is therefore impossible to trace the original number of members or the amount of the members' subscriptions. But in the early 1900's the annual income from subscriptions totalled over £100, which amount, at 10s per subscription, per cow, would represent more than 200 cows insured. It is known that since the Society was founded death payments have been made on 400 animals, this being a mere fraction of the number of cows insured during the 100 years.

About 60 years ago members took an active interest in the Society's affairs and attended its meetings in strength. These meetings were held in Ayton and, most of the members having to rely on horse transport, it is said the gigs and farm carts occupied almost the whole length of one side of the village street. At the meetings, in addition to paying their subscriptions, members voiced their opinions in no uncertain manner and also saw to it that the best representatives were elected to the executive committee. For a long number of years the Society was a very flourishing organisation and a members' dinner was held to mark its jubilee year, several prominent people being invited as guests.

### **Declined**

During the past 50 years, the Society's membership has declined from its former high peak, because of the vast changes which have taken place in rural conditions. In the villages there are few, if any, residents who possess cows. The small plots of land formerly attached to village dwellings have been absorbed in adjacent farms, while the rights of common grazing have disappeared. New sanitary laws prevent the keeping of cows, or the sale of milk except in or from licensed premises.

On the farms, too, the whole wages structure has changed and few workers except shepherds and grieves possess cows. Under such changed circumstances it is greatly to its credit that it is still virile and able to fulfil a very useful purpose. Present membership is mainly composed of small farmers, smallholders, shepherds and grieves who representatives serve on the committee.

At the Society's annual general meeting held in July last, the chairman, Mr William Bell, whose father was identified with the Society over a long period, stated this was the Society's centenary year and suggested some fitting celebration might be arranged to commemorate the occasion.

A sub-committee was formed to arrange the celebrations and at its meeting last Saturday it was unanimously agreed that such a momentous occasion in the annals of the Society must be celebrated in some fitting manner. Members are to be circularised regarding the form the celebrations should take and when the replies have been considered it is hoped to have these in November. In the meantime this newspaper takes the opportunity of congratulating the Society on its centenary and trusts the celebrations will be worthy of such a great occasion in the Society's history.