



New Zealand 2013

14th World Shorthorn Conference

The choice of New Zealand as the venue for the 14th World Shorthorn Conference could not have been timed better, as 2013 also marked the 200th anniversary of Shorthorns being introduced to New Zealand.

We arrived at Christchurch Airport on Friday 8th March after travelling for 36 hours and were very pleased to be met by Ian and Robyn Dibble who escorted us to our hotel for the night in Christchurch to join our companions for the next three weeks. After the welcome dinner we were very privileged to be addressed by Christchurch Deputy Mayor Button who gave us a first hand report on how Christchurch had coped with the tragedy of the earthquake in 2011. We were all aware of the tragedy from the news bulletins but once it had disappeared from the front page of the news there was a feeling that everything was back to normal, whereas in fact nothing could have been further from the truth. The loss of life of 185 people and the complete destruction of the centre of Christchurch had tested the resilience of the residents to the core. It was quite strange listening to Mrs Button speaking so

positively about the future and the rebuilding programme with no hint of self pity or dejection. The residents of Christchurch were quite clearly moving on.

Our tour of Christchurch the following morning showed the true extent of the damage. Houses overhanging huge crevasses where the land had just slipped away, whole



Christchurch after the earthquake

housing estates deserted because all the houses were unsafe, and the centre of Christchurch flattened. The main shopping centre had been renamed container city as all the shops were now trading out of containers.

When we hear of an earthquake we tend to imagine the trembling and shaking of the ground but the true extent of the damage is much much worse. The trapped energy of the earthquake lifted the ground by as much as 8 metres in some places and the seabed was raised by several metres. Even buildings which had withstood the quake were consumed by slurry, a mixture of sand and water known as liquefaction which blocked drains and engulfed properties, some of which crumbled under the pressure. Some of the roads were like driving on an ocean wave.



We left Christchurch reflecting on the fact that we had come to New Zealand to see Beef Shorthorns and on our first morning had witnessed the destruction caused by a huge earthquake which fortunately we have never seen here in UK. The fact that we had experienced a wet summer and late spring were certainly put into perspective.

As we continued our journey South across the Canterbury Plains we saw for the first time the huge irrigation booms stretching out across the plains for miles. The largest one we saw was over 1Km long and capable of irrigating 600 hectares in one complete rotation. This huge area of land which was once home to many of New Zealand's 75 million sheep is now home to large herds of dairy cattle. New Zealand's sheep population has more than halved to the current 35 million while the Country's dairy herd has increased from 1 million to 4 million dairy cows.

Our first farm visit was to Jenny and Mark MacDonald's Brecon herd of Dairy Shorthorns. We were welcomed in true New Zealand style with Mark and Jenny's daughter



singing the New Zealand National Anthem for us followed by a rousing Haka from their two sons. Mark milks 580 cows, nearly all Shorthorns and they were a picture to see in the paddock close to the farm. The herd is run very commercially but Mark and Jenny also do some showing as a hobby and have been very successful winning the New Zealand Royal Show in 2012. Their cattle

have also been prominent in the international photographic competition with several of their cattle representing New Zealand in recent years' competitions. The importance of irrigation was spelled out by Mark who said that without irrigation 800 acres would support 30 cows but with irrigation 800 acres would support 600 cows.

Leaving the MacDonalds we continued on through the

McKenzie basin, named after the Scottish shepherd turned sheep rustler who herded flocks of sheep inland with the help of his remarkable collie dog Friday,



Bronze statue of the Collie Dog



towards Lake Tekapo, with spectacular views of Mt Cook, New Zealand’s highest mountain, with the snow covered summit gleaming in the sunlight. At the side of the lake is a bronze statue of the collie dog, close to the church of the Good Shepherd. Lake Tekapo itself is a beautiful turquoise lake formed from the molten waters of the surrounding glaciers. This was our home for the night at the Peppers Bluewater resort. Immediately after dinner we were transported to Mount John Observatory to view stars over 560 light years away, and ponder some



of the unfathomable questions posed by astronomers. How can we be looking at a star which burnt out 6,000 years ago? And where does the universe end.

The following morning Sunday 10th March we took a short drive to visit Irishmans Creek, a 25,000 acre estate with 6000 merino sheep. This was also the birthplace of the Hamilton jet boat which we would take a ride on later in the tour. The estate had recently been purchased and much of the land was in poor heart so an extensive improvement programme was under way. The name of the estate was



taken from the name of the plant Wild Irishman which infested the estate. The story is that the first Scottish settlers had to push their way through this dense vegetation and found it to be remarkably similar to pushing their way through the crowds to get to the bar for a drink in Dublin – abrasive and prickly!

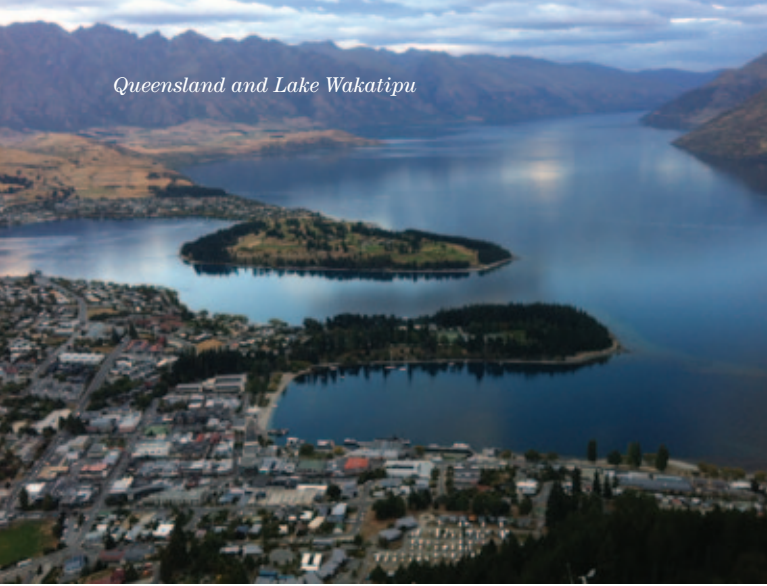


Mount Cook

So the name of the plant stuck and hence the name of the estate. Rabbits have been an enormous problem for farmers in New Zealand and myxomatosis has been introduced to try and control the numbers of rabbits. The Kiwis also have a slightly different take on the Easter tradition. Instead of having an Easter bunny competition they have an Easter bunny shoot and thousands of rabbits are shot.



We had a very pleasant lunch and wine tasting experience at the Northburn Station Winery before continuing to Queenstown, the adventure capital of New Zealand. Dinner was taken at the Skyline restaurant with magnificent views over Queenstown and Lake Wakatipu.



Monday 11th March was a day at leisure to explore the sights of Queenstown. This was the centre of New Zealand's gold rush in the late 19th Century and the Shotover River was regarded as one of the richest gold bearing rivers in the world. Several of us took a hair raising ride out along Skippers road, with sheer drops on the side of the road, to Skippers creek where we took a ride on a jet boat up the Shotover river. After the excitement of the jet boat ride we tried our hand at panning for gold with some taking the exercise more seriously than others, and yes two of our party did find gold! albeit a rather miniscule amount.



The next day we took a short boat ride on Lake Manapouri to West Arm to view the underground power station. The power station is housed in a cavern carved out of solid rock and is an impressive piece of engineering which started in 1964 and took 1800 workers eight years to complete. The electricity is produced by the force of the water from the lake above being channelled through pipes to the turbine. This project was successfully carried out in a World Heritage Area where preservation of the unique and fragile environment was of paramount importance. No wind turbines here then!



After a picnic lunch en route, we arrived at Mount Linton Station, Ohai, Southland. Mount Linton is a huge operation by any standards. It is the largest farm in New Zealand consisting of 32,000 acres and in winter carries 96,500 stock units. Estate manager Ceri Lewis



The following morning Tuesday 12th March we made the short drive to John and Lindy Dobson's Brigadoon herd. Anita Erskine also had some of her Westwood herd here on display. John and



explained the philosophy of Mount Linton which is to be a world leader in genetics for both cattle and sheep. The Angus herd has been recorded since 1991 and all credit must go to Bill and Judy Austin who persuaded Ceri to do a trial comparing pure Angus steers and Angus cross Shorthorn steers with the results to be announced at the

Lindy's cows were looking very fit and grazing some of the greenest lushest pastures we saw. After sampling some beautiful home made cakes we continued to John and Caryl Brown's Weldon herd. The Weldon herd exist solely on grass and are not fed any concentrates. Judging from the condition of the cows they could obviously grow plenty of grass. Following afternoon tea we journeyed on to Te Anau for our overnight stay.



World Conference. This was a very brave decision but one which gave very positive results for the Beef Shorthorn cross steers. The hybrid vigour gave the cross bred steers a 30.3 Kg weight advantage over the pure bred Angus and the heifers a 10.1 Kg advantage with no loss of carcase quality and a slight increase in intramuscular fat.

The sheep enterprise is huge with 45,000 breeding ewes. The wool shed at Mount Linton had a line of 12 shearing stations which, when fully manned during the shearing season, could shear up to 5,000 sheep per day. Looking after the sheepdogs was a job in itself with 70 to 100 dogs on the farm at any one time. This was a hugely impressive operation the size of which we do not see in the UK. Leaving Mount Linton we continued on to overnight at Invercargill.

David Murphy's dairy Shorthorns



Thursday March 14th. We made the short journey to visit David Murphy's milking Shorthorn herd. David, a long serving member of the New Zealand Milking Shorthorn Association Board, milks around 200 cows using some Scandinavian genetics on his Shorthorn cattle. His original cattle came from David Dents Winbrook herd. The herd produces all its milk from grass and forage with no cake fed at all. It was evident from the pastures we saw that David puts a lot of emphasis on producing good quality grass.

We continued on through Southland heading north to Heriot to Fraser Fletcher and Susie Burrows at Glendhu Shorthorns. Established 17 yrs ago, this herd had been built on New Zealand and Australian genetics using high index bulls to improve the herd. Fraser has imported semen from several Australian bulls for which he holds the NZ semen rights. The rolling countryside looked much greener here than in many other areas we visited and the cattle were obviously thriving.



David Baynes and myself were then transported on a slight detour to see the milking Shorthorn herd of Logan Kelly. Logan is a young man with a mission and is dedicated to producing as much milk as possible from his herd of cows. The farm had only recently been acquired and Logan was quickly setting about improving the pastures. His herd were by several different breeds of sire but were consistently showing great dairy character. We saw some examples of UK sired animals here with stock by Oxton Boundless and Hooton Perfection.



On our way to Oamaru we stopped to see the Moeraki boulders, a very strange phenomenon of perfectly formed circular boulders along the beach. The only other marvel to rival this was how Charles managed to escape without getting his feet wet – not many people we know can walk on water Charles! We arrived at our evening destination of Oamaru and several of our party were tempted to go and see the penguins come ashore at dusk. Unfortunately most of the penguins had already come ashore by the time our party arrived and the ones which did come ashore seemed quite shy. Those of us who stayed behind certainly did not feel left out as Sally's impression of a penguin coming ashore was very impressive and infinitely repeatable on demand!



The following day was spent mainly travelling up country back across the Canterbury Plains, towards Kaikoura with a very pleasant lunch stop at Waipara Springs winery.

Kaikoura is noted for its abundance of wildlife, the most spectacular of which are the giant sperm whales, the playful dusky dolphins and the unique New Zealand fur seals, the only seals to have a fur coat for warmth rather than a layer of blubber under the skin. Needless to say we had to experience this for ourselves and were certainly not disappointed. We saw four huge sperm whales doing their characteristic dive, were entertained by a pod of dusky dolphins dancing around the boat and saw several fur seals some with their young sunbathing on the rocks. It was a memorable experience.

We travelled on to Picton visiting the Omaka Aviation Heritage Centre en route. We arrived at Picton to catch the evening interislander ferry to take us across Cooke Strait to Wellington for our evening stay. Unfortunately there was a technical hitch and the ferry was delayed for several hours which meant we didn't arrive in Wellington until the early hours.

Sunday 17th March. Following a good night's sleep we awoke to find we had been joined on tour by some familiar faces. We were delighted to see (and hear) Malcom Douglas and his wife Wendy and Willie Alston with his son Francisco together with Jorge and Patricio Sinclair and Miguel Vallo. We had the morning free to explore Wellington. New Zealand's capital city. We wandered down to the picturesque harbour on a beautiful sunny morning to find that we had arrived on the morning of the Wellington Dragon Boat Festival with over 100 teams competing in various classes and lots of typical Chinese entertainment along the quayside.

We left Wellington at lunchtime to travel over the Rimutaka Hill to Masterton to visit David and Phillipa Blackwoods Hinewaka Herd. As we drove in to the farm yard we were very surprised to see two more familiar faces waiting to greet us. Major Gibb and Anne had been visiting their son Alastair and it was their last day in New Zealand before flying back home.



David is the 5th generation to farm at Hinewaka and Shorthorns have been on the property for over 150 years. Genetics are imported from around the world to produce their young bulls which are offered for sale to stud and commercial farmers at their on farm sale in early June when 25 young bulls are offered for sale every year. The effects of the drought were evident to see with some very bare pastures but the cattle were in great condition obviously being well fed and watered, as indeed we were, with more generous hospitality from the Blackwood family before moving on to Palmerston North for the night.

Refreshment at the Blackwoods – Charles displaying admirable dexterity with two bottles in one hand!



Monday March 18th started with a very interesting visit to the TUI brewery. TUI are renowned throughout New Zealand for their amusing, very un PC advertising bill boards ending in Yeah Right. "The Aussies will win the Ashes in 2013 – Yeah Right"! OK I made that one up with the benefit of hindsight! The thought of drinking beer at 9.00am could cause even hardened drinkers to have second thoughts but then well it was free!

Suitably refreshed, we moved on to Waipama to visit the Tahuna and Hiwiroa herds owned by Timothy Plummer and Jim Nick and Trish Symes. Some time ago a young man from Penrith called David Jackson came out to New Zealand and spent time working on a farm near the town of Tahuna. When he returned home he started his own herd of Dairy Shorthorns and chose as his prefix Tahuna, as a reminder of the happy days he spent in New Zealand.

The Tahuna prefix therefore was a familiar name to our dairy members on tour but had no connection to the Tahuna stud in New Zealand. The Hiwiroa and Tahuna studs are farmed together which each family retaining ownership of their respective cattle with a very clear focus on producing 2yr old bulls for the commercial herd. Timothy is a keen enthusiast of genetic improvement through performance recording and uses AI and ET to speed up genetic progress.

After a lovely lunch in glorious sunshine we continued our journey towards Napier calling in at Hohepa homes along the way. This is a residential community caring for people with learning difficulties based on the teachings of Rudolph Steiner, an Austrian philosopher and social reformer. The community is run on the same principles as Botton Village near Whitby which also keeps a herd of Dairy Shorthorns. Hohepa farm is entirely organic and produces its own cheese which it sells in its farm shop. The small Shorthorn herd produces A2/A2 milk which is ideal for the cheese production, so only genetically tested A2 bulls are used, and the docile temperament of the cattle is essential for this type of operation. The Portugese cheesemaker attributes the wonderful taste of their cheese to the lush herbal pastures and the special care of the land.

We arrived in Napier, a world famous wine area, and enjoyed an evening meal at the impressive Mission Estate Winery, complete of course with wine.

The following day Tuesday 19th March we crossed the Central Plateau to Lake Taupo, the largest lake in New Zealand, before stopping at the mighty Huka Falls where the Waikato River pours through a narrow chasm. After an early lunch at the Huka Prawn Park we continued on to Rotorua, the centre of Maori culture, famous for its erupting geysers, hot thermal springs and hot bubbling mud. The first thing to hit everyone as we disembarked was the strong smell of Sulphur which apparently the locals can't smell as they are used to it.

Hot water geysers at Whakarewarema

We had a tour of the Whakarewarewa thermal village which gave us a brief insight in to the traditional way of life of the Maori people, much of which has now been overtaken by Westernisation.

We were entertained in the evening by a show of Maori cultural experience with our leader John Dobson showing his fearlessness in the face of a frightening confrontation with the Maori chief. Our evening meal was a traditional Hangi meal, cooked in the traditional method of slow cooking in a pit, with the heat from the earth creating a steam box. The evening concluded with a short bush walk to see glow worms and kiwis. It was dark and the kiwi was under a bush, and they are quite small but trust me I did see one.



The next morning Wednesday 20th March we set off towards Te Aroha to visit the Dairy Shorthorn herd of Ian and Robyn Dibble. We had a brief comfort stop at Hobbiton, where the film trilogy Lord of the Rings was filmed. I was forced to admit to never having read the books or seen the films and spectacularly failed to recognise Gollum, a strange little creature who seemed to be everywhere. The area around Te Aroha is a huge milk producing area with 2.5 million dairy cows in a 100 mile radius. Ian and Robyn are well known to many of our dairy Shorthorn breeders and have visited the UK several times. They have used several UK sires in their herd and progeny of Winbrook King Henry, Wenvoe Briars Man, Hooton Fair Reflection and Oxtan Boundless were all on display. Ian explained that they were paid for protein content rather than just litres of milk and had very impressive average of 3.51% protein with several cows achieving up to 3.8%. Whilst New Zealand dairying is traditionally based on block calving in the spring and leaving cattle outside all year round, there is a growing trend towards providing some shelter during the winter. Herdhomes which are simple wooden structures with a plastic roof are springing up on many farms. Whilst they provide shelter and warmth for the cattle they do also increase the overhead costs which is something New Zealand Dairy farmers have always been keen to minimise.

New Herdhome at Dibbles



After more delicious home made food, we left the Dibbles and travelled through the gold mining town of Waihi, stopping en route to see a huge gold mine before continuing on to Katikati to see the Orena



Relaxing at Morton's Winery

herd owned by the Morton family of Ken, Betty, Craig and Maree. Ken Betty and Craig all had their individual studs until they amalgamated them all in 1996. It was a bull from Betty's Aonga herd which is probably best known here in the UK. Aonga Simon S6 was imported and used in John and Sue Dunlop's Tarrant herd and then in James Playfair-Hannay's Tofts herd in the 1990s. The Orena herd is predominantly pedigree herd, selling stud bulls at most of the National sales as well as exhibiting at many shows. Ken and Betty are familiar faces on World Conference Tours and the family obviously decided to make this visit one to remember. We were duly treated to a night to remember at Mortons winery (no relation) just down the road. With generous sponsorship from Mortons

wines, Farmlands, ANZ and Boonies Boots we were indulged with excellent food and wine throughout the evening in delightful surroundings overlooking the Bay of Plenty. This was the first time I had ever heard of a baron of beef. It was a very large piece of beef cooked on the barbeque and believe me it tasted delicious. An element of competition with a target golf facility was definitely a win for the ladies with Judy Austin showing that either she was very good at golf or had consumed considerably less wine than some of the other participants. After a wonderful day to remember we made our way back to Rotorua for the night.

A Baron of Beef



Some looked brighter than others as the day dawned and we headed off to Te Kuiti to visit Russell and Mavis Proffit's Raupuha Herd. Russell and Mavis keep 98 Shorthorn cows and about 1700 ewes. After a welcome cup of tea we were treated to a very interesting demonstration of sheep shearing using both electric and hand clippers. This was followed by a fascinating demonstration by Te Kuiti Meat Processors of how a lamb carcass is butchered and where the cuts are subsequently sold. Whilst the prime cuts are sold domestically or exported to

Europe the lower price cuts and offal are all exported to a growing market in China. The whole of the carcass is saleable.



We were also treated to a fine display of sheepdog handling with the huntaway dogs - a very different mode of sheep herding to our own border collies. The huntaways control the sheep by barking and bark or refrain from barking on command.

We then saw the Rauphua stud of Beef Shorthorns looking very well on some very dry pasture. When we returned to the homestead we found the lamb we had earlier seen butchered now cooking nicely on the barbeque. We left Russell and Mavis after another mouthwatering lunch to head towards Hamilton. We stopped en route at Waitomo where we were taken underground in the limestone caves with impressive stalactites growing down from the ceiling and columns of stalagmites rising up from the floor. My chemistry teacher taught me all those years ago how to remember the difference "tites down and mites up" he used to say. Well it obviously worked as I've never forgotten it. We concluded our underground tour with a short boat ride in complete silence and in total darkness through the glow worm grotto.

Friday 22nd March. We left Hamilton for a short drive to Horotu to see Kelvin and Barbara Stokes Lochburn herd. Kelvin had numbered some of the heifers and young bulls for a judging competition but the animals were not used to seeing so many johnny foreigners and decided not to make it easy for them by standing still for too long. It was however very pleasing to see that one of the winners was from the UK. Congratulations to David Baynes one of our Dairy Shorthorn breeders! We then headed West to see John and Helen Reeves Waimai herd stopping en route for lunch kindly hosted by John and Helen. We had tasted some very special beef during the previous two weeks and Helen's beautifully prepared fillet was no exception. Full fillets marinated with wholegrain mustard cooked at 100C for two hours. It was delicious.

John had his cattle collected for us to view in the holding pens. It was interesting to see stock by Chapelton Wildfire and Podehole Beefeater which were clearly doing a good job in John's herd. John won champion bull and heifer at the 2011 Royal show, with both animals being sired by Wildfire. We also saw a very promising young bull bred by the Morton's who was due to go on centre for semen collection. Unfortunately the bull did not pass all the tests required for export status.

We arrived in Auckland, New Zealand's largest city in time for a short city tour before booking in to the Sky city Hotel for the night. Dinner was taken in the Observatory restaurant at skytower with spectacular views across the city.

The Auckland skyline



We left Auckland over the Auckland Harbour Bridge driving north to Matakoho where we visited the Kauri museum telling the story of the famous Kauri tree and the region's early settlers. It was a fascinating visit with some interesting displays. Later on the tour we stopped to see some of the magnificent Kauri trees in their natural environment. From the heart of Northland we travelled East to Whangarei Heads for lunch hosted and sponsored by the Ody families and to see their Glenrossie herd. On the fertile land running down to the sea the cattle looked superb and were certainly not short of food. They have produced stud bulls for commercial herds with some customers buying bulls from the Glenrossie herd for over 35 years, reflecting their drive for consistent quality cattle.

the Glenrossie herd (right)

Sons of Chapelton Wildfire at John Reeve's (below)



Some people would argue that cattle should calve down at 2yrs old and we saw plenty of cattle on the tour doing just that and going on to rear many calves very successfully. The Odys believe that the heifers should be given more time to develop and calve at 3yrs and visually they certainly looked a picture.

We then carried on to our final destination of the tour, the beautiful Bay of Islands. It was here in 1840 that the treaty of Waitangi was signed with the British government and the Maori chiefs establishing New Zealand as a British Colony and establishing the rights of land ownership for the Maori people. Disagreements over the terms of the treaty have continued right up to the present day but the treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840 is still regarded as New Zealand's founding document. We spent the afternoon immersed in the history and culture of New Zealand and wandered around the treaty grounds to see the very large Waka Taua (Maori War Canoe), one of the historical artefacts preserved in the treaty grounds.

The following day Sunday 24th March we visited the Longview herds of Shane and Dot Dromgool. They run both a Dairy Shorthorn herd and a Beef Shorthorn herd with many of the beef suckler cows coming from the dairy unit in the form of Friesan cross Shorthorn heifers. Whilst some dairy herds here in the UK have moved to three times a day milking to maximise yields, Shane believes a better idea is to milk once a day which dramatically reduces costs and reduces labour by up to 2 men. He sells a lot of bulls to dairy farmers who use them as sweeper bulls and then sell them on to a beef farmer.



Shane and Dot Dromgool's beef herd After our herd visit we were treated to with a beautiful meal in the local school hall thanks to Dot and her helpers, where we experienced our second baron of beef. We were then entertained by the local school choir who sang for us and performed a memorable, and suitably frightening Haka. It was a beautiful end to our herd tours prior to our Conference the next day.

The British and Irish Contingent



The Conference opened on Monday 25th March with a Powhiri or traditional Maori welcome. After the President Bill Austin's opening remarks we were privileged to hear his sister in law, Dame Jenny Shipman, New Zealand's first woman prime minister speak about New Zealand agriculture's place in the world and the significant impact which is being exerted on all our lives by the emergence of China and other Asian countries as world producers and exporters. It is always interesting to hear how other Countries' Shorthorn Associations are progressing and I think this year we had a very positive message to give the rest of the Conference from both our Dairy and Beef Societies. There were some excellent papers throughout the two days covering a variety of topics including use of EBVs , animal welfare and R & D, use of a central organisation serving 20 different breed societies for pedigree registrations, the proliferation of herdhomes being erected throughout New Zealand for housing cattle and a typically charismatic reminder from Tony Fountain that we all need to do much more to promote our breed. The Conference concluded with a video invitation from Uruguay to the 2016 World Shorthorn Conference.

The whole proceedings concluded that evening with the closing Gala dinner and a speech from Mr Bruce Orr celebrating the 200th year of Shorthorns being introduced to New Zealand.

We had a fantastic time in New Zealand. It was enjoyable, interesting and informative and we are very grateful to the New Zealand organising committee and particularly Bill and Judy Austin for their impeccable organisation. We look forward to 2016 and Uruguay.





World Conference Delegates at Russell and Mavis Proffits