

# Midland Dexter Group



## Newsletter August 2024

Welcome to our Summer Newsletter.

I hope you are all having a good summer with lots of grass for your cattle and have been able to make your hay during the recent sunshine. It makes such a change from last year. I hope you are all sharing my positivity for the coming months and have also found some time for holidays!

It was lovely to see many of you at the events we have held so far this year. Our AGM and meal in February was well attended and the visit to the Thomas Ware & Sons Tannery in April was really interesting. Our herd visit in June to Kate Mathers Redfern Dexters was well attended despite the poor weather and was followed by a very social and enjoyable meal and skittles evening in a local pub.

We have events planned for the summer and autumn so hope to see you all again soon. If you do have any suggestions for visits or talks that you would like to see included in our programme, please get in touch with me or any committee member.

### News

At our AGM in February, we elected a new chairman, Stuart Norgrove and welcomed two new committee members, Niki Ford and Terry Collins.

For those that do not know him well, Stuart has provided a short summary of his connection with farming and Dexters. Stuart has been a farmer all his life being borne and brought up on the family farm at Bewdley, Worcestershire. His parents used to multiple suckle cows and then just keep store cattle. Stuart got his first Dexters in the mid 90s and now keeps an entirely dun coloured herd. More recently he has adopted a regenerative approach to farming, mob grazing cattle and sheep on mature pastures with daily moves. He now outwinters the majority of his Dexters that were previously housed. Trees have also been integrated across the farm in a range of agroforestry systems. We last visited Stuart's farm as a group in July 2022 and since then he has started direct selling his meat (Dexter beef and lamb) along with fruit and vegetables now grown on the farm. Stuart has invited us to hold an event at his farm again soon.

The MDG website is now back in operation at <https://www.midlanddextergroup.com> . The website had been missed by members and so more effort will now be made to keep it up to date with group news and events. The committee also felt that more general and useful articles should be added to the website to provide information on all aspects of Dexter cattle. Thus, allowing the knowledge held within the group to be easily shared and available to all members of the group.

If you would like to write an article on any aspect of Dexter keeping, breeding, showing, beef selling etc. or have anything you think would be interesting to put on the MDG website please contact Penny or Mary [mary.brandwood@aol.co.uk](mailto:mary.brandwood@aol.co.uk). Useful links to other organisations can also be suggested and advertisements will be accepted from fully paid up members.

## Upcoming Events

**September 8<sup>th</sup> 12:00pm Summer Social and Barbeque.** We are delighted to be holding our summer barbeque at the farm of Gordon Alison and family, accessed off Stonepit Lane, Inkberrow WR7 4ED. The MDG banner will be placed at the end of the drive which can be found at what3words <http://w3w.co/hires.midwinter.reception> . You can drive up the bank to the top of the hill where we will hold the barbeque.

Gordon has a small herd of Dexters that will be close by. The site has the added attraction of a restored Nuclear Bunker to view (accessed down a 14ft ladder) that was used during the cold war. The bunkers were strategically positioned about 8 miles apart with bunkers at Eversham, Bidford, Stow, Long Compton and Broadway. In total 1,653 were built across the UK and in 1957 the Royal Observer Corps was given the role of theoretically monitoring nuclear fall-out together with the strength and location of a nuclear bomb if dropped, in preparation for a real event! Fortunately, this was never required.

Please bring whatever meat or non-meat you would like to be barbecued for your own consumption and one salad or sweet dish to share. Please let Penny know if you are planning to attend just so we have an idea of numbers by the 1<sup>st</sup> September and if you will be providing a salad or sweet. Hope to see many of you and hoping for good weather! We may postpone if the weather is really bad so please keep an eye on your emails if the weather looks uncertain.

**October 19<sup>th</sup>** Dexter Cattle Society AGM to be held in Ingliston, Edinburgh.

**October 27<sup>th</sup>. 11.00am Herd Visit to Nick Avery's Herd of Dexters** at Grove Farm, Cold Aston, Gloucestershire GL54 3BJ. The herd visit will be followed by Sunday lunch in Nicks pub, The Plough Inn, Cold Aston. We first visited Nicks herd in 2022 and it will be really interesting to see how his herd and business has progressed over the last two years. Nick has been supplying his own dexter beef to the restaurant and I am sure we will enjoy a lovey meal. Please let Penny know if you are intending to come along to the herd visit and meal. More details will be issued nearer the time.

## Other MDG Events for 2024

**December** Christmas Meal and Social - Date and Location to be confirmed.

If you have any favourite pubs/restaurants in your area that would be suitable venues for a Christmas meal, please contact Penny but the committee are also on the case.

**We have made some progress towards organising other events for the group that may now take place in 2025, but if you do have any suggestions for visits or talks that you would like to see included in our programme, please get in touch with me or any committee member.**

## Recent Events

**February 18<sup>th</sup> Our AGM** was held in the Orangery at The Crown and Sandys, Ombersley. The meeting was well attended with 21 members present. The minutes of the AGM were circulated to members after the meeting. The AGM included a discussion on the availability of local abattoirs after the closure of Long Compton at the beginning of the year.

The AGM was followed by presentation of the **Results of the 2023 Herd Competition** and Sunday Lunch. Unfortunately, our judge Jessica Birch was unable to join us, but her score sheets and judging comments were passed on to entrants with rosettes presented to the top 3 herds/ cattle in each category and trophies to the winners. I hope many of you will consider entering our next biannual herd competition which will be held in 2025. The Sunday lunch was great and rounded off a good day.

We also held our annual **Dexter Photographic Competition** at the AGM with the theme "Dexters in the Sun". The competition was won by Robert and Anne Williams with a photo of three cattle from their Finwood herd.



**April 10<sup>th</sup>. Visit and Tour of the Tannery** in Bristol. Thomas Ware & Sons Ltd

Initially we had hoped to go on the tannery tour in November 2023 but due to restrictions at the tannery it was felt that a spring visit would be more beneficial, and it was definitely worth the wait!

We were given a very informative tour by the tannery manager Steve Lovegrove (pictured with Val and Malcolm Eykyn). Steve was enthusiastic and happy to answer our many questions. Steve did also say he was happy to give another tour in the future for anyone who was not able to come on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, so please let Penny know if you are interested.



As soon as we entered the tannery it was like stepping back in time with some parts just the same as they were in 1840 when the tannery opened. This was particularly so for the lime pits at the start of the process and the brick tanning pits where the preserving of the skins takes place. The skins are moved between different concentrations of tanning solutions, over months. Work had just finished for the day, but we could still imagine what it was like with the machines for stripping the waste from the skins and mixing and drying in operation.



After the long process of tanning the skins are then ready for a new life with uses ranging from shoe soles to cricket balls, saddles to iron man belts.



I found it really interesting to have this insight into what happens to the cattle skins once they leave the abattoir, a bi product of the beef we produce that previously I had given very little thought to.

We were shown some leather from a Pasture for Life partner initiative called British Pasture Leather. This is a project that is aiming to allow Pasture for Life certified farmers to trace the skins from their cattle, from the abattoir and through the tanning process, into the production of leather goods. Their aim is to highlight regenerative farming practices including the regeneration of land and ecosystems and establishing the connection with the quality leather that can be produced. This group are now working with a small midland based tannery called Billy Tannery and I found a good background article on their website. They are currently running a trial where selected PFL farmers are involved in the initial preserving stages of their hides after collection from the abattoir before they are then taken to begin the tanning process. I think this is an interesting development and may develop into a way for individual farmers to produce leather from their own cattle in the future and may well be worth a visit or talk in the future.

**June 13<sup>th</sup>.** We held an **Evening Herd Visit** to Kate Mathers small herd of Redfern Dexters at Landgate House, Temple Guiting. We are very grateful for the warm welcome we received from Kate and her husband with coffee and an introduction to their farm and herd before a short walk to see their Dexters. Unfortunately, the weather soon closed in as the Dexters eyed us suspiciously in our raincoats and hats and kept their distance, but it was good to see them (sorry no photos). We then moved on the Farmers Arms at Guiting Power and were met outside by the local Morris Dancers! Before enjoying a meal and social game of skittles, which all made for a very good evening.

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If you would like to have any information included in the next newsletter, please contact me by email [penny.wadey@btinternet.com](mailto:penny.wadey@btinternet.com).

Best Wishes

Penny

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### **Your Current MDG Committee**

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