

## **THE STORY OF MEG MURRAY**

*of Burnham on Crouch*

**PROBABLY THE MOST SUCCESSFUL LADY FANCIER IN THE U.K.**

*1st BICC GUERNSEY Young Bird National 2014.*

*The subject of this report is ,in my opinion, probably the most consistently successful lady fancier in the UK. This is based on the fact that the name of Mrg Murray can be constantly found at, or near the top of club, Federation, Combine/Amalgamation results over many years. I know for a fact that Meg has been extremely successful when competing with the BICC as I have had the pleasure of asking her for details of her prize winning pigeons each year since I took over the role of Press Officer. As a result of her latest top class performance in the BICC Guernsey young bird National, when her young hen beat 1,891 other young birds to record 1st Open I asked Meg if she would share her experiences in the sport with the rest of the fancy. Although Meg was initially reluctant to comply, a little bit of Welsh charm finally persuaded her to "put pen to paper" and the following article, in Meg's own words, is the result.*



*Meg-Murray 1st Open BICC Guernsey YB*



*MegMurray's winner of 1st Open BICC Guernsey*

## **THE BEGINNING.**

*I married a pigeon fancier! Or rather I married a young man called John who was into all sorts of animal life, from ferrets under the kitchen sink, to budgies in the old coal cellar, with the occasional greyhound thrown in for good measure! He then graduated to flying 'horsemen' or 'pouter pigeons' from the top floor of a tenement building in Edinburgh! Thankfully he calmed down a bit when we moved to a new house in Bonnyrigg, Midlothian where he built a large aviary in the back garden and set about breeding Gloucester and Norwich canaries for a few years. Very successfully too I may add.*

*John soon got to know the pigeon men of Bonnyrigg and it wasn't long before the canaries were outed and the racers took over. That was the start of what would become a lifelong obsession.*

*Kirkpatrick's were the first racers to be tried, but when the Cattrysse strain were added to the mix we had our first taste of success: 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> Club and Fed, 6000 plus birds. One season we even won the first three OB races, a real feat in a very strong club containing Scottish National winners. I still have the newspaper clipping pasted in my loft book! I got the job of loft manager when John's job took him away from home for long periods and I spent my time juggling training, racing, a job, a house and two sons!*

*Then, in 1984 we moved to Reading in Berkshire in 1984 and, of course, top priority was the pigeon loft to house the birds which was brought down with us from Scotland. The removal company had never before been persuaded to take the loft, the birds and all their paraphernalia along with the pigeon loft!*

## **THE BIRDS.**

*The birds bred off the Scottish stock were just not good enough. They had strength and stamina in plenty for getting over the misty Scottish border hills into Scotland but were just not fast enough to compete against the "Southern speedsters".*

*The local club Secretary during our time in Reading was Joyce Kulpa, and she and her husband Eddie and their family can still be found well up in National results.*

*Three years later, pigeons, loft and furniture were packed back into the removal van and we were on the road again, this time back up country to Gateshead, Tyne and Wear. There surely cannot be more dedicated men than those Geordies, be it growing and showing onions, leeks and flowers or breeding and racing their pigeons! That was a steep learning curve! With John away for months at a time, there were few more generous with their help and advice. We were in the North East for fifteen years, gaining a few successes, a load of knowledge and, most importantly, great friends. Friends who still to this day, visit bearing gifts of superb birds off Amal winners.*

*In 1997, while we were still in the North East, we were lucky enough to buy some top Kavanagh Busschaerts at auction in our club and they formed the basis of the stock loft when we packed up yet again and moved back south to Essex.*

## **ILL HEALTH.**

*John's breathing problems had been growing steadily worse over the years and by this time he was unable to go anywhere near the pigeon loft, but he did enjoy sitting on the sundeck telling me what to do!*

*There were two pigeon clubs in Burnham on Crouch when we first moved here in Nov. 2001 – the Burnham RPS flying north road and the Leigh on Sea RPS flying south and I joined both! Our first race North in 2002 was with ybs from Spalding, a distance of 88 miles and we were delighted to win 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>. And flying South, 1<sup>st</sup> MS, 6<sup>th</sup> Club. John religiously pasted the results in the loft book, that's the only reason I can come up with those facts! That same loft book shows that the stock loft contained Vandenabeeles, Wildermeesch, Janssens and lots of Busschaerts including our fantastic Kavanaghs. It also shows that from*

*the word go, superb birds were sent down from friends in the North East, gifts that have continued to this day.*

*Sadly, John's health deteriorated and he was on oxygen 24/7 but he was still mad keen on the pigeons. When he died suddenly in 2005, he left behind birds that he'd bought after spending many hours researching pedigrees and results. Some of those pigeons are still in the loft today – and now 10, 11 and 12 years old!*

*He bought both "Sooty" and "Mealy", a pair of YB's that went straight into the stock loft. Sooty was a big dark Wildermesch that came from the loft of Woofe, Son and Daughter and Mealy is a Janssen, Jan Loots hen, Their offspring were at the top of the results sheet from day one. Sadly, Sooty died earlier this year aged eleven but Mealy, an '04 hen is still looking good and, paired to a nice young cock. I managed to get three youngsters, one in each nest, from her this year and they are looking good!*

*The result John was proudest of was winning 2<sup>nd</sup> Open NFC YB from Falaise, 6,203 birds in 2003 with a youngster bred from one of his favourite Kavanagh Busschaert cocks.*

### **THE LOFT.**

*The present loft which was built when we move to Burnham 13 years ago and is forty feet long with four sections and an aviary at each end. A corridor runs the full length of the loft fronting all sections and this is a godsend when I'm basketing birds. The loft faces south so the birds get the benefit of the sun most of the day. There is also a smaller loft next door which is now only used for storage.*

*During the racing season the loft is scraped out twice a day but once racing stops that is reduced to once a day. I have tried straw on the floors and other different floor dressings but always go back to the scraper. One recent exception is in the YB's section where, for the past couple of years I have used cat litter! The birds seem to like it and it keeps their section bone dry. I convince myself it keeps them free from YBS but then that has never been a problem for me anyway.*

### **MANAGEMENT.**

*I race a sort of roundabout, but John always used to say I shouldn't be doing well because I don't follow the usual methods. I don't show the hens to the cocks and I race all the cocks and hens at the same time.*

*They all come back together from the races and stay together for a while before being separated into their separate sections. Both cocks and hens get out separately, twice a day, morning and evening. They are trained lightly before the first race, then once or twice on the midweek training transporter run by the Leigh on Sea Club. They are not trained once racing starts, unless I think they are getting a bit lazy around the loft, when they'll go back on the transporter. The birds are happy, healthy and winning so I think I'll just keep on doing it 'wrong'!*

### **YOUNG BIRDS.**

*The YB's are a different matter. They are raised on the darkness system until the middle of June. Once they are ranging well round the loft it's into the basket and down the road, starting off from about three miles to get them used to leaving the safety of the basket, then increasing gradually until about twenty miles. They then go onto the training transporter every week until I think they are ready to face their first race. The young birds are kept together and, once started, they go to every race. The Old Birds are prepared for the late Channel YB/OB races so that they are sitting, hatching and rearing at different stages for the different races. Then it's lights out and very little disturbance until they are all through the moult. But isn't that what everyone does? I do let them out over the winter months when the weather is half decent for as long as they want.*

## **FEEDING.**

*I feed mostly Gerry Plus, strengthening the mix as the week progresses. As a treat they get peanuts, and Red Band and sunflower hearts. I have never fed depurative, wheat or barley at any time of the year. The YB's are reared on Junior UK Breed and Wean and then go onto the Gerry Plus routine. I don't compete in the longest races where I'm sure the feeding would need to be much more professional!*

## **MEDICATION.**

*Medication is confined to the usual respiratory, canker, cocci treatment pre-season with the occasional "tweak" throughout the season. I do use loads of garlic, putting a whole bulb in each drinker. And my favourite water additive is Orego Stim which is used most days along with Naturaline.*

## **PERFORMANCES.**

*Some of my birds' best achievements in National races include 2<sup>nd</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, Open OHs Guernsey; 2<sup>nd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Tours (3,693 birds); 4<sup>th</sup> ES, 12<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Alencon, (4559 birds); 15<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 37<sup>th</sup> Open Saran (3940 birds); 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup> and 14<sup>th</sup> Open BICC Guernsey. (One hen took 4<sup>th</sup> Open in both the NFC and BICC flying two weeks apart.) 1<sup>st</sup> Open London & South East Classic Club YB Guernsey (2100) and 1<sup>st</sup> NE section, 3<sup>rd</sup> Open on the same day in the OH's race. That 1<sup>st</sup> Open was a great result for me because it stopped my clubmates with a dubious sense of humour from calling me the 'bridesmaid', having had my birds winning 2<sup>nd</sup> Open in four National races but never quite getting the top spot. 2009 was my last year with the Leigh on Sea Club based in Southend but it was a good year with six 1<sup>st</sup> Club; the Overseas Average and the YB Average. During the club's four July Cup races, the birds took the first four places in each one.*

*I joined the Thames North & Eastern Counties Flying Club in 2010. This is another good club for training your birds for the Channel races and the old birds managed to clock up some good results that first year including 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Open OH's Falaise; 4<sup>th</sup> section, 8<sup>th</sup> Open Alencon and 4<sup>th</sup> section, 9<sup>th</sup> Open Saran all with the BICC 1<sup>st</sup> section as well as 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> & 5<sup>th</sup> Open St Malo with the NFC and 1<sup>st</sup> section, 2<sup>nd</sup> Open from Bergerac with the L&SECC. Of course, topping the good results my birds have gained is this year's 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Open BICC Young Bird National from Guernsey.*

## **A BIG THANK YOU.**

*A lot of credit for my bird's performances has to go to the quality of the youngsters sent to me each year from Rob Shield. I used to fly against Rob (and be soundly beaten by him) in the Winlaton Hallgarth Club in the Tyne and Derwent Valley Fed, West Durham Amal. One of the six YB's he gifted me this year was 3<sup>rd</sup> Open Guernsey, BICC. That same youngster won the Thames North & Eastern Counties Club the week before, such is the quality of Rob's birds.*

*Thanks also have to go to Craig Booth of Hartlepool, Co.Durham. He too had some of those fantastic Kavangh Busschaerts and knowing how much I thought of them he has gifted me some super youngsters and stock birds. They are responsible for loads of top results down the years.*

*Last, but not least, thanks to clubmate Lee Bastone. He flies a mean widowhood pigeon but is very strict about numbers, limiting his racers to twelve max. Quite a few years ago he gave me two pairs of superb stock birds, and they, and their offspring have been written about more times than I can count. The Willy Thas cock and SVR hen, through Radar, have bred birds that have headed the results sheet week after week, season after season. The second pair of stock birds from Lee are equally productive and equally successful. Both cock and hen are three quarters Soontjen, one quarter SVR with Radar, Sabre and Secret in their*

*pedigree. The birds off the Willy Thas cock and his hen do not like the Channel races but crossed out they don't have a problem with the water races. They are all nearing the end of their productive lives now, but they have more than earned their perches in the loft.*

*Over the years I have tried to keep numbers to a reasonable amount but during the breeding season YB's just seem to appear when I am not looking and I can't bear to part with any of them! Add to that, the fact that I don't seem to lose many so the numbers soon mount up. However, last year, fewer were bred and I did lose some, so I'll be starting 2015 with about 42 racers - cocks and hen - and six pairs of stock birds – some of those real old pensioners – aiming to breed about 30 youngsters. Can't wait for 2015!*

*Many thanks Meg for sharing your experiences in the sport with us and here's wishing you many more years of enjoyment out of the sport.*

*Gareth Watkins*



*Loft in Bonyrigg*



*Lofts in Blaydon Tyne & Wear*



*Meg & husband John with an ex editor of the RP*



*Meg-relaxing outside the loft*



*Meg pictured in Corridor*



*Meg's Old Bird section*



*Meg's sons John & Gary*