

# **An Account of the Activities and Organisation of the British Grassland Society from 1995 to 2005**

**D Arthur Davies**

Institute of Grassland and Environmental Research, Bronydd Mawr, Trecastle, Brecon, Powys LD3 8RD

## **BGS Aims and Objectives**

The aims of the Society are to advance the methods of production and utilisation of grass and forage crops for the promotion of agriculture and for the public benefit and also the advancement of education and research in grass and forage crop production and utilisation and the publication of the results of any research.

To achieve the objectives the Society organises conferences and meetings, and sells books and publications on all aspects of grassland management.

## **Introduction**

BGS was inaugurated on 20 June 1945. To mark the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary a comprehensive account of the Society's history was published in a commissioned article (Powell *et al.*, 1995). The present article provides an account of the activities and organisation of the BGS over the period from the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 1995 until the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary in 2005.

Back in 1995, the profitability of UK agriculture was at a peak, having seen a dramatic rise in the early 90s mainly due to the decline in the Euro/Sterling exchange rate after the UK had left the Exchange Rate Mechanism. There then followed an equally rapid reverse in profitability for the next 5 years, due partly to the strength of sterling and lower world commodity prices. Farm income in 2004 was 70 % above that in 2000, but it still was only 50 % of that in 1995. Problems for the livestock sector were compounded following the announcement in March 1996 of the link between BSE in cattle and new variant CJD in humans. The sector received another blow in 2001 when an epidemic of Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) affected a large part of the UK. Another serious animal health problem that has escalated during recent years is that of bovine TB. Potentially this could be more devastating than the FMD epidemic.

Monumental changes are now underway following the Mid Term Review of the Common Agricultural Policy and the decision to end production subsidies and introduce support on an area rather than headage payment. Consequently, BGS is celebrating its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary at the time of what is undoubtedly the greatest change in emphasis that UK agriculture has experienced, certainly during the existence of the Society, if not before.

During the decade, with the unprecedented problems encountered by the industry as outlined above, BGS has played its part in helping the livestock sector meet the challenges as detailed in the following account of its activities.

## **Tribute to Jan Crichton**

No review of BGS over the past decade would be complete without reference to the untimely death on 1 May 2005 of Mrs Jan Crichton, the Society's Chief Executive Officer. Jan had in fact accepted my invitation for her to be co-author of this paper. Numerous tributes, both written and spoken, have praised Jan's dedication, skill, energy and cheerfulness during her 20 years at BGS. Having worked very closely with Jan during my terms as National member and President, and subsequently on Organising Committees for an Occasional Symposium and Research Conference, I can only fully endorse the tributes already paid. Whilst mourning her sudden passing away, I can but be thankful that I had the privilege to have known such a truly wonderful person, both as a colleague and a very close friend.

## **Activities**

### **Meetings and Conferences**

*Summer meetings* Regarded by many as the main event of the BGS calendar. During the last decade, nine such meetings were held. Most of these were based on the traditional format as outlined by Powell *et al.* (1995) with three full days of farm visits (usually three visits per day). The AGM would take place on the Monday evening and the Annual Dinner on the Wednesday evening. These meetings are normally held around the second week of July. An exception was the meeting in West Sussex in 2000, which took place in May (for fear of no grass in Sussex in July) and was of a shorter duration (one day less), had the AGM on the final afternoon but no Annual Dinner. Another innovation was the staging of a Discussion Forum on the Monday evening along the lines of "Question Time". This was well received, but as yet has not been repeated subsequently. Most of the meetings were based in college or university accommodation, an exception was the 1996 visit to Durham and Northumberland when delegates were housed in Durham Castle. The meeting in 2001 had to be cancelled due to the severe FMD crisis referred to earlier. This was the third time in the 60 years of BGS that the summer meeting had to be cancelled. Incidentally the previous cancellations in 1952 and 1968 were also due to FMD outbreaks.

Attendance at these Summer Meetings ranged from 160 to over 200. However, an exception was the "different time and format" 2000 meeting in West Sussex when only 109 delegates were present.

In 2001, in place of the cancelled Summer Meeting, a meeting was held at the University of Reading in September, which incorporated the Annual General Meeting. A series of lectures were given by staff of the University's School of Agriculture, along with that from Miss Lynn Wilson a BGS Scholar. As well as the AGM, presentation to the 2001 National Silage Competition winner took place during the afternoon. Some 60 delegates were in attendance.

The forthcoming Summer Meeting in 2005 will take place in September, having had to be moved from the traditional July spot because of the 20<sup>th</sup> International Grassland Congress and Satellite meetings (reported further on). It will be the Society's first ever visit to the Isle of Man - a self-governing Crown dependency situated in the middle of the Irish Sea. As well as celebrating the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of BGS it will

also be the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Manx Grassland Society which is hosting the meeting. Both occasions will be marked with a Gala Dinner on Saturday 10 September.

It is pleasing to report that the Summer Meetings over the decade have included visits to eight of the nine BGS regions, with one visit each to Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. A list of venues and Host Vice-Presidents is given in Appendix 1.

***Winter meetings*** An event that has featured annually since 1947. However during the past decade there has been considerable variation in the format and theme of the Winter Meetings, as well as fluctuations in the number of delegates. The meetings since 1995 are summarised below:

- The meeting at Great Malvern, Worcestershire in 1996 on the topic of “Grass and Forage for High Genetic Merit Cattle” attracted 200 delegates with speakers and representatives from USA, France, Ireland, New Zealand and Holland taking part.
- The 1997 meeting, also at Great Malvern had the title “Grass is Greener?” and amongst the 96 delegates were representatives from Russia, Ireland, Canada and Holland.
- In 1998, the meeting was held in Scotland at Peebles; with a theme of “Keeping the Balance” reflecting the need for cost control and value for money from all inputs in the context of grass based farming systems. Just over 100 delegates attended.
- Great Malvern was again the venue for the 1999 meeting, which doubled as an Occasional Symposium “Accounting for Nutrients - a challenge for grassland farmers in the twenty-first century” and attracted 113 delegates.
- The first Winter Meeting of the new millennium also doubled as an Occasional Symposium. It was held at the Tillington Hall Hotel, Stafford and the theme was “Beef Production from Grass and Forage”. The meeting attracted 80 delegates, but possible explanation for the lower than anticipated turn out was that it coincided with a national petrol crisis. Nevertheless, the meeting received considerable and favourable press coverage.
- In 2001, the Winter Meeting (at Great Malvern) was hastily put together after the abatement of the FMD epidemic in the autumn. The theme was “The Right Mix, Blending Science and Practice in Dairying”. It was held in conjunction with the MDC “Pasture for Profit” group and attracted an audience of 150.
- The Society returned to the Stafford venue for its 2002 meeting with the theme of “Profitable Grass and Forage: meeting the needs of the farmer and society”. The programme included presentations by the finalists and announcement of the winner of the new BGS Grassland Management Competition. Despite this, attendance was a disappointing 70 delegates.
- A new venue was tried in 2003 when the meeting was held at a city centre hotel in Bristol. The theme was “Success and Succession”. This meeting also included the presentations and announcement of the 2003 winner of the BGS Grassland Management Competition. Attendance was again disappointingly poor (70 in total, but only a minority were actual paying delegates).

Therefore, it was of no surprise that a new format was introduced for 2004 when a series of three one-day Roadshows with the theme “A de-coupled future for grassland farming” took place in Scotland, England and Wales during November. The result of

the Grassland Management Competition was given at the last of the three meetings. The roadshows proved a huge success with total attendance of almost 250 and received excellent press coverage. A similar format will be applied in November 2005 with the theme of "Making Grass Pay" but will also include a fourth leg in Northern Ireland, when the BGS Grassland Management Competition presentations and announcement of the 2005 winner will take place.

**Occasional Symposia** Over the past 10 years, no fewer than nine such meetings were held (see Appendix 2). The subject matters reflect the change in emphasis from production to environmental aspects of grassland farming with three conferences being devoted to environmental matters. In 2004, a highly successful meeting was devoted to Organic Farming. An innovation at this conference was the staging of a Public Forum with the theme of "Organic food - is it worth it?" on the evening of the first day. This was chaired by Kay Alexander, a well known BBC TV presenter in the Midlands. It attracted an audience of 270 and received considerable press coverage.

Four of these symposia were held in collaboration with other organisations as follows:

- *Legumes in Sustainable Farming Systems* was organised jointly with Sustainable Farming Systems (a joint initiative between SAC and the University of Edinburgh).
- *Seeds of Progress* was run jointly with British Society of Plant Breeders, National Institute of Agricultural Botany and SAC.
- *Conservation Pays?* was organised jointly with the British Ecological Society and attracted over 180 delegates.
- *Organic Farming* was run jointly with the Association of Applied Biologists and the Colloquium of Organic Researchers. It was the first BGS conference devoted entirely to organic farming and attracted some 130 delegates.

**Research Conferences** The Fifth, Sixth and Seventh meetings were held between 1996 and 2005:

- The meeting in 1997 at Seale-Hayne College, Plymouth at the joint invitation of Plymouth University and IGER North Wyke attracted a total of 124 delegates and had 35 theatre and 59 poster papers.
- At Aberdeen in 2000, there were 84 delegates who heard 29 theatre presentations and viewed 33 poster presentations.
- In 2003 at Aberystwyth (the venue of the first meeting in 1988) there were 88 delegates with 27 theatre and 29 poster presentations.

At these meetings awards were given for the best theatre and poster papers, with emphasis given to presentations by young researchers. Winners of the theatre presentations were: Charlie Morgan in 1997, Jim Vale and Louize Miller in 2000 and Helen Warren in 2003. Coincidentally, all four were either IGER staff members or research students at the Institute.

The tradition of having a distinguished speaker to give the Stapledon Memorial Lecture during the Research Conference continued. In 1997, Prof. John Hodgson from Massey University, New Zealand gave a lecture on "Sustainability in pastoral systems: the New Zealand experience". At Aberdeen, Dr Michael Coughenour of Colorado State University, USA gave a lecture on "Ungulates and grassland interactions-integrating across scales with models" At Aberystwyth, Prof. Chris

Pollock CBE, Research Director at IGER gave a lecture titled “In Stapledon’s footsteps: Promoting research for sustainable agriculture”.

**Joint meetings** The policy of holding meetings jointly with other organisations has expanded over the decade. As well as the four Occasional Symposia mentioned above, other joint meetings (normally of one-day duration) were held mainly with either the British Society of Animal Science (BSAS) or the Maize Growers’ Association (MGA) as outlined below:

- In what was a first for BGS, a joint meeting with MGA on “Forage maize in extended grazing systems” took place in the South West Region in January 1996 and attracted some 140 attendees.
- Another very well supported conference was held at Cirencester in conjunction with RAC, BSAS and MGA on “Quality Forage for Ruminants” in March 1997.
- This was followed by a joint MGA/BGS meeting “Maize and Graze for Profit” in West Sussex in October 2000.
- A BSAS conference, with BGS, RAC, IGER, ADAS and the Institute of Rural Studies (Aberystwyth University) at Cirencester in September 2003 gave scientists the chance to debate their research findings on equine topics for the first time.
- A further BGS/MGA meeting was held in October 2003 on a farm in West Sussex under the theme of “Maximising the benefits of quality forage”.
- In October 2004 a mini-conference on “Weed control in grass and maize”, also held in West Sussex, was also a joint BGS/MGA event.

BGS supported a colloquium “Progress in grassland science” in October 2000 at IGER North Wyke Research Station, which was held to mark the retirement earlier in the year of Prof. Roger Wilkins from IGER. BGS contributed by assisting financially with publication and distribution of the proceedings.

In March 2003, a very successful BGS/BSAS meeting with over 100 delegates on “Reconnecting the food chain” was held as a “satellite meeting” on the last day of the BSAS Winter Meeting at York.

Other joint meetings during the period under review were in association with new technology transfer activities, mainly the grazed grass projects, and are detailed below.

#### **Technology transfer initiatives**

**Grazed grass** In the autumn of 1996, a series of Grassland Utilisation Roadshows were organised by BGS and sponsored by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), Milk Development Council (MDC) and the Meat and Livestock Commission (MLC). These took the form of a one day event with presentations by four invited speakers followed by a “Question and Answers” forum with the speakers. The meetings were held in Dyfed (Carmarthen), Cheshire (Nantwich), Somerset (Shepton Mallet) and Cumbria (Carlisle). The aim was to show producers how to get more milk, meat and money from better grassland management.

During the summer of 1996, a BGS initiative engaged the service of a New Zealand consultant (Mark Blackwell). This was a logical follow on from a one-off meeting in

1995 to examine ways of extending the grazing season. The initiative was supported by MDC, Genus, Midland Bank and Farmers Weekly and centred around on-farm discussion groups. Some 17 local grassland societies in southern England and West Wales participated.

Following on from the successful experience of 1996, the exercise was repeated in 1997 and coverage extended to northern areas of England and Wales and eventually into southern Scotland in 1998. This led to the establishment of an MDC-funded project that ultimately became known as "Grass 99" with the strap line "Grazed grass grows profit". The project was ably led by Mr Jerry Rider and employed three New Zealand consultants (Paul Bird, John Simmonds and Carol Gibson). Over the 3 years (1997-99) of the project, considerable progress was achieved and much publicity generated, both in farming, and general media such as a mention on the Archers and in Private Eye. The Society also had grazing demonstration plots at the Royal Show in 1999, by invitation from the Royal Agricultural Society of England (RASE). By 1999, there was a total of 30 discussion groups with over 500 farmers involved. A successful one day final Grazing Conference was held at Great Malvern following the 1999 BGS Winter Meeting. This attracted over 100 farmers, highlighting the importance and value of the project.

Grass 99 resulted in a net financial cost to the Society of £26,955. The 3 year total cost was £235,477, of which £118,490 was contributed by MDC. The balance was from participating farmer contributions. The £26,955 expended by BGS equates to only 11 % of the total cost and must be regarded as money exceptionally well spent and a valuable contribution to assisting dairy farmers during a period of continued financial pressure.

MDC continued to fund this approach from 2000-02 with a successor project "Pasture for Profit". BGS gave administrative support for the project's first annual conference at RAC in January 2001. By today MDC is funding Grass+, an interactive programme consisting of a comprehensive manual supported by a series of extension programmes and workshops specifically designed to help dairy farmers make the most of grass. Some 1000 dairy farmers have registered for Grass+.

***Other events/projects*** To redress the balance, BGS organised a meeting for beef and sheep producers in the Less Favoured Areas. The meeting on "Upland pasture utilisation: Research into practice" was held at IGER Bronydd Mawr Research Station in May 1998. It took the form of presentations by three speakers in the morning (two researchers and a farmer). After lunch delegates were taken on a tour of the experiments at the station. BGS also circulated copies of IGER Technical Bulletin No. 2 "Improved upland pasture: The Bronydd Mawr Story" to local grassland society members in the Less Favoured Areas in 1998.

The Society also supported a grassland demonstration project "Practice into Profit", which ran from 1998 to 2001. Funded by MAFF, MDC, MLC, British Seed Houses and Barclays Bank (and also supported by Farmers Weekly in terms of publicity). This project involved a number of dairy, beef and sheep (upland and lowland) farming systems on farms of educational or research establishments with the objective of demonstrating best practice in terms of grass production and utilisation. Twelve Open

Days were held over the period (four were cancelled in 2001 due to FMD) with average attendance of 114 (range from 37 to 210).

BGS is supporting and fostering a new project called Forage Legume Network (LEGNET). Sponsored by DEFRA, and led by Dr David Thomson, it will be delivered through the Forage Legume Special Interest Group and IGER. The objective is to raise awareness of the benefits of growing and utilising legumes. Working with leading producers, it aims to provide easier access for other farmers to both research information and results, and appropriate practical skills.

### **The BGS Award**

The BGS Award acknowledges those who have made an outstanding contribution to the understanding or application of grassland and forage crop husbandry and technology. It has been awarded annually since its inception in 1979. Any member of BGS may be nominated to receive the Award, the nomination being made by any one member supported by two others. Nominations are assessed by a distinguished panel appointed by the Executive Council and an award made if there is considered to be a suitable candidate. Winners of this prestigious award over the decade under review (Table 1) came from a wide spectrum of the grassland fraternity and all four constituent countries of the UK are well represented (either by residency or birth).

**Table 1.** BGS Award Winners, 1995 to 2004

1995	Mr D N Cray	Farmer, Cornwall
1996	Mr M E Hutchinson	Kingshay Farming Trust, Somerset
1997	Mr G Newman	Agricultural Consultant, Somerset
1998	Dr A S Laidlaw	Research Scientist, Northern Ireland
1999	Mr C Crichton	BGS Hon. Treasurer, Hampshire
2000	Mr J C Rider	Farmer, Wiltshire and Cheshire
2001	Dr C S Mayne	Research Scientist, Northern Ireland
2002	Mr D A Davies	Research Scientist, Wales
2003	Prof. C Thomas	Research Scientist, Scotland
2004	Mr A J Golightly	Commercial R & D, Berkshire

### **Competitions**

**National Silage Competition** This award was instigated in 1977. From 1992, it was sponsored by Kemira, in association with ADAS and SAC. The winners received the Kemira Star Trophy and 5 tonnes of fertiliser. In 1996 the winner was Will Taylor from Northern Ireland, thus ending (to the delight of Irish, English and Scottish competitors) 5 years domination by the finalists from the Principality. Winners over the period from 1995 until cessation of the competition in 2001 are shown in Table 2. Apart from in 2001, the presentation ceremony took place at a prestigious venue in London in March with a distinguished person as guest speaker and presenter of the awards.

**Grassland Management Competition** Following considerable debate at Council, and with full consultation with local societies, it was eventually decided to replace the above competition in 2002, with a new competition called “BGS Grassland Management Competition”. The aim of the competition is to demonstrate “excellence

in the management of grass and forage for profitable livestock production and care of the land". This was deemed to be in keeping with developments in grassland farming placing emphasis on grazing. However, there was some concern that the National Silage Competition was to terminate. A silage making and utilisation element was still included as part of the new competition along with aspects of: grazing strategy and general farm management; care of the environment; innovation; safety and welfare. In the first year there were entries from eight of the regions. Three finalists were chosen from an initial paper sift of the eight regional winners. They were then visited by a panel of judges and given the opportunity of presenting their case at the Winter Meeting. The initial winner was David Davies from Lampeter, who is no stranger to BGS, having narrowly missed winning the National Silage Competition in 1996 and 1998. Therefore his exuberance on receiving the Kemira Star Trophy was understandable, particularly bearing in mind that both his father Sam and brother John were previous winners of the National Silage Competition. In 2003, the winner was David Wallace from Northern Ireland, who had in fact won the National Silage Competition in 1998, proving that the farmers who are excellent silage makers and users also excel at grassland management. The winner in 2004 was Tom Morris, an organic dairy farmer from Somerset. During the first 3 years, the competition was sponsored by Kemira and Barclays Bank nationally. As well as holding the trophy for a year, the winner also receives £500 prize money. Regional competitions were sponsored by various other organisations.

**Table 2.** BGS National Competition Winners, 1995-2004

<u>National Silage Competition</u>		
1995	Tom Tudor	Welshpool, Wales
1996	Will Taylor	County Down, Northern Ireland
1997	John Thomasson	Cheshire, West Midlands
1998	David Wallace	County Antrim, Northern Ireland
1999	Gerwyn Owen	Lampeter, Wales
2000	Ian Walton	Richmond, Northern
2001	Roger Comber	West Sussex, South East
<u>Grassland Management Competition</u>		
2002	David Davies	Lampeter, Wales
2003	David Wallace	County Antrim, Northern Ireland
2004	Tom Morris	Somerset, South West

### **BGS at National and Regional Events**

During the past decade, participation by BGS at National Events has increased substantially. Prior to 1996 attendance was confined to the Grassland Event (2-day event held triennially at Stoneleigh, Warwickshire). This has continued along with regular presence since 1996 at the European Dairy Event (held annually over 2 days in September at Stoneleigh). In recent years, BGS has also had a stand at the annual Beef Event (which is peripatetic and organised by the National Beef Association), and the biennial National Sheep Event organised by the National Sheep Association held at Great Malvern. The Society also had a presence at AgriVision: focusing on farming's future, a 2-day event at Stoneleigh in December 2001, organised by the RASE as a replacement for that year's Royal Show that had to be cancelled due to FMD.

BGS also attended a number of major regional agricultural events, including Genus Northern Forage Event in June 1998, DairyScot in December 1998, Bath and West South West Dairy Show in 2002, Grassland UK at Bath and West Showground in May 2003 and Beef & Growing Cattle South West in September 2004. In June 1999, BGS took stand space at an Open Day at IGER North Wyke Research Station.

At all the above events there has been a shift in emphasis from initially just promoting the Society and affiliated local societies to that of a technology transfer role. At some of the above events BGS has shared stand space with other organisations, principally BSAS and MGA.

### **International involvement**

BGS has had a presence at all the biennial General Meetings of the European Grassland Federation (EGF) since 1996 and at the International Grassland Congress (IGC) in Canada (1997) and Brazil (2001). As well as having a manned display, a reception for BGS members was held at some of these events. Opportunity was taken to publicise the activities of BGS, recruit new members and to sell BGS publications. Of course, BGS had a presence at IGC 2005, which is covered in greater detail below.

BGS association with IGC goes back a long way. In fact it was at the 4<sup>th</sup> IGC at Aberystwyth in 1937 that the idea of establishing a British Grassland Society was first mooted by Sir George Stapledon and others. Commencement of hostilities prevented its actual formation until 1945. BGS played a prominent role in organising the 8<sup>th</sup> IGC at Reading in 1960, the last time the congress took place in the UK.

***International Grassland Congress 2005*** As a result of a successful joint bid by the BGS and the Irish Grassland Association the 20<sup>th</sup> IGC was held in Ireland and the United Kingdom in 2005 with the theme of “Grasslands - a Global Resource”. The Main Congress took place in Dublin from 26 June to 1 July with over 1000 delegates from 80 countries in attendance. There were three main themes:

- Efficient production from grassland
- Grassland and the environment
- Delivering the benefits from grassland.

In all there were 30 invited plenary papers and 800 offered papers (mainly poster presentations). This was followed by five Satellite Meetings at Aberystwyth, Belfast, Cork, Glasgow and Oxford, which examined various topics in greater depth. Some of these were held in association with other meetings. One of the highlights of the Main Congress was “The Jan Crichton Producer Programme”. It was dedicated to the late Jan Crichton since she had developed the concept of the programme and arranged the Special Producer Session before her untimely death.

BGS had played a prominent role in organising IGC 2005, mainly through Prof. Roger Wilkins and Jan Crichton as members of the Organising Committee. Roger also chaired the Scientific Committee, which had responsibility for the contents of the sessions. Other BGS members played an important role in organising the Main Congress and Satellite Meetings. Jan Crichton had also organised a Pre-Congress Tour through England and Wales. After her death leadership of the tour was taken on by Ms Lois Phillips, supported by other BGS members.

## **Research and Development**

R & D remains crucial for BGS members and for the grassland industry as a whole. In addition to the wide range of members active in R & D, BGS has retained its high profile R & D committee. Established under the chairmanship of Mr David Cray in 1988, this committee continued to be very active during the past decade under the chairmanship of Mr Jim Harrison, a Sussex dairy farmer, who took over from David in early 1996. Membership of the group comprises eminent persons from the R & D community and leading farmers. Current composition is: Mr Jim Harrison (Chairman), Mr Dick Baker, Mr Robin Crawshaw, Mr Arthur Davies, Mr Angus Golightly, Prof. David Leaver, Dr Brian Pain, Mr Richard Radcliffe, Mr Jerry Rider, and Prof. Roger Wilkins. Past members include: Dr Ken Baker, Mr David Cray, Dr John Frame, Mr Hamish Munro, and Mr Giles Tedstone. The group normally meets twice a year (a winter and summer meeting, with the latter taking place at a research establishment).

A priorities list for Research and Development was published in 1998 and was substantially updated in 2005. The most recent list has eight topics in relation to: Sustainability, Environmental Impact and Food Chain Connections. Copies have been circulated widely to policy makers, funders, researchers and other stakeholders. Copies are available upon request from the BGS Office. The committee has also dealt with a number of consultation documents and participated in numerous reviews, workshops etc. especially DEFRA's Sustainable Farming & Food Research Priorities Group.

### ***BGS Studentships***

As part of the Society's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebrations and commitment to R & D, a 3-year studentship was launched in 1995. This was awarded to Miss Sharon Danby, who carried out her research at IGER North Wyke under the supervision of Dr Brian Pain and Mr Peter Penning at North Wyke and Dr Emyr Owen of Reading University. Her thesis "The effect of slurry and dirty water application to herbage on herbage production, dairy cow productivity and behaviour" was completed in 1998 and she was awarded a PhD degree by the University of Reading.

This was followed by a second studentship in 2000, which was awarded to Miss Lynn Wilson who conducted her research on "Production response to concentrate supplementation of highly productive dairy cows" at SAC Crichton Royal Farm in Dumfries under the supervision of Dr David Roberts. She received her PhD degree in 2004 and is currently employed as an Agricultural Officer in South West Scotland.

This year the Society launched a "Summer Student Placement Scheme" whereby £500 will be awarded to each of two students, to carry out R & D projects for 6 to 8 weeks during the summer. The students are required to match the amount with equal funding from another source and to work on a defined research project. The package also included one year's free membership of BGS. To date, only one has been taken up. Miss Elizabeth Donkin is currently working at RAC Cirencester under the supervision of Dr Gerry Lane.

## **Publications**

***Grass and Forage Science*** The Journal continues to be the flagship of the BGS and throughout the period under review has continued to be an important income earner for the Society. Nowadays, *Grass and Forage Science* publishes the results of research and development in grass and forage production, management and utilization. It also publishes results dealing with amenity and recreational uses of grassland and with the environmental implications of grassland systems. Papers are considered irrespective of climatic zone. In 1997, starting with Volume 52, No.1, *Grass and Forage Science* became The Official Journal of the European Grassland Federation. At that time, the Journal became available online through Blackwell Science's "Journals Online" service. As well as a panel of fourteen Advisory Editors who come from around the globe, the current Associate Editors are also drawn from across the world.

During the decade the Journal has had the services of three editors. Dr Alan Younger was the editor from March 1988 until March 1996. Dr Owen Jewiss took the reins from then until he stepped down at the end of 2002. At which time, the present editor Prof. John Milne took charge. In fact John had been deputy editor since 1999. The current deputy editor is Mr Alan Hopkins.

Now in its 60<sup>th</sup> year of publication, the Journal has made tremendous advancements in the use of electronic means of communication. In the latest issue (Vol 60, No. 2) an Editorial Note announced that the Journal has adopted a web-based submission and peer review system called Manuscript Central. It is hoped that adoption of this electronic system of communication will help to ensure rapid and topical publication of articles.

***Grass Farmer*** During the past 10 years, this publication has seen many changes. In 1996, in an attempt to revive the fortune of the publication, the format was changed from A5 to A4. Also that year, Mr Herbert Daybell ceased to be employed as editor and in 1998 Mrs Sara Gregson was appointed as editor. She has worked tirelessly to improve the content and attractiveness of the publication. Apart from in 2003, when there were four issues, in order to reduce the backlog of articles, there has been three issues per annum in spring, autumn and winter. In 2005 the publication was renamed *Grass and Forage Farmer* to reflect the growing importance of other forages for livestock production.

Despite highly successful efforts by the editor and CEO in increasing advertising revenue, this publication continued to be produced at a cost to the Society. However, there are indications that this is now almost at break-even. Furthermore, the Society was fortunate that substantial contributions towards its production costs were received from the Stapledon Memorial Trust for a period of 3 years at the start of the millennium.

***Occasional Symposia Proceedings*** This series of publications commenced in 1962 and the proceedings of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Conference in 1995 was number 29 of the series. Since then there have been a total of eight publications. These are listed, with their editors, in Appendix 2.

***Text books*** In 2000, the third edition of *Grass: Its Production and Utilization* edited by Alan Hopkins was published. This in fact was the first book commissioned by the

Society with the first edition and second edition, both edited by Prof. W Holmes, appearing in 1980 and 1989 respectively. The third edition not only updates the previous versions but also widens the range of topics covered to reflect the changes that have taken place in land use and the agri-food industry over the decade. New areas covered include organic farming, farm waste, amenity grass and nature conservation. The book is recognized as an authoritative textbook on grassland science and husbandry. In all there were twenty-three contributors to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition.

Another book that was recently revised is the *Herbage Intake Handbook*. The initial edition had been published in 1988 with Prof. David Leaver as editor. The revised version was edited by Mr Peter Penning and appeared in 2004. Thus all three of the Society's textbooks have now been revised. The *Sward Measurement Handbook* was revised in 1993 edited by Miss Alison Davies.

**Other publications** Papers presented at Winter Meetings and Research Conferences are published in a hard covered folder. Normally the papers are accepted from authors as camera-ready copies. A Video *Extending the Grazing Season* was produced as part of the Grass 99 project. It was produced in collaboration with Duchy College Cornwall and IGER and received funding from EAGGF objective 5b.

**Electronic publishing** In 1999, a CD-Rom was produced combining Occasional Symposia numbers 27, 29, 30 and 33 which incorporated Acrobat Search tool to allow users to conduct a full text search over the four proceedings. This was as a result of some hard work by Jan Crichton with support from John Vipond and John Clark of SAC. Proceedings of Symposia, Conferences and Meetings over subsequent years are also available on CD-Rom.

#### **Bursary Award Scheme/ BGS Travel Fund**

The Bursary Award Fund was set up to offer a limited sum each year to support members financially for travel or education, which is deemed to be furthering the objectives of the Society, with general preference being given to younger members. During the decade some 24 Bursary Awards were given, amounting to £9170, mainly in assisting attendances at IGC and EGF meetings.

In addition, BGS spent £3825 from central funds assisted eight members with attendance at IGC 1997. This year a further £3000 was spent in assisted participation at IGC 2005 by a number of delegates from within and out with of the UK.

Following the recent Strategic Review, it has been decided to rename the award as the BGS Travel Fund and to widen its appeal. Council has now decided to offer this opportunity to members of the affiliated local societies as well as BGS members.

#### **Stapledon Memorial Trust**

BGS played a leading part in the establishment of the Stapledon Memorial Trust back in 1960 in memory of its founder and first President Sir Reginald George Stapledon. Over the past decade, the Society has received financial support from the Trust for specific activities and events. Some of these have already been detailed elsewhere in the paper. The Trust was also involved with the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Meeting when it partially funded the proceedings and assisted the attendance of a number of young delegates. In 2001, the links became even closer when BGS was contracted to provide

secretarial services for the Trust and this is set to continue at least for the next 3 years. The Trust is also giving support to the 2005 Summer Meeting, by funding the attendance of four young delegates.

## **Organisation**

### **Council and committee structure**

During 1995/96, a review of the Society's Council and committee structure was led by Dr Cled Thomas (at that time Immediate Past President). Following which, a few changes were proposed and supported at the 1997 AGM. These are summarised as follows:

- That the Executive Council as the elected body should primarily be a policy making body concerning itself with strategic planning, leaving the implementation of this to its committees
- That the Management Committee had the remit of implementing the decisions of Council and administering the financial affairs of the Society
- That there would be four sub-committees namely: Programme, Publications, Research and Development and a Local Societies Liaison Committee (a new one, although there had been such a committee in the past).

There was also a change in the structure of the Council itself. From 1997, four national members serve for 4 years with one vacancy per annum (hitherto this had been three members for 3 years). Regional Representatives also now serve for 4 years (previously 3 years) but are shadowed for 2 years by "alternate" representatives i.e. 2 years as deputy and 2 years as main representative.

The Publications Committee was chaired by Dr John Jones from 1992 to 2003. He was succeeded by Prof. Cled Thomas. This committee was renamed the Publications and Communications Committee in 1999. A sub-committee, led by Dr John Vipond, was set up in 2000 to look at all aspects of electronic publishing and communication.

A decision was approved at the AGM in 2003 to reduce the number of regions in England from six to four. This was achieved by amalgamating the Eastern and West Midlands regions to form a Central region. Also the Northern and Yorks/Lancs regions were amalgamated to form a new Northern Region. The intention is that the new geographical division will better reflect the balance of membership and spread of affiliated local societies.

In 2004, it was decided to streamline the running of the affairs of the Society, and to this end, the Management Committee has been disbanded, with various aspects of its work transferred to the other committees where appropriate.

### **Membership**

At the time of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary membership stood at around 900, having declined from a peak of 1350 in the early 1990's. Part of the reason given was the doubling of membership subscription from £15 to £30 in 1992. Perhaps rather surprisingly, the subscription rate has remained unchanged ever since. A steady increase in membership to around 1100 was achieved by the start of the new millennium, largely as a result of Jan Crichton's hard work. However, current membership total stands at 791 compared to 915 in 2003. Whilst there has been a slight reduction in true

membership, this marked decrease was as a result of “cleansing” of the database by the BGS Office with a full review being taken of all members’ details and payment of subscriptions, with those in substantial arrears being removed from the list.

**Honorary Membership** At the AGM in 1995 it was passed that Honorary Life Membership may be bestowed by the Executive Council, on behalf of the Society, on individuals who have made an exceptional contribution to the Society. A maximum of five such members to be allowed at any one time. The Society had no problem whatsoever in filling the quota with very worthy members. Former Secretary Mr Jim Corrall was elected in 1995. He was followed by Mr Cyril Davies in 1999, Dr Ken Baker and Prof. Roger Wilkins in 2000 and Mr Charles Crichton in 2004.

**Survey of members** Management Committee conducted a postal survey of members in 1999. This was led by Mr Owen Davies ably supported by Mr Mike Helps and Mrs Jan Crichton. Results were summarised by Owen Davies in *Grass Farmer* (No. 66, Autumn 2000). Generally, membership was very supportive of BGS activities.

### **Affiliated Local Societies**

The number of local grassland societies affiliated to BGS currently stands at 68 compared to a high of 73 just over a decade ago. A list of affiliated societies is available from the BGS Office. Estimated membership of the affiliated societies is around 8000.

### **Officers**

A list of officers since 1995 is given in Appendix 3. It is interesting to note that during the decade, the presidents have truly reflected the cross section of membership, with representation from, research, education, advisory, farming and commerce. Furthermore, they have come from the four constituent countries of the UK.

### **Secretariat**

Following the retirement of Mr Jim Corrall (after 13 years in office), Mr Mike Helps was elected as Society Secretary at the 1995 AGM. An increasing part of the remit of the Secretary was to act as the Chief Executive of the Society. Greater responsibility for day to day affairs was delegated to Mrs Jan Crichton as Administrative Officer.

When Mike Helps retired in 2001, Council decided to appoint a full-time Chief Executive Officer and unanimously agreed that Mrs Jan Crichton be appointed. After Jan’s untimely death on 1 May of this year, an extraordinary meeting of Council has decided to appoint a Society Director. An advertisement for the position has recently appeared in the press.

Following Jan’s appointment as CEO, Miss Miranda McHugh was appointed as Administrative Officer in July 2001. She resigned in March 2004 to move with her husband to the USA. Mrs Kay Bridges was appointed to the post and commenced on 24 May 2004. Mrs Carolyn Davidson has been employed on a part time basis throughout the decade, mainly dealing with administrative matters appertaining to *Grass and Forage Science*.

The Society has been extremely fortunate to have had the services of Mr Charles Crichton as Honorary Treasurer from 1982 until recently. The fact that the Society is

in such a healthy state financially is without doubt due to his prudent stewardship. Considerable extra work has fallen on the Treasurer and the Office since 1996, when implementation of the Charities Act 1993 commenced. Although Charles stood down at the 2004 AGM, he agreed to assist with the processing of the accounts until the end of 2004. A permanent successor is yet to be identified but Prof. Cled Thomas has recently assumed the treasurer's role in the interim.

The post of Honorary Assistant Secretary was filled by Mr Owen Davies from 1991 until 2002. Mr Angus Golightly now occupies the position, which has been renamed Honorary Executive Officer.

*Office* BGS Office was relocated in the plush new Agriculture Department Building of Reading University in 2001 from the old single-storey Agriculture block, which had been its home since 1991 after the closure of IGER's Hurley site. A further 3-year tenancy agreement with Reading University was signed in 2004.

### **Special Interest Groups**

Council decided in 1996 to support the establishment of Special Interest Groups. Initially there were five such groups, with varying degrees of membership and activities. They were: Forage Legumes, Pasture Ecology, Forage Brassica, White Clover, and Pests and Disease (subsequently replaced by Amenity Grassland). By today only the first three continue in operation. However, the possibility is being pursued of establishing an Equine Grassland Group and a Grazing Group.

The Forage Legumes Group, convened by Dr Gerry Lane of RAC Cirencester, is the most active. Its programme of events include farm/field visits and one-day conferences. The Pasture Ecology Group is also fairly active, but is more of a group for researchers and has membership from across the world. One of its main activities is the production of a Pasture Ecology Newsletter, which nowadays is published electronically. This group, initially led by Miss Alison Davies is now overseen by Mr Mick Fothergill at IGER Aberystwyth. The Forage Brassica Group is convened by Dr John Vipond at SAC Edinburgh.

### **Strategic Reviews**

As is befitting a vibrant organisation, BGS periodically reviews its organisation and activities. Two such reviews were carried out during the last decade. The first led by Mr Angus Golightly in 1998/99 and the second by Mr Steve Peel in 2003/04. Prior to the 1998/99 review, the last long term review of the affairs of the Society had been carried out back in 1986. The review of 1998/99 was conducted with reference to anticipated major factors of change in agriculture that would influence the future of BGS. A Guidance Note for the Future was published and issued to all Executive Council members. Sub-committees were also instructed by Council to bear the recommendations in mind during their deliberations.

The remit of the 2003/04 review was to define the aims/visions of the Society taking into consideration: changes in the UK agricultural industry as a result of EU/WTO restructuring; potential future stakeholders of the Society; the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to the Society; possibilities of developing close working relationships with other societies and organisations. Recommendations were that the Society should:

- Broaden its activities and membership
- Continue to address the needs of the core membership, strengthen links with local societies and groups, and find more support for regional representatives
- Strengthen its public relations
- Improve website and electronic communication
- Critically examine time requirement, by secretariat and committee members, of all activities
- Explore external core funding, or support “in kind”
- Continue to open channels of communication with kindred organisations
- Continue to lobby for appropriate R & D and engage actively with funders
- Attract and retain young members.

## **Future Directions**

As mentioned in the introduction, the agricultural industry in the UK is now entering a new era. The way forward was highlighted in the Government’s “Sustainable Farming and Food Strategy” published by DEFRA in 2002. In future the role of grassland will not only be to provide feed for ruminants, but as the basis for the production of high quality animal products with enhanced delivery of environmental services in multi-functional land use systems.

The BGS considers it vital that a substantial and vigorous R & D programme is carried out to enable grassland to deliver fully its potential contribution to farming and to society more generally.

Communication has been an important part of BGS activities and will remain so. The two main publications, *Grass and Forage Science* and *Grass and Forage Farmer* are both excellent publications. The former brings in considerable income and although the latter is produced at a cost to the Society, it is regarded as an essential publication for bringing research and development information to the practitioner. Fortunately, both publications are currently in the hands of excellent editors in Prof. John Milne and Mrs Sara Gregson respectively, ably supported by good teams of advisory, associate and assistant editors.

The BGS, with its mix of members and its past record, has the capability to become the pivotal organisation in informing government and the general public of the benefits of grassland farming in producing healthy food in a natural way with due regard for animal welfare and environmental issues. The role of farmers as custodians of the landscape and wildlife needs vociferous and constant telling.

To achieve its objectives, BGS will most certainly have to work in close collaboration with kindred societies. Links with such organisations have been forged over the past decade, but these need to be further strengthened. Current initiatives, such as forming an Equine Special Interest Group, need implementing, since there are now almost 1 million horses in the UK.

There will no doubt be further advancements in ICT. Developments in this sphere over the past decade have been at a blistering pace. BGS, despite valiant efforts by Jan Crichton, has struggled to keep abreast.

When UK agriculture faced the massive challenge to feed the nation sixty years ago, Sir George Stapledon and his contemporaries had the vision to establish the British Grassland Society with the objectives of playing a key role in transferring research and development to the farmers. The vision of the Society's founding fathers remains equally, and arguably, more valid today as UK grassland farmers embark on turning the challenges that lie ahead into opportunities.

## **Acknowledgements**

Whilst a number of persons have been named in this article, there are countless others who have played an important part in the organisation and activities of the Society over the past 10 years. For example, those that have served as: national and regional representatives, on organising committees (summer meetings, winter meetings, occasional symposia, and research conferences), editorial panels, members of sub-committees, special interest groups. The BGS is also indebted to all the businesses that have provided financial support, be it towards meetings, publications or competitions.

I wish to thank Prof. Roger Wilkins and Mr Owen Davies for constructive comments and suggestions on a draft of this article.

## **References**

Davies, O.D (2000) Membership Survey, *Grass Farmer No. 66*, Autumn 2000. British Grassland Society, p 10.

Powell, R.A., Corral, A.J. and Corral, Rosemary. G. (1995) A History of the British Grassland Society, 1945-1995. In: Pollott G.E. (ed) *Grassland into the 21st Century. British Grassland Society Occasional Symposium No. 29*, 2-30.

## Appendix 1. BGS Summer Meetings, 1996-2005

Year	Location	Host Vice-President
1996	Durham	Don Wilkinson
1997	Northern Ireland	Will Taylor
1998	Stafford	Graham Roobottom
1999	Somerset	Steve Bryant
2000	West Sussex	Christian Fox
2001	Cancelled	
2002	Bangor, North Wales	Cyril Davies
2003	Ayr, S W Scotland	Prof. Cled Thomas
2004	Yorkshire	Terry Hodgson
2005	Isle of Man	Allan Skillicorn

## Appendix 2. Occasional Symposia Publications, 1995-2005

No.	Title and (year)	Editor
29	Grassland into the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century (1995)	G E Pollott
30	Legumes in Sustainable Farming Systems (1996)	D Younie
31	Seeds of Progress (1997)	J R Weddell
32	Grassland Management in the ESAs (1997)	R D Sheldrick
33	Accounting for Nutrients (1999)	A J Corral
34	Grazing Management (2000)	A J Rook and P D Penning
35	Beef from Grass and Forage (2000)	D Pullar
36	Conservation Pays? (2002)	J Frame
37	Organic Farming (2004)	A Hopkins

## Appendix 3. Presidents and Officers of BGS, 1995-2005

	President	Secretary	Treasurer	Assistant Secretary
1995-96	Prof. R J Wilkins	M B Helps	C Crichton	O D Davies
1996-97	Mr J C Rider			
1997-98	Mr A J Golightly			
1998-99	Mr C K Mackie			
1999-00	Mr D A Davies			
2000-01	Prof. J D Leaver			
2001-02	Mr D Wilkinson	Mrs J M Crichton*		
2002-03	Mr S Peel			
2003-04	Mr W J H Taylor			A J Golightly+
2004-05	Dr J E Vipond	Vacant	C Thomas†	

\* Chief Executive Officer + Honorary Executive Officer † Interim appointment