

## Grampy's award-winning herd

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It all started with an old-fashioned chocolate box full of family photographs. Most of them were sepia ones, worn at the edges and with no vital clues as to who these strangers from a bygone time might be, other than the questionable family resemblances that we had attached to them.

I had looked at them a few times before over the years, often at family get-togethers, but until now had never shown any real interest in them.

However, for some reason, this time, as I looked into the faces of these strangers, my 'unknown ancestors', I found myself wanting to know who they were and what life had been like for them. In short, I wanted to get to know them.

So, fancying myself as a modern-day Sherlock (and with my parents' sturdy old magnifying glass in my handbag), I set up some 'interviews' with the more senior members of the family.

It was only after a few 'interesting discussions' over cups of tea and homemade cake that I realised that this was a far more daunting task than I had first imagined; and that if I was

going to get anywhere at all, I needed to focus on one person at a time.

It was at this point that my Mum mentioned, very casually, that she had some of my Grampy's milking records (from his days as a dairy farmer) tucked away in a cupboard. For some reason I had the impression that there would just be a few small books to look at, when in fact it turned out that there were several large milking record ledgers (covering the period 1943 to 1955), together with diaries, certificates, newspaper cuttings and receipts. So with these family heirlooms safely boxed up in the back of my car, I set off home with the intention of looking through them over the next few weeks.

My Grampy grew up in a small Buckinghamshire village in the early years of the twentieth century and, like the majority of children during that period, left school at an early age. He married my Nan, his childhood sweetheart, when they were both in their early twenties. As a wedding present my great-grandparents bought them a very practical gift: a Friesian cow.

Apparently, Grampy then hired a

local bull with attitude, called Lightning, and from these very humble beginnings they eventually ended up with an award-winning herd of British Friesian cows.

In 1943, with the Second World War in full swing, the family, which now also consisted of Mum and Aunt, were renting a local farm in Buckinghamshire. The ledger shows that at that time they had twenty-three dairy cows. A year later, in 1944, Grampy received a letter from the Milk Records Office with an invitation to join the British Friesian Cattle Society. Interestingly, the letter says that there were 300 herds in Buckinghamshire at that time.

Looking through the ledgers, I could see that over the war years the herd was gradually growing in both size and in the yield of milk being produced by the farm.

Rummaging through the bundle of paperwork I found a certificate for 'an especially meritorious performance' from the Buckinghamshire War Agricultural Executive Committee (BWAEC) for their Winter Milk Campaign, dated for the years 1944 to 1947. And another certificate for milk sales which exceeded the set target during November to February for the years 1946-7. I think this is very impressive considering the difficulties of the period and the fact that Grampy had also just taken on the role of a 'special' in the Bucks Constabulary.

It was while I was looking through the pages of these dusty old ledgers



Grampy's certificate from the Buckinghamshire War Agricultural Executive Committee for its Winter Milk Campaign of 1945-6.

that I also started to become interested in the cattle themselves. It was as if their personalities were jumping out of the pages at me as year after year I came across the same familiar names: Granny Snowflake, Granny Cowslip, Duchess Mayflower, Countess Pansy and Fillpail, to name just a few. It seemed to me that these were not just the names of mere livestock, but of individual animals with their own distinct characters. I began to think that maybe my overactive imagination was getting the better of me until I asked Mum if she remembered a cow called Granny Snowflake.

"Oh, she was our favourite," came her instant reply.