

The breed behind the badge

Since its creation in 1973, RBST's logo has featured the outline of a distinctive horned head, now featured on the lapel badge designed to commemorate the Trust's 50th anniversary. The breed behind the badge is the White Park, one of our most ancient breeds of cattle.

The White Park was one of the breeds chosen in the 1950s by Sir Solly – later to become Lord – Zuckerman when, in his role as Honorary Secretary of the Zoological Society of London, he established what he called his 'Gene Bank' at Whipsnade Zoo. He chose breeds which he believed were on the edge of extinction.

In the late '60s, when ZSL began to question whether the gene bank may not have been more the concern of the agricultural and scientific community than that of a zoological park, the events which led to the formation of RBST took place. They started with a letter to Christopher Dadd at RASE suggesting a meeting to 'create a wider interest' in the gene bank. This resulted in a joint working party being set up between RASE and ZSL, chaired by Sir Dudley Forwood Bt, to advise on alternative locations for the gene bank breeds. The Duchess of Devonshire agreed to have the poultry collection at Chatsworth and half of the sheep and a nucleus of the rarest breed of cattle, the White Parks went to the NAC. This move led ultimately to the formation of the Rare Breeds Survival Trust – and the rarest cattle breed was chosen as the logo to symbolise the work that RBST was taking on.

The White Park is truly a historic breed and in historic texts is sometimes referred to as 'White Forest' as it mostly favoured more

remote wooded areas of Britain. The earliest references of cattle of the White Park type are found in the pre-Christian Irish epics, where white cattle with coloured points were often

mentioned as a special and favoured breed. Other early references occur in Wales. The Laws of Hywel Dda (laws of mediaeval Wales) measure fines and payments in numbers of white cattle with coloured points.

Herds were established in England and Scotland from the thirteenth century when in 1225 the Charta Forestae (Charter of the Forest) allowed forests and hunting chases to be emparked and the historical associations of some of these ancient herds are continued in the breed's current Herd Book.





The White Park was considered an endangered breed long before the establishment of RBST, although its historic significance was recognised. During the Second World War, five cows and one bull were shipped to America for safekeeping as part of a programme that sent national treasures across the Atlantic for safekeeping. Initially the White Parks found their way to the Bronx Zoo but it was decided that the zoo didn't have facilities to house them long-term. Four animals were moved to the King Ranch in Texas, where they were maintained as a closed herd for 40 years. The cattle were dispersed in the 1980s, and several conservation herds were established in the US and Canada. Breeders formed the Ancient White Park Cattle Society of North America to monitor the status of the population which, by 2008, had reached nearly 300 breeding animals. These North American breeders have an important role to play in conserving some genetic variants that are now rare or have disappeared in the British population. The North American cattle have been DNA tested for purity and to determine the best breeding plan to preserve its genetic base, with an on-going breeding programme being put in place.

In the UK, the breed reached its most endangered position after the war and by the 1960s only four domesticated and recorded herds remained: the Dynevor, Cadzow, Woburn and Whipsnade herds.

The current series of White Park herd books were collated from 1972 onwards, but detailed records had been maintained in some herds for a much longer period. The breed is now officially recognised in the EU and animals have been exported to North America, Australia, Denmark, Germany and France.

Why choose White Park?

The White Park is a medium size animal, with cows averaging 600kg and bulls 900kg. Typically a shapely animal with plenty of size and length, they are white with black points and distinctive long, curved horns. Occasionally the black points can be red.

A beef breed, White Park cows are long-lived, fertile and maternal. They make good suckler cows and can breed well into their teens. One study of calving ease saw five herds of White Parks recorded, with 22 cows put to nine different bulls, most of them pedigree White Park. Of the 63 calvings recorded, all were categorised as 'easy' (*Dystocia in nine British breeds of cattle and its relationship to the dimensions of the dam and calf* – AE Schwabe, SJG Hall).

They can finish within 30 months off forage and the breed is known for being very lean and with good marbling and a full flavour. The usual target at three years is a carcass of 350kg from non-intensive management. They are well suited to low-input, extensive systems and high quality beef can be produced from upland pastures.

Legend has it that the superlative quality of White Park beef was recognised by James I when, after a long day of hunting, so enjoyed the beef from the resident herd at Hoghton Tower in Lancashire, that he dubbed it 'Sir Loin'.

Although the White Park is ideally suited to a parkland setting because of its distinctive appearance, it is a very hardy breed, capable of overwintering in a range of environments. Its ability to adapt to local conditions and its grazing behaviour mean that the breed is eminently suited to conservation grazing in a wide range of habitats, from heath to wetlands and woodland and they often show a preference for coarse herbage.

The White Park is genetically distinct from all other British breeds and White Park crosses have a great deal of hybrid vigour.



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