

# Dexter Cattle

## -Beefy Little Milkers-



Newinn Dexter Stud is a well known Dexter Stud, breeding and selling quality cattle throughout Queensland and interstate. When you visit Newinn Dexter Stud you will see Dexter cattle, which are the smallest naturally occurring cattle in the world, in a number of our paddocks. From a small beginning, I bought our first Dexter heifer in 1997, they now have a central place on my stud.

Many people ask me, "why Dexter's?". I believe it's no accident that they have survived so long and won a special place in many hearts and minds worldwide, including mine. Dexter's have always been a small breed which have not been miniaturised, and I believe have special characteristics to offer the people who keep them. Here, briefly is their story...

### The Fascinating History of the Dexter

A certain amount of mystery surrounds the origin of Dexter cattle. What does seem certain though is that they are descended from the breed Celtic cattle which roamed throughout Ireland. records show that they are closely related to the rare Irish Kerry cattle, which are a hardy dairy breed. Dexters, being less specialised, were still good for milk but also provided quality meat.

Many people consider Dexters to be very ancient cattle. Archaeological diggings have found that Celtic cattle from the iron age most resembled by Dexters in type. Consequently, a model of an iron age farm in England, keep Dexters, as the breed best demonstrating the ancient Celtic cattle. Movies such as Robin Hood Prince of Thieves and First Knight, which are set in earlier centuries, have also used Dexters to depict authenticity of life in those times.

Another claim is that Dexters, being small and docile, were taken on sailing ships to supply fresh milk on the journeys. It is thought that they were left behind in some destinations. Tales are told of Dexters being found on the coastline of Africa in the 18th century and of some reaching Japan, intermingling with Japanese cattle, and being part of the evolution of the Wagyu breed. Records of livestock history in the UK, report regular

imports of Dexters from Ireland in the 18th century.

These little cattle were mostly kept by the aristocracy in England on their parkland estates. Thus, the "poor man's substitute cattle" of Ireland, became the "park-cattle of the rich gentry" in England. This includes lords and ladies, Dowagers and Earls, Dukes and Duchesses and Edward Prince of Wales.

Other rich and famous families in more recent times have established the Dexters, such as the Kellogg family of Cornflakes fame, having bred them in Long Island, New York, for more than 50 years, and the Syme family, the well known Australian publishers who bred Dexters in Victoria before World War II.



And today, they are kept throughout the world by rich and poor and in between alike, mainly on small farms, but also on larger farms. One thing Dexters have certainly proven over their long history, is that they are versatile and adaptable. Adaptable, not only by being appreciated by different types of people, over many centuries, but for producing milk as well as meat, in cold and hot climates, and on green English pastures and rougher non-improved Australian and African grasslands.



Despite the Dexter's long history, they diminished in numbers at one stage to a critical level. Interest in Dexters waned with the development of cattle for specialisation into beef and dairy types, and also the now discredited, bigger is always better dictum. Fortunately, in 1970, they were recognised as a domestic breed in danger of extinction, by the rare breeds survival trust in England. This earned them registration on their list and rekindled interest worldwide, in their smallest of cattle breeds. Thus, renewed breeding of the Dexter cattle began, in order to save the breed. And now, in many countries, they are once again appreciated and kept by increasing numbers of people.