

The Aylesbury Club and the Duck Dinner

The Duck Dinner is held in Aylesbury each year by the Aylesbury Club, which was originally formed in 1810. Its objects then were "good cheer, good humour and good neighbourhood", and its members met each month on the Friday nearest to the full moon during the period from November to April. Apparently the dining sometimes got out of hand; it is reported that on 21st January, 1832 an inquest was held in respect of one Robert Brazil, who died as a result of choking on stewed beef which he had been "eating voraciously" at Judkins Bakehouse".

The club continued into the 1950's; the Bucks Herald recording in September 1954 that the author Sir Compton Mackenzie proposed the toast at the Bulls Head in Aylesbury and that the ducks were provided by the British Oil and Cake Mills demonstration farm at Stoke Mandeville. After this time the club seems to have faded away. However in 1973 Maurice Buckingham, the then Mayor of Aylesbury, reconstituted the club with the same laudable objects, and it is now as strong as ever, although its members are now more temperate.

The Club's only raison d'être apart from the above objects is to continue the tradition of the annual duck dinner, and the Club and its members hope that all its guests will enjoy tonight's dinner.

The Background of Aylesbury Ducks:

BREEDING: Records of the first poultry show in 1845 show classes for 'Aylesbury or other white variety' and for 'Any other variety'. Since that date the particular characteristics of the breed were standardised and selected to create a good meaty bird. Later the standard diverged so the exhibition quality bird is now very different to that of the utility. The attraction of the Aylesbury for development as a table bird was its large frame, which careful selective breeding would fill with meat, but now is lost in most, and equally importantly its white feather and skin. The white feather stubs leave less of an obvious residue after plucking so making the resulting carcass much more attractive to the general market.

EGGS: White; good utility lines should produce around 150 eggs a year, these are now VERY rare. Aylesbury's nowadays tend to vary from 35 - 120 eggs a year.

SIZE: Heavy; drakes should weigh about 10-12 lbs. (4.5-5.5 kg); again most are not so well covered, ducks could be about 9-11 lbs. (4-5kg).

MEAT: The old utility types were very efficient converters of feed to meat with a less pronounced bony keel than exhibition stock. It is said that at 8 weeks they would be at their best, weighing around 4-5 lbs.

TEMPERAMENT: Lazy, eating machines who enjoy their pond.