

# HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA

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



**NEWSLETTER NO 11**  
**June 2008**

## **Strange Choice** *By Ivan Heazlewood*

Australia's early history records the introduction of types of sheep which we now regard as strange and unsuitable; undesirable even.

The notable examples are those sourced from India (the Bengais) and some of the imports from South America. Although from the early settlers those sources were almost accidental, being from the last port of call or the nearest trading source, we now recognize that despite their unusual appearance the unplanned integration of some of their characteristics into the later, Merino dominated flocks of Australia was advantageous.

However later planned and international introduction of some Shetland sheep to Bothwell in Tasmania would now seem equally strange. Seven of these small hardy sheep from Shetland Island arrived in Hobart in June 1839. They had been sent out by Captain Patrick Wood, a retired East India Company officer who was then living in Edinburgh, but had originally arrived in Van Diemens Land in 1822. With financial backing from James Dennistoun, founder of the Glasgow Banking Company he had received a grant of 2000 acres which he named after his benefactor. By 1828 Dennistoun had grown to be more than 10,000 acres. It still remains one of Tasmania's icon grazing properties. Although wool production was the main objective Captain Wood had also brought Angus cattle from Fife and these are recognized as the first importation of that breed into Australia.

But why did Wood, in 1839 decide to introduce unlikely Shetland sheep into his Merino establishment? The Shetland islands which lies far out in the North Sea, halfway between Scotland and Norway carry distinctive breeds of domestic livestock, Shetland Ponies, Shetland Cattle, Shetland Sheepdogs and Shetland Sheep.

In recent times Shetland Sheep have been modified by the intergration of larger British Breeds but in 1839 those sheep would have been uncontaminated and adapted to the harsh environment by centuries of isolation. They were small and hardy and carried a light coat of variously colored wool which they shed over many days. Like the Bengais, those sheep which had arrived in Australia 50 years earlier, they had an outer coat of hair and an inner coat of very fine soft wool. It was this fine wool which provided the Shetland Islanders with a lucrative but labour intensive industry. Traditionally the soft shedding wool was gently pulled from the animal leaving the strong hair coat to protect them from cold and rain.

The inner coat was recognized as the finest wool in Britain and at the hands of the cottagers produced knitted goods which commanded premium prices in London and other English cities in the 1700's. Captain Wood would have been familiar with the widely circulated claim that a shawl of Shetland wool was so fine and so strong that it could be drawn through a wedding ring and that, no doubt was why he ventured an experiment with Shetland Sheep on his Merino property half a world away.

Only 7 of the 12 sheep shipped on the "William Mitchell" from Leith arrived in Hobart in June 1839. Writing later in 'The Narrative of Golf Hill' George Russell, whose brother Phillip was Captain Wood's manager at Dennistoun said, "they did not succeed well, being so very wild; they could not keep them in any enclosure. Captain Wood's idea was that the soft downy wool which grows next to the skin of these sheep, and under a coating of hair, would become more valuable in the climate of Tasmania than it was in Shetland. But they were not a success." After nearly 170 years of reward from our national sheep and wool industry most Australian graziers may say that it was fortunate that Captain Wood's speculation with small, coloured, wool shedding sheep was abandoned and that no Shetland Sheep survived to join the present ranks of Australian Heritage Sheep.

But how interesting it would be to chart some of the activities of those sheep while at large on Dennistoun in the early 1840's and establish whether Shetland Sheep joined the ranks of several other breeds which made accidental contribution to the genetic diversity of the pure Australian Merino

### References:

Janet Vorwald Dohner: The Encyclopedia of Historic and Endangered Livestock and Poultry 2002.

Clyde Company Papers. Ed PLBrown 1941

The Narrative of George Russell of Golf Hill 1936



*Shetland Sheep in North America*

## Annual Lustre Wool Sale

On March 12, 2008, Woolgrowers Independent Selling Services held their annual luster sale on behalf of the English Leicester Association. This year's sale however was a combined luster sale with the Australian Lincoln Society offering their wool for the first time. The wool bales were displayed traditionally and generated a great deal of attention from several exporting companies, with one exporter being a repeat buyer from last year's sale. Although prices were down on last year due to the increase in the Australia dollar, the sale was a success with all wool sold to the trade. Wool growers were represented from all parts of Victoria in the total offering of 30 bales, with Nicholas Cole "Westcloven Hills", Camperdown receiving the highest price of 198cents per kilogram greasy. WISS Wool would like to thank all those who supported the luster sale and wish to advise the sale has the potential for further development as an ongoing market. Enquires should be directed to Craig Potter, Marketing Representative WISS, phone 0418369119.



*Woolgrowers Independent Selling Services Annual Luster Sale.*

## Heritage Sheep Australia Woollen Rugby Jumpers

We have a small number of rugby jumpers still available, they are priced at \$80 plus postage. They can be ordered from Jacque Carr phone 03 98204172.

## Heritage Sheep Australia Magnets

The fridge magnets for Heritage Sheep Australia and each breed have been selling well with several reorders. They look fantastic and make terrific gifts.

Magnets can be purchased from Ethel Stephenson for \$1 each. Ethel Stephenson can be contacted on 03 5764 1298.

## Annabel has a little lamb !

In February 2007, a request from Annabel Smith for an English Leicester lamb for a school project was an interesting challenge. Annabel is a student of Urrbrae Agricultural School in Adelaide. The School's year 8 project – the study of their own subject- animal, bird, something agricultural- monitoring statistics and any problems over a 14 week period, concluding with a report including historical background.

Annabel's choice of an English Leicester lamb from a stud ewe and "on the bottle" was a special order!

All this fitted in with my belief that every child should rear a bottle lamb! The day came on September 2 when lamb, complete with paperwork and food for the journey, was collected from Ostlers Hill stud, Broken Creek, Victoria, for the trip back to Adelaide. This was certainly a Smith family event with great support for Annabel's lamb and the school project. I don't think I will ever forget the sheer joy on the child's face when she picked up her lamb- I guess we were all happy.

The lamb, named Shaun, after the TV character, is now 7 months old, shorn and living happily with the family alpacas and goat. Annabel shows their alpacas and hopes to take her lamb along to the local shows.

Annabel is looking forward to graduating from Urrbrae and becoming a tertiary student at Roseworthy Agricultural College to study vet science. We wish Annabel great success.

Ethel Stephenson

Ostlers Hill English Leicester Stud.



*Annabel and Shaun the lamb*

## Display Boards and Banners

Display boards and banners are available for any member that wishes to set them up at local shows, expo's and field days. Contact Jacque Carr on 03 9820 4172 to locate their where abouts!

## Guild Insurance

Guild Insurance continue to sponsor Heritage Sheep Australia. We thank them for their continued support and encourage members to think of them when you are doing your insurance. They would be very pleased to quote on any of your Insurance requirements. Call Jim McConnell on 03 9373 2500

## Book Reviews

The Encyclopedia of Historic and Endangered Livestock and Poultry Breeds.

By Janet Dohner

Yale University Press 2001

This book is one of the most interesting books on domestic animals I have ever read.

While it gives detailed information about rear breeds, it also has a wealth of general information about the species which mankind interacts with and included a comprehensive summary of the animal products which we use for our own benefit.

Detailed are 11 breeds of goats, 50 of sheep, 16 swine, 35 cattle and donkeys, 21 chickens, 9 turkeys, 14 ducks and geese. The natural history, husbandry requirements and breed profile of each is included along with colored photos of many.

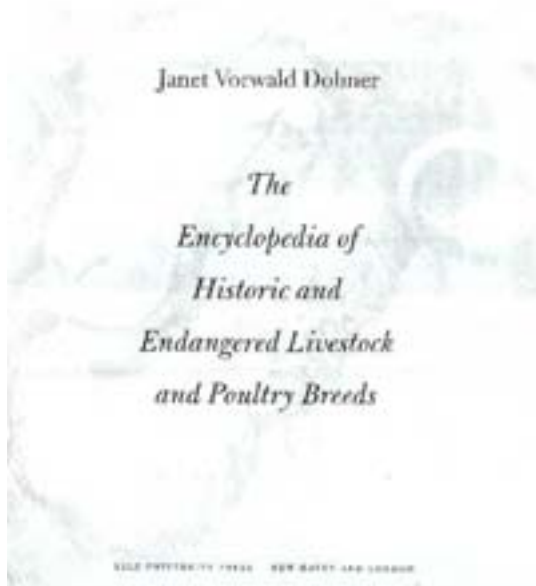
Janet Dohner, being an American, brings an interesting aspect not usually seen in British or Australian writings; that being the influence of early colonial Spanish imports into the Americas.

It is a big book of 500 pages, A4 size, hard cover and well presented.

I purchased my copy from USA via the internet for around AUD\$135.

It is worth every penny.

By Ivan Heazlewood



## The Hampshire Down Centenary Year Book, 1889-1989

My favorite book would have to be "The Hampshire Down Centenary Year Book, 1889-1989", which has some amazing photos of show sheep and studs in Britain through the years, not to mention a lot of information about the formation of the Hampshire Down Breeders Association, and it's role through that century.

Another little snippet I love to look at is a booklet from the "Surrey County Show, 1973 - an Exhibition of Rare and Lesser-known Breeds of Sheep"

I enjoy reading the old English books on sheep husbandry and life in general, and there are so many to choose from, it's a real dilemma !!!

By Helen Raven

## Strong Wool Sheep and Wool Fair



*Strong Wool Sheep and Wool Fair Benalla*

*Genevieve Burgin winner of the Junior Handlers Competition with Ethel Stephenson and her Ostler Hill English Leicester Supreme Champion Interbreed Ewe and Brian Harker, President of the Strong Wool Breeders Association.*

It was a bright and sunny day for the 21<sup>st</sup> annual Strong Wool Sheep and Wool Fair held at the Benalla Showgrounds on Sunday, May 4 2008.

Organised by the Strong Wool Breeders Association, the fair is the highlighted the important role that strong wool breeds play in the sheep industry.

In attendance were breeders from Victoria and NSW and the day was opened by influential English Leicester identity Ivan Heazlewood.

There was a great display of strong wool fleeces, craft, photographs and sheep with a special demonstration of blade shearing.

A highlight of the day was the judging of Supreme Champion Ewe with the winner an English Leicester from Ostlers Hill English Leicester stud, Broken Creek, Victoria with the reserve Champion Ewe being awarded to the Cheviot exhibited by Jan Duff, Spring Grove Stud, Heathcote, Victoria. Spring Grove Cheviot stud also won the Reserve Supreme Champion Ram.

**Lincoln:** Champion Ram and Ewe Beattie Farms, Yarrawonga.

**English Leicester:** Champion Ram and Ewe Ostlers Hill Stud.

**Cheviot:** Jan Duff, Spring Grove Stud, Heathcote.



*Strong Wool Sheep and Wool Fair Benalla*

*John Beattie Esdale Lincolns and Merna Hull, Paulatim Romney Stud, Inaugural members of the Strong Wool Breeders Association, both were presented with Life Memberships on the day.*

## Safe Cove Cheviot Stud

Flock 95

Safe Cove Cheviot Stud (Flock 95) started at Safe Cove on the south eastern coast of Tasmania (Tasman's Peninsula) five kilometers from the World Heritage convict prison of Port Arthur – Safety Cove Farm was part of Point Puer Prison for Boys – next stop South Pole.

The stud began with the purchase of one ewe in lamb from Elton Creswell, Oaks, Tasmania in 1957 – the same year Chain Gate Stud began.

At that time Cheviots were enjoying considerable interest for breeding rams to put over Polwarth and comeback ewes to breed fat lamb mothers. Our first ewe purchased for seventy guineas was the foundation of the present Safe Cove stud, that hovers around fifty ewes, all are her direct descendants as the only two other ewes purchased from Eskdale Stud only produced ram lambs.

“Wellard Park”, the home of Safe Cove Stud since 1962 was purchased as a bush block that ran no stock other than as a winter turnout for Port Arthur's street cattle and Mr Wellard's dry dairy cows about 1944 and was gradually bulldozed into a dairy farm from 1950 onwards. Wellard's Run as it was then known was originally purchased around the 1890's by an Englishman named Thomas Mason of “Clougha”, Port Arthur who was recorded by Ivan Heazlewood as being one of the originals to import Cheviot sheep into Tasmania. The breed later disappeared from Tasmania for possibly a big part of half a century.

The first lamb of Safe Coves' original ewe couldn't be born so it meant putting the ewe in the back seat of the car and making a dash to the nearest veterinary clinic at Sorell seventy kilometers away. The lamb was dead. The following year the ewe chose lunchtime to give birth on the bank of the water-race, her lamb drowned but in the tradition of Robert the Bruce on the third attempt she produced twin ewe lambs, which were named Shelley in honour of Mr Creswell's daughter. Since then the Safe Cove Stud like Topsy just “grewed”. In 1968 the flock grew to seven ewes. A ram purchased from Barnett – Quamby House Premier R60-58 and his son Safe Cove Eska R3-59 out of Eskdale E94/56 were early series used.

At one stage we hoped to build up a flock of 500 ewes and experimented with Ryeland, Romney Marsh, Polwarth and finally Corriedale rams even over comeback ewes. We made the mistake of buying a merino ram thinking it was a Polwarth and consequently ewe lambs were too fine woolled for our climate. A friend suggested a Southdown ram for ease of birth. As our dairy herd expanded we cut back on sheep numbers, switched from grade Ayrshire cows to registered Jerseys and from that time on found we could maintain our Cheviot stud by mating about fifteen ewes to Cheviot rams and the rest to Southdown as the lamb from that cross fetched a premium in the sale yard. It was gratifying on a couple of occasions to top the market on the day knowing the cheviot-southies were twins and triplets. In November 1984 I sold eight Cheviot ewe hoggets to Dr Barry Munday of “Serendip” Glengary, WA who proposed to use them in developing the white Suffolk breed. We had some good fat lamb mothers with Cheviot sire and Romney-Polwarth cross dams. On the other hand a Southdown ewe with a lamb sired by a Cheviot is no match to a lamb sired by a Southdown out of a Cheviot ewe. A Cheviot ewe is a “dairy cow” or “dairy goat with stand up ears”

History records Cheviots were used to develop the Border Leicester and Perendale breeds.

One of our Cheviot ewes had quads but actually reared two with the other two pets. They frequently have triplets but we usually make a pet of one or use a triplet for adoption. Our six year old ewes are snapped up by fanciers and some have started studs but they seem to fold up regularly.

We work in with Renee Harvey, Janara Stud Flock 406, agist her surplus rams and share (lease) her rams purchased from Grandridge and Grayoaks studs in Victoria. Some years ago we co-operated with Garyoaks Stud and Greg and Vicki Skeggs who took some of our ewes to Launceston to join Armstrong and Hopkins rams in a display of the Cheviot breed and their wool during the International Sheep Exhibition.  
*By Allen Briggs,  
 Wellard Park, Carnarvon Bay via Port Arthur Tasmania*



**CC Heazlewood Champion Cheviot Ewe 1960**



**Strong Wool Sheep and Wool Fair Benalla  
 Grand Champion Ram the Border Leicester exhibited by Deepdene Stud  
 Wagga and Reserve Champion the Cheviot exhibited by Jan Duff,  
 Spring Grove Stud, Heathcote.**



## Australian Sheep and Wool Show July 17<sup>th</sup> –19<sup>th</sup>, 2008

### GENERAL MEETING

Dear Member,

I wish to inform you that a General Meeting of Heritage Sheep Australia shall be held on Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> July 2008 at 12noon in the Committee Room at the Sheep and Wool Show, Bendigo Showgrounds, Bendigo.

1. Welcome
  2. Apologies
  3. Minutes of the previous meeting
  4. Business arising from minutes of the previous meeting
  5. Presidents report
  6. Financial report
  7. Correspondence
  8. Business arising from correspondence
  9. General business
- Advertising  
 Feature Shows  
 Melbourne Royal Show display  
 Web Pages  
 Membership Fees

Yours sincerely  
 Jacqueline Carr,  
 Secretary,  
 Heritage Sheep Australia

### Next Newsletter Issue September 2008

Thankyou to all those members who have contributed to this issue believe it or not I had more copy than I could fit in, so if your contribution was not in this issue it will be in the next.

Please keep the articles, information and photo's coming the more the merrier.

The next issue will be September so please send in your contributions by the 15<sup>th</sup> August 2008.