

HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA

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



NEWSLETTER NO. 33 November 2014

MAGICAL MOMENTS IN SHEEP HUSBANDRY

There are lots of derogatory comments about sheep in our everyday language, the most frequently used and widely accepted as the truth is "silly as a sheep".

Against that however the conscientious sheep husbandry-man, the good shepherd knows better because in his daily experience he is constantly exposed to moments of sheep magic. Those moments are his reward. Do we stop to savour and enjoy them? Have we ever attempted to record them? After decades in the negative I now venture; perhaps it's not worthwhile; but if it rekindles one magical moment of delight perhaps it is.

Their only purpose is to turn grass into money.

We have all seen that magic of maternity when the old ewe chooses that sheltered spot behind the hedge, in the hollow of the big gum tree, leeward of the big log to drop her twins.

There is always magic in new life whether it be animal, human or plant. It is an irresistible instant of delight. Ovine recreation may not compare with the birth of your own children, the birth of their children, or the birth of my great grand children but for a fleeting moment it can come close.

The twilight is fading fast, it is cold, it is wet, it is miserable. The old English Leicester ewe has dropped twins. They are on their feet but will the cold have victory over their instinct to suckle?

She is standing over them murmuring comfort, pleading for them to make the next instinctive move. Will it come? Should I let nature take its course?

I am the shepherd, we humans have interfered, domesticated, we have responsibility.

I pick them up; she is protective and alarmed. She sweeps round my legs, pushing, impeding, almost tripping me, and then rushing back to the birth site to check they are not there but on the first feeble bleat she is at my knee, half anxious, half satisfied.

Surely a magic moment of motherly instinct.

Lamb losses are inevitable.

I watched her for most of an hour, a maiden ewe plainly showing the signs of impending birth. She had chosen the spot and established it by drops of discharge which her nostrils compelled her to confirm with increasing frequency. She was down for a moment then up on her restless feet. We have all seen these signs and formed the suspicion that this is not an easy birth and that closer inspection was necessary; that against the wisdom of letting nature take its course.

I felt the time had come when I should look. Most of her mates had dropped twins, and the occasional triplet. Yes my suspicions were confirmed; this lamb was properly presented but big, unusually big and as the birth process had stalled interference was necessary otherwise we would eventually find a young ewe standing over a perfectly good dead lamb.

She did not want to leave the spot which her instinct had identified as ideal but with the help of a quiet dog and gathering a few un-lambled mates we got to the yards where I could isolate and catch her. She was young, strong and heavy. I was ageing and weakening but modestly experienced.

As anticipated it only needed a bit of a tug on the front toes and both she and I were pleased to see a beautiful big ram lamb, covered with rich yellow mucus lying on the ground.

Nothing magical or unusual about all this, every shepherd has a similar occasional experience.

Involvement in reproduction is a common normal and necessary part of animal husbandry.

More than a magical moment was about to come. Add fear, alarm, relief, wonder and admiration to the mix.

The successful delivery was over, I could relax but habit made me reach over to check that there was no film covering his nostrils, impeding that first breath.

As mentioned she was a young active, timid, flighty ewe. Well she was, but now she wasn't. She was on her feet in a flash; she was now a mother; she was loaded with motherly instinct; she would protect her new born at all costs. I went to lean over but I stopped and instinctively waved my arms, just in time. Had I not done so she would not have stopped half-way through her defiant attempt to butt me.

For a fleeting moment I was scared, had my arms not worked she would have bowled me over. However fear was soon replaced by admiration. I had witnessed an instantaneous change, an explainable unstoppable display of maternal instinct which we humans share with all mammals. A magic moment.

Close shepherding leads to lower lambing percentages.



You would have seen a two day old, full bellied lamb attempting to do a four day old skip but only managing an awkward sort of side kick.

What a moment of visual delight when the two week olds join the three week olds for a communal evening race from here to there, from this log to that stump, on a racetrack that has been approved and used by instinct for generation after annual generation.

Don't let sentiment interfere with efficiency.

We have all seen that delightful sign of early spring when the hoggets begin to jump and play. That is our reward for the special nurture that dismal winter demanded as we ready them for motherhood.

In sheep husbandry science should replace sentiment.

There are always magical moments awaiting us who have carelessly postponed selecting the yearling show team. They are now strong and full of vigour but light on close domestication and confidence with humans. How quickly they change after a few short sessions of halter restraint.

There is the magical moment when the first one abandons flight and fight and decides to follow with no pressure on the halter. There is the super magical moment when the occasional one becomes human – attached to the point of insisting on being near, wanting ears to be scratched and handled, wanting to distract when you are deep in the preparation of one of his mates.

Showing, close handling, and intense feeding are unnecessary and misleading.



And what about that frustrating, annoying, farcical moment when that old ewe with young lamb at foot, reverses the accepted and expected norm, and chases the dog. It's both embarrassing and annoying. She turns defence into defiance. She turns away from the mob, the dog instantly thinks that a single ewe a walk over, but shock, dismay, retreat. The lamb follows at full speed, over-runs motherly protection, her panic and aggression is out of control and the black comedy is fifty yards further behind you and the mob.

Get a stronger dog.

It is a contrite and forgiving heart that can find any magic in this but a moment's reflection and calm is known to solve many problems.

When you reflect it is magical in several ways. Why is it so strong in some breeds and almost non-existent in others, they are all sheep, they have all been domesticated for aeons. It is mystery, it is magic.

A good strong dog is worth much more than a sheep.

Not being a wool sheep man I find more than magic in the intensity of our wool breeds herding instinct. It is a moment to cast off prejudice. It is a moment of reassessment, of recognition, that without the multi millions of merinos which occupy inland Australia there would be little need for breeds originating from more northerly Europe. Used to the individuality of meat breeds which finds them grazing independently, spread out haphazardly over available pasture and never capable of packing in a tight mob, I never fail to be delighted when I come across a wool mob moving sedately along a country lane or coming in for shearing. That sedately moving, horizontal carpet of wool is much more than a significant visual treat. It is living, moving history lesson telling the story of the lynch pin of our nation's early economic development, of the foresight and determination of our forebears, of their instinctive perception that they were establishing our nation's first export industry, of their inherited or acquired animal husbandry skills.

With our breed it's what is under the skin that counts.

But wait Ivan, your readers may say, you have lost the plot, age has made you forget that we keep sheep only to make a living. We just haven't got time to dream, we have got to keep up with industry leaders, we have got to improve conception rates, lambing percentages, maturity rates, feed to meat conversion, skin values and a hundred similar things.

Yes dear reader, if you are still with me, if you haven't dropped off at paragraph two, you deserve a medal. Of course you are right.

Efficiency, research, planning, concentration, persistence and such words must dominate our attitude to success in the sheep industry.

Forget about what you see – use objective measurement.



However, add a few moments of magic to the human-ovine mix and you might find the words intensified interest; enhanced satisfaction and deeper enjoyment come to the surface.

When the day is hot and the sheep yard dust is rising; when your eyes are clouded and your ears are filling with dirt; when winter feed is perilously short; when you know there is lice over the neighbouring fence; when the price of skins has fallen and someone has failed to lock the gate between the weaners and the matrons; and your wife wants to take you to the beach for the weekend; the calling up of a magic memory moment just might stop you from calling the real estate (prestige rural properties) agent.

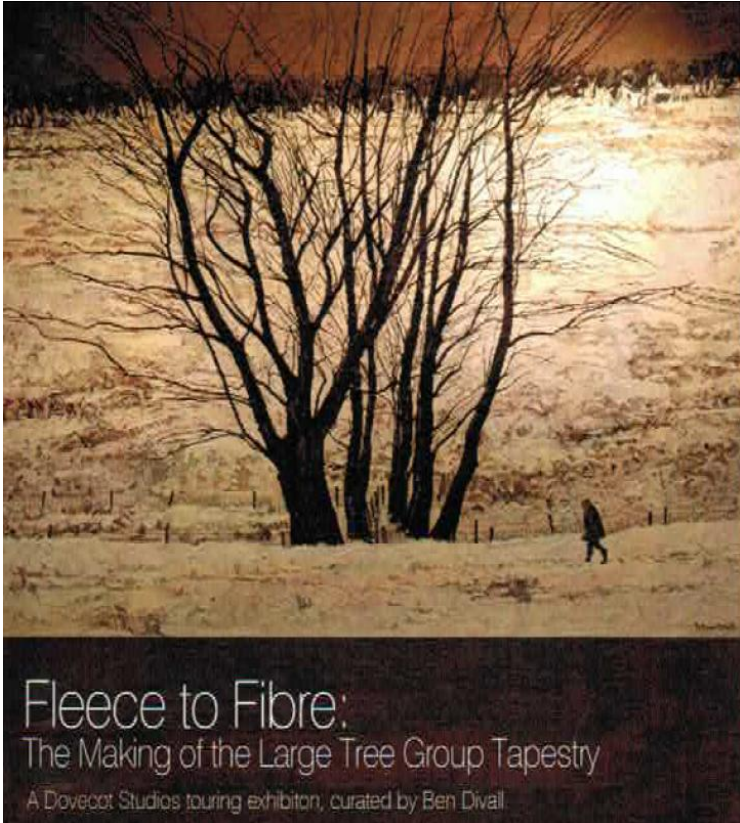
Oh dear, what tripe, what sentimental rubbish have I written, should I burn it.

Pardon me please dear reader.

**My only excuse is found in Acts
Chapter 2 - Verse 17.**

***Young men shall see visions
Old men shall dream dreams***

Ivan C Heazlewood AM



Fleece to Fibre: The Making of the Large Tree Group Tapestry.

A Dovecot Studios touring exhibition, curated by Ben Divall.

First exhibited at Dovecot Studios, Edinburgh, Scotland in August 2013, the Australian Tapestry Workshop was proud to present this remarkable celebration of the British wool industry: growers, spinners, and foremost the weavers of Dovecot tapestry studios earlier this year.

To mark the centenary of Dovecot Studios in 2012, an ambitious project was undertaken to create a tapestry entirely from un-dyed wool. After some 12 months of painstaking liaison and collaboration with suppliers of un-dyed wools, a range of providers and craftsmen, spinners and growers (both commercial and enthusiasts), careful collaboration with artist Victoria Crowe, and foremost extraordinary concentration, diligence, and expertise of Dovecot's weavers, the Large Tree Group Tapestry was complete. Forming the centerpiece of the exhibition, the sheer scale of the tapestry is remarkable. Its embodiment of sheep, wool and those who contributed behind-the-scenes, provided an ideal opportunity to explore the processes and people involved in the creation of this extraordinary work.

HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA

Some 70 produces across Great Britain, from small scale crofters to large estates, provided wool from a wide range of sheep breeds. The yarn was spun by a range of specialists – again from individual spinners and small groups to commercial operations on a semi-industrial scale. The un-dyed wool produced by this remarkable range of breeds has created the entire natural color palette, which has been used in the creation of this unique collaborative tapestry.

Accompanying the story are photographs by renowned Scottish photographer, Alicia Bruce that were commissioned by Dovecot to capture some of the people and the animals involved in producing and processing the wools that form the tapestry. These range from the smallholdings of Debbie and Frank Harvey at 'Lonelyfield' and the Broughton Spinners – a group of enthusiasts who regularly meet in the Scottish Borders – to the large-scale farming of The Duke of Buccleuch at Bowhill.

Portraits of makers, including Dovecot Master Weavers David and Naomi Robertson and the artist Victoria Crowe, foreground faces that might otherwise be overlooked in such a project. Images from the publication 'Beautiful Sheep', taken by Paul Farnham, provide an insight to the diversity of sheep breeds in the United Kingdom, all of which contributed wool to the tapestry.

Subsequently, The Large Tree Group Tapestry has been gifted to the National Museums Scotland by Sir Angus Grossart and its presence in Melbourne was the result of their flexibility, and generosity of Roxane Clayton, who assisted with the transportation of the works.

Dovecot Studios is a one hundred year old tapestry studio, now housed in a beautifully renovated Victorian swimming pool in the heart of Edinburgh. Founded in 1912 by the Marquess of Bute, the studio evolved from the renowned William Morris Craft Studio at Merton Abby in Wimbledon. Dovecot is unique for its highly creative collaborations between artist and weaver and commissioner.

Image: David Cochrane and Naomi Robertson, master weavers; Victoria Crowe, painter, Large Tree Group Tapestry 2012-2013, un-dyed wool, cotton warp; tapestry weaving. On loan courtesy of the Trustees of the National Museums Scotland.

Over The Pens.....

Royal Melbourne Show Display

September has come and gone and another Royal Melbourne Show Display has delighted, surprised and hopefully educated some of the 500,000 people that visited this year's show. Thank you to the members that muster, feed, educate their sheep and then deliver them to the Showground's it all takes precious time and energy !

To give you all some idea it starts with that email or phone call "It is that time of year again could you please supply some English Leicesters for the display this year?"

Andrew Beard finds some Shropshires and takes them to the Rae and Ian Christies along with Des and Marylyn Stevens who deliver their Ryelands for the trip to Melbourne beside the Christies Lincolns.

Colin Taylor rounds up his English Leicesters and drives them to Jeff Johnson and Jeff brings them to Melbourne with his Hampshires.

Meanwhile Rob Waddell finds time to bring the Cheviots in from their lush green pastures in Gippsland and head up the highway as does Rob Grieves bringing his Dorset Horns from the other direction.

Colin and Margaret Chapman returned from Iceland to find their Dorset Downs ready for the show and beautifully prepared by the family.

Graeme Dehnert meanwhile has been organizing a team of Southdowns for the show and fits in a couple of extras for the display.

Then we have Tintern and their Romney's and I am not sure who is more excited to get to the show the sheep or the children or maybe Gavin Wall as he tries to round up both children and sheep!

The RASV continues to support and help develop our display and this year employed a Shepherd Cindy White from Lindenow for the entire show. Cindy kept the display immaculate day and night and kept the feed and water bins full to the delight of both the sheep and their owners on their good condition at the shows end.

Cindy like many of us was amazed at the reactions of the public and had many funny stories to tell parents on her return to the family property. She was delighted to come

across a relative of Robert Bakewell an amazing lady whose father was also Robert Bakewell and bred Southdowns in South Australia.

Rae and Peter Christie came back to the show and helped Cindy on the last three days and then loaded up the Lincolns, Ryelands, Shropshires, English Leicesters and the Hampshires for the trip home! Given the lavish lifestyle these sheep have had over the show it was a very full load and a scenic trip home.

Meanwhile the other breeders with display sheep make another trip to Melbourne to pick them up. Thank you to all our members who help with the display and are keeping our wonderful heritage breeds in front of the public and educating future generations.

Annual Membership Renewal

My apologies for not including our annual membership form with the AGM notice. It is however included this time round!

For those that were super organised and have paid thank you and please disregard the notice.

Web Site

The Web Site is still being developed I am currently tracking down the original art work for the logo however the basic layout is done and once we have the logo and material loaded it should be up and running.

Christmas Shopping

Looking for that extra Christmas present? Look no further than "From the Sheep Pen Short Sheep tales and long lambs tails" Ivan C Heazlewood. Copies are available from Sharon Heazlewood Phone 03 6397 3515 or 0417592 291 Email Roselands22@bigpond.com

Christmas and New Year Wishes

I trust the year has been truly enjoyable "Saving the breeds that were the foundation of our sheep and wool industry".

Best wishes for a very Merry Christmas and a Happy Prosperous New Year preserving the unique genetic qualities of our Heritage Breeds!

Jacque Carr 0398204172 or 0411600466