

Anarchy or Establishment

Lawrence Alderson: a life of contrasts and contradictions

His working life was based on an impressive career as an international business management consultant, but his focal interest has always been the conservation of native breeds of livestock and the environment to which they are adapted. He has created new breeds of supreme productivity, but probably he will be remembered best as Founder President of Rare Breeds International and the driving force for more than forty years behind the success of RBST.

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Review by Peter Titley, former president of RBST

Polar opposites emerge throughout this intriguing tale: the warm welcoming bonhomie juxtaposed with the stern countenance are but two of the many manifestations of a complex personality. This powerful, influential, character is candidly exposed yet subtly hidden between the covers of this book. I have known Lawrence for over thirty years and I recognise much of the man lurking between the lines; so much so, that I can understand why the author felt like a 'ghost-writer' on occasion.

I remain challenged to reach clear conclusions about the messages in this book. "Setting the record straight" is one idea, but this would not do justice to the author or his words. Like the subject, the book is a work of many parts: on one hand the history of a fascinating, talented family whose chronology sees the emergence of flair, intellect, pugilism and sporting prowess in a boy of their own. The Cambridge Scholar and Boxing Blue...what a combination!

On the other hand, it plots the enthusiasm, conviction and self-belief which developed and remains to this day. These adult qualities are inextricably woven into the fabric of an organisation which Lawrence created and which he came to look upon as his own... and so we witness the birth of RBST in 1973. His sheer enthusiasm for the emerging charity shines through and he harnesses an astute and committed band of farmers, business men, scientists and academics to ensure that this pioneering organisation gained sufficient credibility to influence policy and stop the slide into extinction which had been the fate of so many of our native breeds in the first half of the twentieth century.

The book shows how his various roles in RBST, including director and chairman, carved out a career in a field which he made his own both at home and internationally. The changing fortunes of RBST and the roles of some of its "personalities" attract the author's particular attention, not surprisingly given the access which was afforded to hitherto unseen private archives.

The book reveals a level of self-belief, undoubtedly a driving force in RBST, which made him formidable in the face of opposition and intolerant of indecision and dithering. The author finds many examples and, for instance, cites evidence of this in an account of Lawrence's outstanding individual effort to support farmers ensnared in the awful Foot and Mouth outbreak of 2001. Here he paints a picture of a compassionate and uncompromising campaigner who took the fight to the heart of Government, Parliament and policy makers. In the cut and thrust of those



Baroness Byford awarding Fellowship of the Royal Agricultural Societies to Lawrence Alderson CBE in the House of Lords

political engagements it seems that the boxer was never far away! His interventions had an added dimension, for what emerges is an unerring sense of ownership which Lawrence has towards RBST. His defence of his beliefs, his ideas, his plans and his reputation, is unflinching!

It is testing to draw conclusions from a story in which one has played some part, but all my encounters with him were first-hand experiences of the man in action; personal memories of many of the things picked up by the author: the workshops and rich fellowship of the RBST members. I was reminded of the many times I have seen Lawrence's magnetic personality drawing people to the cause. His CBE was a well-deserved award and the author named many pioneering visionaries who worked alongside Lawrence.

There is so much in this very readable book that the review fails to mention but this is in keeping with the man at the heart of it. There is so much more to him than business acumen, farming, conservation, genetics and science; so much that relates to his roots, his childhood, his family and the northern grit in his soul. There is so much of him that extends beyond the bounds of Britain and beyond the bounds of lesser mortals who are not blessed with his talents, energy, enquiring nature and wanderlust. The author does well to capture the essence of it.

I am happy and privileged to know the man portrayed in this book for here is an account of a unique being who has opened his life to the prying eyes of an author and thereby submitted it to inspection by the reader. The story starts and ends with the family centre stage. Enigmatic he may be, but no one who reads the book will gainsay that he made a difference. His living legacy will roam our land for generations to come and anyone with an interest in the roots of genetic conservation will find it a compelling tale.