

In terms of organisational infra-structure, *British Camelids*. was formed in June 1987 (incorporated 20th May 1988 Companies House), following an informal meeting of like minded people at Keele Service Station on the M6 (*Camelids Chronicle*, 4 December 1988 p. 1). Representing the llama fraternity as directors were Pamela Walker, Derek Williams, Ann and Peter Knowles-Brown alongside Adele (Pat) Bentley and Jenny Cobb from the alpaca community.

One of its early objectives was to establish a register of camelids in the UK which it started immediately under the supervision of Mrs Jenny Cobb. However, this was not easy, with the base herd consisting of mainly imports with no records and ex-zoo stock with very sketchy (probably inaccurate) records (Paul Rose, personal communication 4.5.2019).

British Camelids also published its own quarterly magazine entitled the *Camelids Chronicle* edited initially by Pat Bentley and in 1995 the *Guanaco, Alpaca and Llama Advertiser (GALA)*, first as a separate listing then embraced within the magazine. In 1996, it appears to have extended its name to *British Camelids Ltd., Owners and Breeders Association*, and a year later to the *British Camelids Ltd. British Llama and Alpaca Association*. According to Jane Brown (personal communication 2.12.2019) this was due to the fact that the word camelid was not well understood in the UK. However, a few years on this sub heading was abandoned too because of its *BLAA acronym* and in 2004 the *British Camelid Ltd. (BCL)* Officially became the *British Camelids Association* although it had used both titles interchangeably in its publications for many years (personal communication Jane Brown via *BLS Facebook* 2.12.2019).

There is evidence that in 1995, if not earlier, several alpaca owners sought greater autonomy within *BCL*. Their request was declined although various concessions were offered such as 2 whole pages devoted entirely to alpacas in each issue of the *Camelids Chronicle*. 17 ‘alpaca members’ attended a meeting at Pat Bentley’s house in Penrith that year and under the leadership of Joy Whitehead formed the *British Camelids Alpaca Group* (incorporated in 1997). Members incurred an extra £10 levy but were retained within *BCL* (*Camelids Chronicle* 32 1995). The unrest did not go away stimulated in part by the growing commercial alpacas community who had started to import in significant numbers swamping both the llama and alpaca ‘pet community’ and in 1999 The *BACG* became the *British Alpaca Society (BAS)*. Much of the discontent, however, clearly centred around differences of opinion on animal registration. A rift between those who were motivated to focus the Register on only camelids attaining an agreed standard and those who wanted a more inclusive one (Personal communication with Norma Chandler 2019). Members were consulted and whilst most favoured a registration scheme in principle, they could not agree on whether this should be a single one or two registers (breeder/pet) running in parallel. There was also conflict as to the criteria by which an animal would qualify for inclusion in whichever register, who would be the judge, the cost and inconvenience of this process. These differences of opinion were not entirely aligned to keepers of one or another of the camelid species. Some llama breeders held strong opinions on breeding objectives, practices and thus in favour of a separate registration for breeding animals. Writing in his Chairman’s column of the *Camelids Chronicle* llama breeder Peter Knowles-Brown wrote:

Rubbish breeds rubbish. If you are intent on breeding camelids look carefully at your females; decide how you would hope to improve them, i.e. stronger bone, flatter back, taller, shorter, etc. Then beg, borrow or buy a male that possesses those 'ideal' qualities and hope to produce good lamas. The South American Indians invested thousands of years of selective breeding in these species, producing fine alpacas and Llamas. Do not destroy their efforts by trying to breed 'something' you consider 'pet' worthy. Above all, do not cross breed for I will guarantee you will surely breed the worst characteristics, not the best. If you own a male, of poor conformation, castrate him. As an Association we must do more showing so that we can learn to judge and appreciate good conformation. I know these suggestions will not meet with universal approval, but now that registration has been reorganised we must aim for pure animals - true to type.(Camelids Chronicle 12, (Winter, 1990), p. 3.

Others, saw the distinction unnecessary and even divisive. One member dismissed the idea of pure types commenting that had recognition been given to crosses (as in the dog world with cockapoos, etc.) things would be very different. After all, crosses of male llama/female alpaca (*Huarizo*) and male alpaca/female llama (*Misti*) had been common place in the indigenous South American societies and, if the truth were to be known, most of today's popular woolly llamas were products of this somewhere down the line, whilst Paul Rose reflecting on the past from the present noted that 'Out went the concept of smallholder having fun and in came the 'ostrich/angora-style marketing/accountancy led businesses' (Paul Rose, personal communication 4.5.2019).

The *BAS* ploughed ahead and established their own selective registration scheme and with this firmly in place, proposed merging with *BCL* in 2003.

BCL rejected the idea but fearing they might lose their charitable status if not seen by the Government to be the one body representing camelids, agreed to look into ways of working more closely. Since registration remained the main obstacle, the Chair put the idea of a dual camelid registration scheme to members (breeder and non-breeder animals) in order not to marginalise pet owners but differences of opinion remained with further comments on either side of the divide.

In 2006, a separate *British Llama Societies* came into existence which introduced its own 'single' Register. Both organizations, *BAS* and *BLS* remained affiliated to the *British Camelid Association* but its key objectives and role became more focused as an umbrella organization (see below).

The debate over breeding and registration continued amongst some within *BLS* and a number of llama keepers of a farming/stockman/business background/persuasion left the organization in this period because they did not feel it supported their interests (various personal communications with Derek Wallis, Jane Methuen, Alasdair Fraser). It would be interesting to know if some of the alpaca pet owners did likewise in respect of *BAS*. I think it fair to

suggest that overall, the pet community dominated the BLS with an emphasis on the fun and social aspects of llama keeping as they had in the years of BCL. However, they did not have a total strangle hold on the policies and activities of the Society since at least one prominent member of the Board, Mary Pryse ensured quality breeding remained a priority. She wrote:

"I have banged on for years about... and the importance of conformation and phenotype when selecting animals for breeding. It has always fallen on deaf ears. 'They are just pets' is the constant reason. I think there is an embarrassing ignorance among our members and maybe even some breeders regarding what is desirable and what is not".

Historically, such a concern as to llama breeding was not new or confined to the UK.

As far back as 1858, Mr Benjamin Gee critically wrote 'llamas hitherto have been too much regarded as curiosities or ornaments for gentleman's parks' rather than animals of considerable commercial potential and writing in 2005, American, Daniel Powell expressed concerns about what he described a 'chaotic breeding free for all' and 'the desperate need for a sophisticated and ethical approach to llama breeding'. As a stockman with a passion for breed development and breed presentation he was disheartened by 'the rampant out-crossing and mix & match approach' that the typical llama breeder had hitherto employed.

'It was as if llama breeders existed in a vacuum, isolated from all other livestock industries as well as from the breadth of that knowledge those industries had to share'

There were also some in the *BLS* who saw and aspired to commercial opportunities using llamas creating new businesses around trekking, therapy, guarding, etc. (*The Daily Telegraph*, of 1st September 2002). However, private comments by a recent outgoing officer that

BAS is the antithesis of BLS since it is almost exclusively commercial and the object is almost entirely to sell alpacas at high prices... BLS is dominated by people who keep llamas for fun and pleasure

(2019) suggests that at least some saw the two organizations as worlds apart with one largely representing the interests of one group of owners and the other, the interests of the other group of owners. It has also fostered a perception amongst some that these are diametrically opposed priorities and BLS to collaborate with BAS would be almost to sell one's soul. Perhaps the recent surge in llama enterprises will help change this perception especially as alpaca trekking companies have seen what additional traits llamas have for this purpose – leading packs, confidence, etc. Hopefully, BAS will look at how best to engage with pet keepers as well as breeders, BLS pet keepers at how best to engage llama breeders and all come together to give strength and support to one another on common fronts.

Going back to the roots of *BLS*, founding directors of *BLS* were Donald Butler, Linda Johnson, Yvonne Parfitt, David Pryse and Paul Rose. All 3 organisations still exist today but have separate structures and what appear to be different order of objectives beyond general welfare of the species. Today, the *British Alpaca Society* are a much larger organisation

(1500 vs 45 Members 26/1/2020) and as a consequence are a better resourced organisation. Reading their annual reports and talking to some founding members, they appear to have a stronger focus on stockmanship, showing, education/training, marketing and commercial opportunities. The *British Llama Society*, by contrast, appears driven more by enthusiastic hobbyist for whom the organisation seems to fulfill a social as much as any other role.

The llama community within *British Camelids* and later *BLS* was behind the annual llama show and exhibits at several agricultural shows. It organised its own *Llamarama* and *Lamakhama* events, notably at Ascot with various competitions and hosted by its Chair – Ordell Safran (personal communication 2.5.2019). Numerous treks were organised, often with the added goal of raising money for charity (eg. Michael Bassett's Woolacombe Sands trek in aid of Leukemia, Joe Connolly's Lytham St. Anne's trek in aid of the *RNLI*). Ordell Safran did a huge amount for many years in terms of organising social and other events, and promoting llamas generally. Her very popular annual Windsor Park Walks with permission of Her Majesty being a great highlight and which brought out llama owners from far and wide (*Llamas*, 12, 5 (Winter 1998), p. 24 and Paul Rose, Personal communication 4.5.2019). Annual treks were also organised in Nottinghamshire (by Brian Haughton and later Vivienne Ives) and one to the top of Cairngorm was organised by Malcolm Curtis in 2002 (*Camelids Chronicle*, 56, 1 (2002), p.7). In recent years, despite their reported popularity at the time by those who attended, these treks and several other social events appear to have fallen by the wayside. Quarterly issues of the *Camelid Chronicle* would usually have a list of at least half a dozen events (shows, group treks, etc.). Some regions have been more active than others although this has varied over time. In the late 1990s and early 21st century, the South East, Midlands and West regions were holding monthly meetings (see *Camelids Chronicle*) but again this appears to have lapsed in recent years although Regional Coordinators were first appointed in 2008 in an attempt to re vitalise regional activity (*Llama Link*, 9, September 2008). For several years *BCA* organised an annual Christmas lunch and in 1997, Dick Chandler organized a trip to South America (*Camelids Chronicle* 38, 1997). It produced various information leaflets for members offering advice on purchase and husbandry of llamas. In 1998, the *BCA* produced its first code of conduct for the sale of llamas (*BCA Newsletter* November 1998) and in more recent years the *BLS* introduced microchipping as part of its registration scheme (*Llama Link*, 9, September 2008), produced a new magazine *Llama Link* and revamped its website several times.

Today, both *BAS* and *BLS* support the *British Camelid Association* who continue to provide a representative lobby for camelid owners as a whole supporting research and welfare. Finally, a *Camelid Vets Association* was formed in 1994 to help support professionals working with camelid owners in the UK.

It has been hard to pin down the cost of a llama at these different periods of history. We know that in October, 1851, Lord Derby's llamas fetched between £33 and £65 and that in 1858 Mr Gee sold some of his imports for a mere £25 each although one entrepreneur was able to more than double the price to £60 on resale. As the novelty value of the llama started to wane so did its value. Mention was made earlier of a llama sold at auction in 1872 for £15. Unfortunately, I have no information of what gender, age or condition this llama was in but

clearly their monetary value went in cycles. Some purchasers clearly fell for the idea of llamas making money for them but when the optimism faded so did their monetary value and so it was in the 20th century. More recently, *The Times* (October 13, 1988, p.7) mentions the auction of Pam Walker's *Maplehurst Llamas* at Stoneleigh fetching £87,885 for 27 lots and according to the *Daily Telegraph*, a Cumbrian farmer was paid £5K compensation when one of his llamas was killed by a low flying RAF jet! (*The Daily Telegraph*, November 29, 1989, p.1). Anecdotal evidence I have from a breeder around the same time suggests that at its zenith, £10K was not unknown for a llama and others have claimed that certainly for a period they were around £5-6K each although this fervour was short lived with prices falling with demand towards the end of the 20th century before recovering again for quality stock in very recent years. Perhaps a few early astute entrepreneurs made a good few bob out of llamas through advocating pyramid selling, as in the US, but they were probably very few with the majority getting their fingers burnt. Today, a good stud male can fetch around £2-3K and a young female £1-2K (ex VAT), considerably less than in Europe and parts of North America. Sales in the US reached their zenith around 15 years ago with \$220K paid for *Newevo* in 2003. These dropped again before also picking up again with a record \$80K for *CTF Renegade's Vigilante* in 2017.

It has proved difficult to get to grips with the extent of llama ownership in the UK over the years. A University of Bristol undergraduate project, based on returns to a questionnaire came up with a figure of 727 llamas and 2778 alpacas (*Camelids Chronicle* 2002) . This compared to a figure of around 2000 being banded around in *The Independent*, a few years earlier in 1995). I suspect it has not fluctuated that much in the years since apart from a bit of an upturn in very recent times although that is questioned by several comments on the *BLS Facebook* site recently (26 December 2019). The *BLS* has since 1992 aimed to keep an up-to-date record via its Registration scheme but as it openly acknowledges, many owners are not members and many keepers fail to report any changes, despite various incentives and initiatives to encourage them to do so.

Finally, in respect of ownership, it is interesting to speculate in who these have been past and present. In reviewing the state of llama keeping in the UK and US in 1990, Peter Bourne suggested:

‘Llama owners in Britain fall into one of several different categories, according to the nature of their interest in the animals.

Commercial zoos and animal parks

Animal traders

Alternative fibre producers

Pet owners

and Breeders who are seeking to build up quality herds for breeding and showing.’

Accepting that some might fall into more than one category, I sought to ask via the *BLS Facebook* site (26/12/2019) if this still holds true today. The response was poor but I speculate that it does not do so in the same proportions. Although early issues of the *Camelid Chronicle* contained regular articles on fibre, shearing, it's processing and finished products, cooperatives and marketing these have almost but not entirely disappeared. I therefore doubt interest in fibre production prevailed or confidence that a business opportunity in this respect was to be had. Today, I know of no llama traders although there are the burgeoning trekking and therapy business owners but not sure if this is the same thing (no definition given). All that said, I do suspect that the age and economic profile of owners has changed little. From dates of birth identifiable on the old *BLS* website (member's area), Companies House Directors records, individual *Facebook* timelines, etc. most current owners fall into the older age bracket with a mean age of 65, perhaps a sign of them being a semi-retired (with sufficient time on their hands), hobbyist with sufficient funds/disposeable wealth to own land and so called exotic pets. Statistics published in the *Camelid Chronicle* 17, 1992, suggested llama owners in the U.S.A. were affluent and highly educated. 45% were from the professional classes, 20% business owners and only 14% were farmers. I guess the results of a similar UK survey would not have been too dissimilar. When I look at the names of breeders appearing in the *BLS Business Directory* and also advertising over the years not many seem to hang around for much more than a decade or at best two. Perhaps this too is a sign of an ownership reaching an age beyond keeping llamas 10 or so years after they started. All this speculation nicely moves us on to the present.

(Extracted from Chapter 2 of a forthcoming book by the author entitled *Llamas: A Reference Handbook*)