

HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA



"Saving the breeds that were the foundation of our sheep and wool industry"

NEWSLETTER NO 17
December 2009

"Grandfather Had Shropshires" and so did lots of other Grandfathers.

By Ivan Heazlewood

I was surprised to find, when researching the history of my local Agricultural Association, that around the turn of the century my grandfather showed Shropshire sheep. His involvement with a popular breed of longwooled sheep was well documented for succeeding generations with medals, prize ribbons and numerous photos. No mention was made, at least to the third generation, of his ownership of Shropshire sheep of good enough quality to take to a show.

I was surprised, but on reflection I should not have been for around 1900 Shropshire sheep were having such an impact in Australia that it would have been impossible for any grazier not to know about them. Indeed there would have been few Grandfathers in the higher rainfall meat producing areas, who did not try them.

If we acknowledge that the Southdown had a long steady build-up from 1870 to a zenith in 1940 and that the Lincoln, as a first crossing breed had, in the last two decades of the 19th Century, a rapid expansion for use in Australia's wool growing areas, the Shropshire must be credited with the first and most spectacular expansion of any down-type breed in Australia.

Because the Shropshire has been declined for more than two generations, it is difficult to now appreciate the impact and benefits which this breed brought to Australia's prosperity and its expanding meat industry, in particular, in the 30 years between 1885 and 1915.

As its name implies it was native to a county, now famous for dairying, in the west of England. In the mid 1700's it was reported that 10,000 of these brown or black faced, horned sheep with very fine light (2 1/2 pound) fleeces were

grazed during the summer on a 400 acre tract of public grounds that bordered on Shropshire and Staffordshire known as Morfe Common.

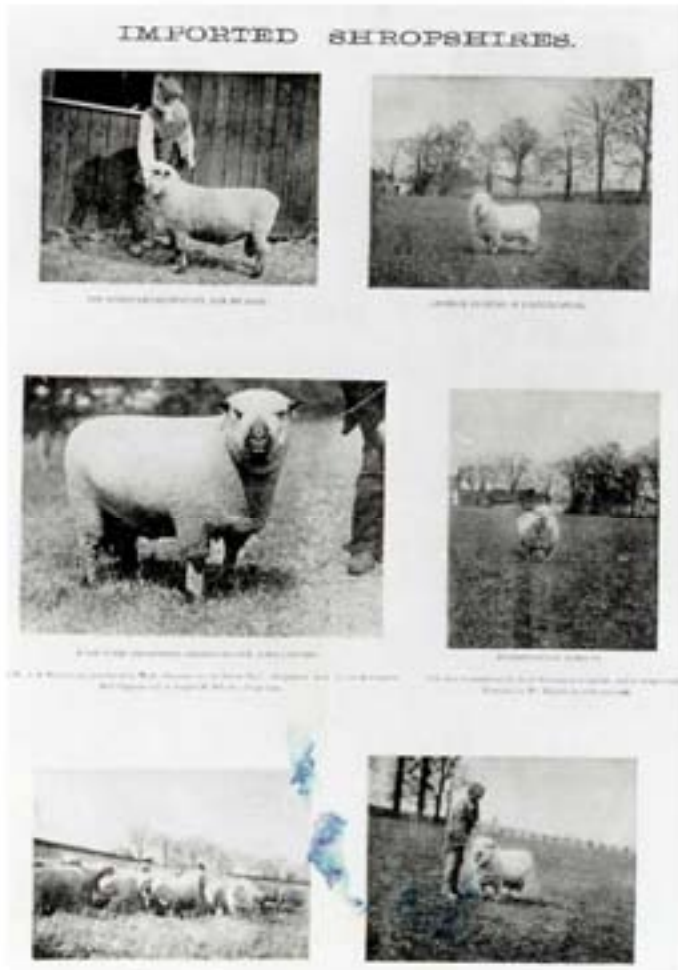
However by 1830 farmers all over Britain were aware of the strategies used by Bakewell and Ellman to improve animal production and owners of flocks in Shropshire used both their methods and their breeds, Leicesters and Southdowns respectively, to improve their local sheep.

In 1845 the Royal Show (of England) was held at Shrewsbury, the principal town of Shropshire. Sheep classes restricted to Leicesters, Southdowns, Longwools (excluding Leicesters), and Mountain Breeds. As the Shropshire did not fit into any of these categories local breeders resorted to presenting several rams for display only.

By 1853 the Royal Agricultural Society of England was ready to recognise the breed and at the show held that year at Gloucester included a class for "Shropshire or other grey or black faced shortwools". In 1860 there were classes exclusively for Shropshires and they were declared by the influential "Farmers Magazine" to be the best of the modern breeds. The fleece weight had by now increased from the 2 1/2 pounds of the old native sheep to 7 or 8 pounds and the carcass weight had doubled to 20 to 22 pounds per quarter. At the Royal Show of 1875 the judges said "There is not a single breed of sheep that has made greater or more rapid improvement than this".

The Shropshire Sheep Breeders Association was formed in 1882 and their flock book, the first of any sheep breed in England, was published in the following year.

In 1884, that moving feast, the Royal Show, again came to Shrewsbury and this time the local breed out-numbered all other, of the forty odd breeds of England, two to one and sixty exhibitors showed 875 Shropshires. They came from 15 English counties and competed for 345 prize money.



continued, with the exception of the period of World War I till 1920. The American Shropshire Registry association which was founded in 1880 had grown to be the largest livestock organisation in the world by 1914.

Two Shropshire Associations were formed in Australia in the mid 1890's, one in South Australia and the other in Tasmania. They published flock books but ten years later, in 1905, they amalgamated to form the Australian Shropshire Sheepbreeders Association.

These were the years when the Shropshire really boomed in Australia. It is said that 1100 sheep were imported in one consignment around the turn of the century and that in 1903 Six hundred sheep were sold at the Royal Melbourne Show Sales. In Tasmania enthusiasm for the breed rose to dizzy heights and Tasmanian breeders claimed, perhaps with some justification that they had the best sheep in Australia. Their performances at royal Shows, from Adelaide round to Brisbane, and results at associated sales certainly supported these immodest claims.

Andrew Mansell's advertisements appearing in sales catalogues declared that he was "The Worlds Premier Sire Breeder". Such was their confidence in Tasmania as a base for breeding and distribution of Shropshires that he and two other English breeders migrated, with their flocks, to the island state.

The Shropshire sheep breed had well and truly arrived on the world's sheep scene. It had also arrived in Australia thirty years earlier. Unfortunately it could be said that their arrival in South Australia was thirty years too soon. Australia would have no meat export industry till the 1880's when it became possible to ship frozen meat to Europe. Charles Price's 1855 importations to South Australia were followed a year or so later when E.B. Boulton of Wem, Shropshire sent a group of sheep to his brothers in New South Wales. Robert Russell of Bendigo, Victoria imported some Shropshires in 1865. Better timing, were the imports to Tasmania, in 1872, of two rams and six ewes by George Wilson of Jericho but even these underwent a long period of probation and no one saw the need to bring them before the public till Thomas Barbury exhibited them at Hobart (in any class for any other breed) in 1887.

Australia and New Zealand received a large proportion of the 250 rams which left England before 1900 but sheep were also sent to Canada, USA, South America, South Africa, France, Germany and Russia. By 1907 Australian imports had dwindled but North America was receiving 100 and sometimes up to 2000 sheep each year and that



"CORSTON JOSEPHINE," "CORSTON EUGENIE," "CORSTON COUNTESS,"
 "CORSTON DUCHESS," AND "CORSTON BEWIDDER."

I.C. Heazlewood Imported Shropshires C1903 from A.E. Mansell.

In 1904 H Williams told the press that he had sent Shropshires (from England) to various states of America, Canada, South America, Russia, France, Germany, South America and New Zealand, but now living at Oatlands, Tasmania he said that there was no place in the world so like Shropshire. "The sheep thrives and grows as well here as he does in England" and "the cost of producing Shropshires here is much less than it is at home."

Two prominent Tasmanian breeders devised the strategy of one taking only rams and the other taking only ewes to mainland Royal Shows. In this way they regularly "scooped the pool".

One breeder stated that for several years all his rams had gone to Queensland as soon as they were weaned and another gentleman said that all his rams were sold and he was unable to fill an order, also from Queensland, for 300 rams.



The involvement of several prominent figures in Tasmanian agriculture may well have increased the Shropshires' popularity. One such person was R.C. Kermode who in 1904 was president of the Tasmanian Shropshire Association. He was a leading Merino breeder and his property "Mona Vale" was one of the best known in the state. The residence built in the 1860s is often referred to as "The Calendar House". It has 4 stories, 12 entrances, 52 rooms and 365 windows and is still considered Australia's finest colonial mansions. Kermode imported three top sires from England in 1901.

Only two Shropshires appeared at the 1890 Melbourne Show but by 1904 their numbers had risen to 250 entries. During that period they won the prize for freezing carcasses in four years out of five.

All this activity could well be described as market driven. The Shropshire was present during the greatest expansion Australia's sheep-meat industry has ever seen. Before 1900 only about 20,000 lamb carcasses left Australia each year. Ten years later there were several millions sent to Europe each year and at least 70% of these were sired by Shropshires.

When did the Shropshire bubble burst? There was no doubt that they were good terminal sires, they had the ascendancy on the Southdown, they produced larger carcasses and more wool, they should not have failed.

For some obscure reason the fashion in USA demanded that they carry heavy wool covering on the head and legs and as 65% of all sheep exported from England went to that lucrative market, the source breeders acceded to that



H.R. Oldmeadow's Champion Shropshire Ewe Launceston October 1911.

demand. Shropshire breeders all over the world followed the woolly trend. Photos of early Australian sheep show them to be excessively loaded with wool.

Few commentators offer logical reasons for the Shropshires decline but in Australia burr, grass seed and wool blindness may well have been, at least part of, the reason.

The slump in world economy following World War may have also affected the Shropshire's fortunes. Times were tough and the British housewife, who was our major customer, could only afford small joints of meat. The smaller, compact carcase of the Southdown of that era was more marketable.

The trend extended to cattle, and older graziers can vividly recall the talk of "baby beef" when the championship ribbons were placed on small chunky Shorthorn and Angus cattle. Features which we now consider admirable were a disadvantage. It did not pay to be too big.

While it is true that Shropshire sheep are now only represented in Australia by a dozen flocks we must not discount their very real contribution to Australia's economy in the early 1900's. They were the first terminal breed to really flourish in this country and their dramatic advent focused the attention of graziers on the possibilities of the emerging prime lamb industry. They brought with them some expert stud masters and a rich heritage of skills and husbandry practices which have been employed in the prime lamb industry ever since.

The few people who have maintained pure flocks through many lean years should be applauded and those who gathered at the 1995 Perth Royal Show, to celebrate 100 years of the Shropshire breed in that state, should be congratulated. It is hoped that their determination to preserve this once popular and celebrated breed will be sustained.

Ref. Robin Hill: Shropshire Sheep 1984. William Youatt: Sheep – Their Breeds, Management and Diseases 1878. Stephen Hall and Juliet Clutton-Brock: 200 Years of British Farm Livestock 1989. The Weekly Courier (Launceston) 1901-1904. The Australian Shropshire Register. The Tasmanian Flock Book of Shropshire Sheep, Vol 1., 1895.

Heritage Sheep Australia members that bred Shropshires

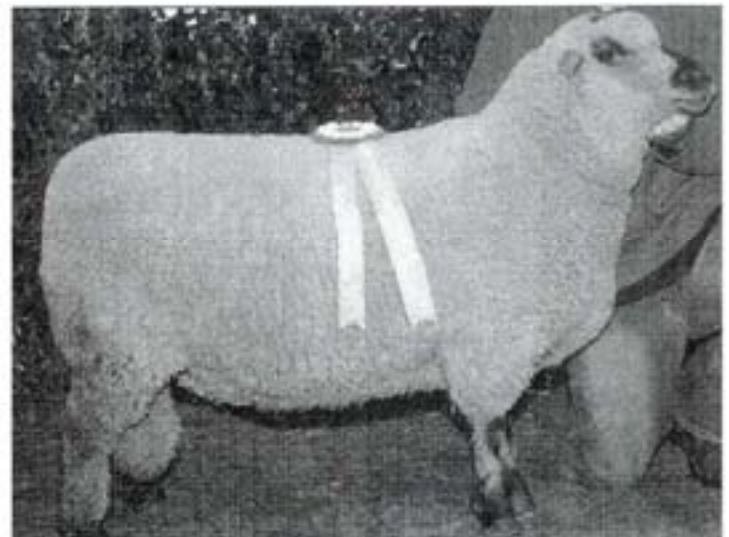
Andrew & Lois Beard
 Orange Grove Stud
 Founded 1891
 Phone 03 55606218

Geoff Baker
 Merriyong Stud
 Founded 1930
 Phone 03 55951585

Fiona & Katrina Chambers
 Fernleigh Stud
 Founded 1999
 Phone 03 53485681

Marilyn Mangione
 Clarendon Downs Stud
 Founded 2004
 Phone 03 97133674

John Harbour
 Yinell Stud
 Founded 2006
 Phone 03 53335573



Shropshire Ram
 Champion Royal Melbourne Show 2006

J.M. Peck

*Excerpt taken from "A Centenary of Purty & Pedigree"
By Ivan Heazlewood*

If his name had rhymed with coach John Murray Peck might have become a legend in Australia. In the event it was Freeman Cobb's name which was used by four young Americans who arrived in Melbourne in 1853 to found a coaching company.

Peck and another partner, Swanton, were the expert drivers (Peck had worked for Wells Fargo) and horse breakers of the fledgling Australian partnership Cobb & Co. Coaches.

However the original Cobb & Co. was dissolved in 1856 and Peck returned to America. Two years later he was back in Victoria with eight new Concord coaches and a supply of harness. Four of these coaches which had been built to Peck's design could carry 40 passengers each.

His bad luck in losing most of his capital due to an outbreak of scab in his sheep grazing venture in 1861 was fortuitous for the livestock industries of South Eastern Australia for he then became an auctioneer for Melbourne Stock and Station Agent Dal Campbell & Co. Within that sphere he decidedly did become a legend.

A natural eye for livestock, a keen sense of humor and his imposing figure combined with Yankee flamboyance to make "Honest John" Peck the leading auctioneer in Victoria.

In 1870 he joined the partnership of Peck, Hudson and Raynor but in 1877 the firm J.M. Peck & Sons, which became so well known in stud sheep affairs of the period surrounding the turn of the century, was formed.

The first president of the Associated Stock & Station Agents in 1888, he was for several decades regarded as the doyen of Newmarket auctioneers and his firm was agent for such well-known station owners as James Tyson and Sydney Kidman.

Pecks were particularly interested in Shropshires and they seem to have been the exclusive auctioneers for consignments of that breed sent to the Australian Sheepbreeders Association's sales from Tasmania. Indeed his son H.H. Peck wrote a long history of the breed for the introduction to Vol. 1 of The Australian Shropshire Register when it appeared in 1904. To say that it is detailed

is an understatement for it reports on almost every importation, and there were many, into Australia and also the history and performance of numerous flocks both here and in Britain. J.M. Peck & Sons was absorbed into the Australian Mercantile Land & Finance Co. in 1922.

John Peck was a vice-president of the Essendon Football Club, member of the Victorian Racing Club, Mayor of Essendon and from 1871 Councillor of the RASV.

Freeman Cobb returned to America after only three years, leaving his name to become a household word in Australia.

John Murray Peck was present at the November meeting of the Council of RASV to lend his support to the concept of a Flock Book for British Breeds of Sheep.



John Murray Peck

Royal Melbourne Show 2009

The Heritage Sheep Australia display received another fantastic response at the 2009 Royal Melbourne Show. Following last years success the display ran for the entire length of the show. A ram and ewe, from each our nine heritage breeds were on display.

Building on last years success of their Cheviot ewe with twins, Neil Hopkins and John Armstrong arrived at the show with a Cheviot ewe with triplets! Our resident caretaker had a constant stream of adults and children all holding and cuddling these rotund little Cheviots. When these little fellows needed a rest the Dorset Horn twins and Dorset Horn Ram with his horns created quite a scene. The display would not be possible with out the generosity of the breeders that allow us to use. Whilst some are show sheep, some are brought down especially, and we are very grateful for the time and effort of these breeders.

Des Stevens our resident caretaker and Heritage Sheep Australia ambassador does the most astonishing job caring for the sheep and promoting them to the public. Des's passion for and knowledge of our heritage breeds and their place in our sheep industry, along with his patience and keen sense of humor with the public, take the display to a new level. Heritage Sheep Australia is indebted to Des for donating his time and energy to make our display possible and such a huge success.

Guild Insurance generously agreed to sponsor our display again, and so we purchased two stand alone rollup banners which looked very professional and smart.



Geelong Show 2009, Reserve Champion longwool, English Leicester, exhibited by Colin Taylor, Heritage Sheep Australia president Ian Bucknall and Supreme Champion Longwool, Lincoln, exhibited by Ian Christie.

Heritage Sheep Feature at The Royal Geelong Show 2009.



Geelong Show 2009 Supreme Champion Heritage Sheep line-up

Heritage Sheep featured at The Royal Geelong Agricultural Society annual show in October 2009.

Heritage Sheep Breeders came from as far as Henty NSW and Keith SA. to exhibit their sheep alongside other heritage breeders. With close to one hundred sheep entered, competition was tight and presented quite a challenge for our judges

Our longwool judge was Heather Stoney from Inverleigh, Victoria. Mrs Stoney is a highly regarded Border Leicester breeder who has judged at Royal shows and many special breed shows. Heather said "both the Lincoln and English Leicester Champions had very high quality fleeces and were very good examples of there breeds".



Geelong Show 2009 Champion Shortwool Heritage Sheep, Hampshire Down Ewe and Reserve Champion Shortwool, Hampshire Ram exhibited by NW & JI Johnson.



Geelong Show 2009, Judge Graham Day, Reserve Champion Dorset Down Ram exhibited Ellen Reed and Champion Dorset Down Ram exhibited by Margaret Champan.

The shortwool judge was renowned sheep and cattle judge Graham Day from Bordertown, South Australia. Mr Day has judged all breeds of sheep and cattle at every Royal Show in Australia and also shows in New Zealand and South Africa. The Day family have been breeding Suffolk stud sheep since 1931 as well as Poll Dorsets, White Suffolks and Poll Hereford Cattle. Graham said "it was a pleasure to judge the Heritage breeds because of the importance they have played and continue to play in our sheep industry." He also said "although the numbers in many breeds are small the quality of sheep is a credit to the breeders."



Geelong Show 2009, Champion Heritage Lamb Hampshire Down exhibited by NW & JI Johnson and Reserve Champion Heritage Lamb Dorset Horn exhibited by the Grieve Family.



Geelong Show 2009, Champion Ryeland Group exhibited ER & AR Wilkens, Malung Stud, Freshwater Creek..



Geelong Show 2009, Champion Dorset Horn Ram and Ewe exhibited by the Grieve Family Hillend Stud, Millbrook..

Following judging and a day at the show Heritage Sheep Australia members and friends went along to the Geelong Football Club Dining Room for a casual dinner and get together. It was a delightful evening with many stories, lots of laughing and wonderful sheep breeder's camaraderie. Not often do we have the time and opportunity to relax and reminisce over the history of our wonderful sheep industry. Thankyou to Heather and Murray Stoney for organizing this evening, as Geelong is their home territory they suggested and booked the venue which we would now all recommend especially Geelong supporters!

150th Whittlesea Show



Whittlesea Show Display 2009

Whittlesea Agricultural Society Inc. had many reasons to celebrate and are to be congratulated on their 150th Agricultural Show (founded 1859) on held on 6-8th November 2009.

This was a very special heritage event and brought together many members of the community devastated by the fires and associated tragedies of February 2009.

We thank Brian Alford, Sheep Superintendant for his welcome and organization.

Heritage Sheep Australia were invited to be part of the celebrations and in the sheep pavilion set up a sheep display and supporting material.

The old photographs created big interest, five breeds, with a ram and ewe were penned, Dorset Horn, Dorset Down, Shropshire, Southdown and English Leicester and appreciation goes to breeders for their effort and work involved.

Such opportunities for members to present their sheep, wool and Heritage Sheep Australia historical displays to large public audiences are positive promotion "saving the foundation breeds".

By Ethel Stepenon, Ostlers Hills English Leicester Stud, Broken Creek, Victoria



Whittlesea Show Display 2009



Whittlesea Show Display 2009



Whittlesea Show Display 2009

May 2010 Newsletter No 18

Thankyou to all those members who have contributed to this issue.

The next deadline is **15th April 2010**. I would be delighted for any contributions from members, either email or post.

Email **Jacque @ mcarchitect.com.au**

Mail 11 Mona Place, South Yarra 3141

Guild Insurance

Guild Insurance sponsor Heritage Sheep Australia. We are grateful for their continued support and encourage members to think of them when renewing your insurance.

They are very pleased to quote on any of your Insurance requirements.

Call Jim McConnell on 03 9373 2500