

Penton Discussion Group

Penton Discussion Group was formed in 1943 when, as part of the 'Dig for Victory' initiative, the Government encouraged farmers to form discussion groups as a means of disseminating information. Mr Davidson, District Officer for the Ministry of Agriculture in Longtown, and Bill Dixon, Chairman for the first 32 years, established the Penton group. The first speakers, from the Ministry of Agriculture, promoted food production and boosted morale in the agricultural community.

Today members are drawn from many walks of life, though the great majority are involved in farming in one way or another, and have a common interest in rural issues. More than 40 members, from both sides of the Scottish Border, meet once a month between October and March to hear talks from invited guests. The programme reflects the interests of the group; it is diverse, often educational and always entertaining. Every other year a 'Brains Trust' is organised as one of the evening meetings.

Initially meetings were held in The Bridge Inn, Penton. The Group then transferred to Craighburn Country Farmhouse Hotel until it closed in April, 2014. Now meetings which are friendly and informal are held at Skitby House, Smithfield, Carlisle, a country restaurant, at 8pm on the first Monday of each month (with some variations). The usual pattern is for a guest speaker to talk for about forty-five minutes to an hour on their chosen topic; light refreshments are served at about 9pm and are followed by a short question and answer session.

A major annual event organised by the group is the Penton Sheepdog Trials held on Bank Holiday Saturday at the end of May. A popular trials event in the North it attracts 50 or 60 competitors mainly from Cumbria, Northumberland, Durham, Lancashire, and the Scottish Borders. In recent years competitors have come from as far afield as Bristol, Holland, the Shetland Isles, and Cairndow in Argyll. The trials are run at the Haithwaite Farm in Penton and the day now includes a dog show during the lunch interval. Visitors and spectators are very welcome indeed at any time throughout the day.

An annual outing to the racing at Kelso is well supported as is an annual visit to a local place of interest. Recently the Group has visited Spadeadam, the BCW Sawmills at Rockcliffe, the new Biomass Power Station at Lockerbie, the microbrewery at The Old Crown in Hesketh Newmarket, the Lakeland Smolt salmon farm at Haweswater, Jenkinson's farm at Whinfell Park, and a trip on the Carlisle to Settle railway.

The current secretary is Mrs Lorraine Phillips of Netherhill, Roadhead, Carlisle, CA6 6NQ.