

(1) HANSSENE



When I was just entering my teens in the 1950s I first became aware of the name of Hansenne, for within a valley of the Sperrin Mountains some members of the two local pigeon clubs which included my father, had representatives of this pigeon strain. Little did I know then that this was considered one of the great distance strains. In fact I was ignorant of the meaning of the word 'strain' and of the country of its origins, Belgium. In my recall of a period of time long gone I wonder how the Hansennes managed to play a part in the sport in a small valley beyond the foothills of the Sperrins. Where did they come from? Who brought them? Yet they succeeded in channel races from Milford Haven, Bude and Penzance. So in researching this article I am now more informed about the strain although still ignorant of their origins beside the Roe in County Derry, in Ireland. For, alas, generations of local fanciers from the area have since gone to that big loft in the sky and I am bereft of their knowledge.

Alexander Hansenne was from Verviers in Belgium and before he died in 1903 he had moulded a strain of outstanding racing pigeons. In fact the late A.H. Osman attributed the Hansennes as being the primary base of the then emerging English strains at the beginning of the last century. In his writings the same authority believed that Hansenne was the greatest long distance racer of his day.

Some of Hansenne's best birds included 'Le Criquet', hatched in 1877, and as a racer was 1st National from Paris, 1st from St. Benoit and 3rd from Tolosa. There was also an outstanding racer known as 'Calvi' who amongst other successes was 1st from Calvi. There was also the great 'Le St. Vincent' which was 2nd St. Vincent and 1st St. Benoit and Agen respectively.

Alexander Hansenne was known to have bought up more than one loft in his pursuit of a particular bird or birds, culling the others in the process. Where breeding was concerned he had a policy of never breeding off a cock until it was raced hard at the longer races.

As a family they were composed mostly of dark chequers with traces of bronze and short in legs and necks. Chest wise they were not so broad as other families of the time. His commitment to the long distance races was extreme by reputation and there is no doubt although he would not have been aware of it, that this contributed to the advancement of the long distance and marathon type of pigeon racing which we are witnessing today.

The Hansenne bloodlines lies at the base of many of the old Belgian, British and other world strains. Indeed this maestro was a pivotal figure in our sport and Wanroy, and Aarden, etc, and others of today owe much to this outstanding pioneer.

(2) GURNAY



Renier Gurnay of Verviers, Belgium, began in the sport as a runner for the great Mons Hansenne of world wide pigeon fame. A teenager in the time of no timing clocks in the 1870's he relished the tasks that he had to do for Hansenne. For his love of pigeons had started early in life and this was stimulated by Hansenne whose own sons had no interest in the sport.

In due course Gurnay received pigeons from his mentor and as Hansenne

died in 1903 he purchased some very good stock of the latter's lofts because of his inside knowledge and began a journey which saw him in the eyes of others eclipse his mentor. His foundation hen called the 'Old Blue Hen' whose progeny won over 500,000 dollars was the base of a wonderful and prosperous pigeon career although he was a successful business man in his own right as a merchant in tailor linings.

It is estimated that since he started racing pigeons in 1886 until 1936 Gurnay had won 600,000 dollars in prize money. A phenomenal sum in those day at the beginning of the 20th century. In fact in his first season his birds won 160 prizes in one of the largest pigeon bodies in Europe and we should bear in mind that his successes were achieved when Bricoux and other giants of the sport were at their best.

One could say that fate had dealt a very good hand to Renier Gurnay for as some believe he had everything handed to him on a plate because of the genius of Hansenne and their relationship. Yes, I have no doubt that Gurnay was a good pupil and because of his role as a runner he was constantly taking in what Hansenne was freely giving and of course the obtaining of the best of stock. However there is something born within oneself which is a necessary prerequisite to possess in order to form a loft of winning pigeons at the distance especially if one wants to reach the heights of Hansenne and Gurnay. Of that Renier Gurnay definitely possessed.

And I believe that this was reflected in the fact that he was a hard culler based upon a very strong love for and commitment too the sport. And this involved a loft of about 20 to 30 inmates and no matter what the bloodlines if one had to be culled it was culled. This was necessary for he was also a very close inbreeder who in the main kept his birds until they were 2 years before they went to the races. Again like many maestro's of the fancy acknowledging the need for maturity.

Gurnay was acknowledged as the official champion in Belgium for over

30 years which is testimony to how he was thought of and to how brilliant he was as a pigeon fancier- breeder, and racer. And I know that myths can be created or grow up around the exploits of any fancier but the evidence available would suggest that Renier Gurnay was an outstanding participant in the sport.

In other insights into various strain makers I have outlined some results but in the case of this master it is not I think a necessary practice. In fact I knew of one deceased fancier of my youth who was nicknamed 'Gurnay' and this was in the 50s of the last century which would imply that in the consciousness of the ordinary fancier Gurnay is a legend otherwise why use his name to describe the achievements of another?

(3) BRICOUX



The strain to be looked at in this piece is the Bricoux strain which reigned supreme in Belgium in particular between the two world wars i.e. approximately 1919 and 1939. During that time Bricoux was unbeatable based upon the truth that he was an outstanding breeder of racing pigeons. The base of which arose from the exchanging of young birds with the great French champion Paul Sion. And as time passed the intelligent Doctor won 14 Nationals, was 2nd in Nationals twelve times and scored in the top twenty on approximately 125 occasions.

Being a Doctor however Bricoux had his critics arising from the phenomenal results of his pigeons even to the extent of being accused of using drugs to increase his lofts potential. His superiority however arose from the fact that he was a maestro at the widowhood method and held the reputation of being one of the first to use it in Belgium. As for his young birds they were never raced but well trained and given time to

mature. The yearlings were raced from the nest whereas those two years and older were sent as widowers to the long distance races, for he was of the belief that there were horses for courses and that one had to specialize.

Inbreeding was his preferred breeding method although he acknowledged that a cross had to be brought in at sometime. The out cross had to be from an inbred or line bred family. In general preferring well built pigeons with sound constitutions coupled with broad and rounded backs and rigid vents. This was the standard of what he required in a pigeon nevertheless he would not adhere to it rigidly for there was always room for pragmatism in Bricoux's thinking.

When one looks at the results obtained by this great strain under the tutelage of its founder then one realizes that this was a master of his art for he produced champions like the great 'Kleine Geschelpte' which was sent on five occasions to the Pau National and won on the five occasions. A super pigeon! Then there was the famous 'Rode Libourne' which was 4th National from Angouleme in 1930 followed in 1932 and 1933 with National wins from Angouleme and Bordeaux respectively. Another of his great birds was the 'Goede Rode Bricoux' which scored a 2nd and a 4th National. Of course the master breeder was the world famous 'Jules Caesar', a red cock of magnificent physique. Red was one of Bricoux's favourite colours because quite a number of the strains winners were of this hue and as such were nicknamed 'The Red Locomotives'.

What the reader may not know about Dr. Bricoux is that apparently all of his pigeons were killed during the war in a charge of the French Army and although other fanciers like Nestor Tremmery, whose loft were mostly of the Bricoux strain, provided other birds in substitution the good Doctor never got over the apparent shock and died a few months later. Thus the Doctor who created one of the pivotal strains in the history of the sport like all mortals could not escape the shadow of the cross inspite of the fact that he had previously shared in the glory. It was then left to his son Arthur to continue with the work but he lacked the genius of his father and in 1952 what was left came under the hammer. But rest assured

that the name of Bricoux is amongst the bright lights of the greats of the sport of pigeon breeding and racing.

(4) PAUL SION



The Sion strain of long distance racing pigeons holds a hallowed place in the pantheon of the world's greatest families of the thoroughbreds of the sky. And like much that is good in Europe came out of the culture of France. Paul Sion, its originator, started in the sport in approximately 1895 and in due course set his mark. In fact what he produced crossed more national boundaries throughout the world and became the source of much joy and reward to countless fanciers. To quote one eminent authority, A.H.Osman: 'This man has won more prizes in one season than many fanciers win in a lifetime'. Yes, Paul Sion who was later to be assisted by his son, Robert, truly exceeded (perhaps) his expectations when after becoming a fancier he adopted Luis Salembier as his teacher, the latter being one of the great French distance pigeoners for over 50 years at that time. Sion admitted in 1935 that he belonged to the Luis Salembier school.

Upon following the advice of his mentor Sion obtained the best of distance bloodlines including representatives of the old Verviers strain and for decades cultivated what he referred to as his old Gris (grey) strain. So called because of its origins from a son of a famous French distance racer named Gris Dugniol. Sion had purchased a champion mealy cock from M.Gris Dugniol. On the dam side his family went back to the Vekemans Red of the Wegge strain. The latter pigeon being one of the greatest in the history of the sport in Europe. The Mealy cock was bred with a mealy hen and produced a blue hen with black eyes. This hen proved to be a champion in all of her races. She was later mated to a cock of Pynen /Delathouwer bloodlines. It was from this mating that Rouge Sion, one of Sion's pivotal pigeons, was produced. The Rouge Sion went

on to be a great racer and also bred many winners.

When once asked what were the requirements for success in long distance and marathon racing Paul Sion replied- strain and constitution. A reply which was in the form of an article in which the author took, as an example, there were horses good in soft and other horses good in hard conditions. Opining that there were pigeons or strains good in clear, weather conditions and others good in tough cloudy conditions. The latter strains being the best for the ultra distances. Thus according to Sion only those birds whose forebears distinguished themselves in difficult races were in turn capable of doing the same. Whatever is ones response to Sion's position in that article there is one notable fact and that is- he was not an advocate of inbreeding. Like his master Salembier, Sion, participated in out crossing, which was based upon much thought and research into the pedigree and the background of the potential cross. The fruit of which was a strain that was almost identical in appearance. Apparently this great pigeonier had perfected his out crossing approach to the level of a science.

Today, there are those who claim to have representatives of the Sion strain especially in the U.S.A., where they impacted upon that fancy. How pure they are I do not know. But there is a wide agreement that when one sees a Sion one knows that it is a Sion, which is but a reflection of the genius of their founder.

(5) JULES JANSSEN



Our subject Jules Janssen from Rue Seutin 6, Schaerbeek, Belgium, once held the position of the Minister of Finance in the Belgium Government and was in his day reputed to be the 'Father of the Sport' in his native country. At least he was one of its founding fathers. To the older generation of pigeoniers this particular Janssen would have been well

known through the exploits of the stud of the late T.Buck and the world famous 'Theatre Lofts' of Jack Lovell of Britain. The Buck 'Janssens' as some referred to them were winners of countless prizes in Fed, Combine and Open competition and Jack Lovell of London was noted to have received numerous expressions of thanks and congratulations from fanciers world wide arising from the exploits of his pigeons especially of the Jules Janssen bloodlines. In fact there are many outstanding strains who have had Jules Janssen bloodlines at their foundations including the Janssens of Arendonk. (The latter family were not related to this maestro of the art of breeding). In relation to the base of the Arendonk family some authorities imply that the Janssen Bros and especially their father was somewhat secretive about the pigeons used. This may have been unintentional but there are those who opine that Jules Janssen was a source if not the full source of their strains base. Suggesting that sharing the same surname of an then famous fancier would have seen the Arendonk family making contact with Jules Janssen.

The strain was of the Brussels type of the long distance racing pigeon which tended towards being large, blue and chequered in colour, and was descended from the Wegge strain. Jules Janssen patiently created his strain after he had received some pigeons from Karel Wegge. He had been helping Wegge for sometime to look after his pigeons and when he decided to have a loft of his own the Wegges were an obvious choice. In due course his name became famous especially as a breeder of marvellous stock and from throughout his native country his bloodlines were sought by hundreds of the fancy. T. Buck had a stud book of Jules Janssen dating from 1893 which he presented to Jack Lovell and in it is revealed the names of many founding fathers and great exponents of the sport who had received birds from Jules Janssen namely Vandeveld, Gits, Delbar, Grooter, Van der Espt and Jurion. Also there are Delmotte, Carpentier, Gallez, Vekeman, Pittevoil and Coopman. The brothers Catrysse family also carried their bloodlines via the Vandeveldes and in due course the following strains were helped by the Jules Janssens namely Havenith, Sion, Bricoux, Tremmery and Stassart. Of course there are others but the sample provided should confirm that this was a pivotal strain in the sport of pigeon breeding and racing.

In Britain it is opined that the Jules Janssens lie at the base of or

influenced the development of the Kenyons via the black pids of the Thorogoods. They are also said to have been used by the great English national flyer Marriott via T. Buck and there is a story by Jack Lovell in which it is related that N. Barker got in a red stray cock of Janssens which he was allowed to keep, bred good birds off it before gifting it to J.W. Logan who was of the opinion that it was his best breeder. Yes, as well as Logan there were many other lofts who housed the Janssens for Jules breeding skills helped to develop the sport at its infancy and beyond.

In conclusion, Jules Janssen warrants a special place because of his contribution to the sport of pigeon racing, especially the genetic contribution which is to be found at the base of many outstanding strains of our thoroughbreds.

(7) JOHN LOGAN



Although a man of many interests John W. Logan was destined to become the pioneer of distance pigeon racing in England. It was the late scribe and Logan specialist who wrote under the pseudonym of 'Old Hand' S.W.E. Bishop, the original editor of the British 'Pigeon Racing Gazette', who referred to Logan as 'the wild Irishman'. Well its not the first time that persons of Irish blood or association have contributed to the culture and the sport of other lands. And what better area of contribution than the sport of pigeon racing in the land of the rose. Of course because of the close proximity of the two nations the land of the shamrock or the harp would also reap the rewards emanating from the stamina and the endurance of 'The Logans'. For many a fine representative of the strain flew hundreds of miles through all elements including crossing the English channel and the Irish sea to win for their proud owners in Ireland.

John Logan was a man of immense wealth and influence based upon his role as a master of engineering of which his hand is seen in some of the most important engineering feats in Britain of the nineteenth century. In fact his success at this aspect of human endeavour as time progressed saw him elected eventually to the House of Commons. A role which as an MP he performed like all his many other interests to the best of his ability. By all accounts Logan was a unique individual.

As to his beginnings in the sport of pigeon racing it is believed that this was in approximately 1870 when there were none or very few long distance pigeons in England. But once he was hooked so to speak Logan would have attempted to move mountains on behalf of the sport as well as establishing the United Counties Flying Club and ultimately becoming Chairperson of the English National Flying Club. Yes, in those formative years of the sport he was often referred to as a person of immense importance. In fact at that fledgling period he was looked upon as the leader of the sport in England if not in Britain. And along with the late Colonel Osman the founder of another great English strain Logan founded the British based 'Racing Pigeon Weekly'.

But in creating in due course England's number one strain where did Logan procure the foundations of the latter? In the nineteenth century an Englishman by the name of Northrop Barker from Yorkshire had settled in Belgium and raced so well in the sport there that he was second to the great Grooters of worthy fame. The astute Logan had been observing Barker's achievements for sometime and in 1878 he surprised many by buying out the latter's loft and bringing them to England. He then as an original thinker sold most of the old birds ensuring that he got quite a number of their offspring back crossed with pigeons from those whom he had sold the young birds too. The latter with other purchases for example input from the Gits, Hansenne, Tofts, Blampain, Soffle, Dardenne, and Goosens were the foundations and the blocks of the Logan strain.

With a millionaire revenue Logan bought other outstanding birds although some others he failed to obtain in fact he once offered Gits a pair

of the best carriage horses in England for two of the latter's best birds but was refused. He did obtain one outstanding champion and that was 'Rome 1' which he purchased from Gasper Heutz and which was the leading pigeon in the 1878 Rome race, appearing ultimately in the bloodlines of Logan's 'Old '86'. The latter bird 'Old '86' was born in 1879 and in 1882 flew Arras; 1883 3rd from Rennes; 1884 1st from Rennes and also flew La Rochelle; then in 1886 1st Ventnor; 1st Rennes and 1st La Rochelle. Outstanding victories in an era when the transport of the pigeons was an obstacle to their form and health. Surely one of the great racing pigeons of all time was 'Old '86'.

Apparently Logan was a hard but fair task master and was known to have killed off many birds in the build up of his strain. As an advocate of careful crossing the evidence from his time confirms that he was extremely careful and this appears to be part of his genius for otherwise no successful strain would have evolved without this factor. An important aspect of his breeding method was the pairing of an outstanding Cock with two outstanding hens and then to pair the offsprings of the initial matings. Many successes arose from this method.

His family of racers were very game and definitely of long distance par excellence. And as they were based upon many strains the Logans were noted to be good crossers with any other strain or family. But like some other strain founders in spite of their successes and there were many the development of the strain were helped by others like the late S.W.E. Bishop whose family in due course were labelled 'Bishop's Logan's'.

The latter development is nothing new in the sport for it took other breeders who in a sense were masters in the art and the science of pigeon breeding and racing to develop the work of the founders. As if the founder of a strain was but the seed setter but others were necessary for the nurturing and the fruition of the original work. The latter is true to a certain extent as one can see in the development of the Aardens and the Stichelbauts for example.

It is to be noted that one of Logans famous hens '1826' won 8th and 1st in the English NFC National in successive years at a distance of 640 miles. The latter outstanding racer proved also to be a good breeder. Rome 1st was in her bloodlines as well as another of Logan's finest breeders '129'. Also '1826' bloodlines are found in the great ' Twilight ' of world renown and of latter times.

The record of results which I have encountered in researching the background for this article are too numerous to mention: but apparently between 1877 until 1886 J. W. Logan experienced continual success at both racing and breeding with the family which he created. And in due course the Logans cultivated by others such as the above mentioned Bishops, and to include Shearing, etc., added to their development which has established the strain forever in the folklore of pigeon racing. That is as it should be for there is no doubt in the mind of this writer that the Logans were on a par with the best of distance strains from the European mainland. Thus the 'wild Irishman' if he had accomplished nothing else in his lifetime has left his undoubtable mark on the history of the sport of European pigeon racing.