

HERITAGE SHEEP AUSTRALIA

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



NEWSLETTER NO 18 May 2010

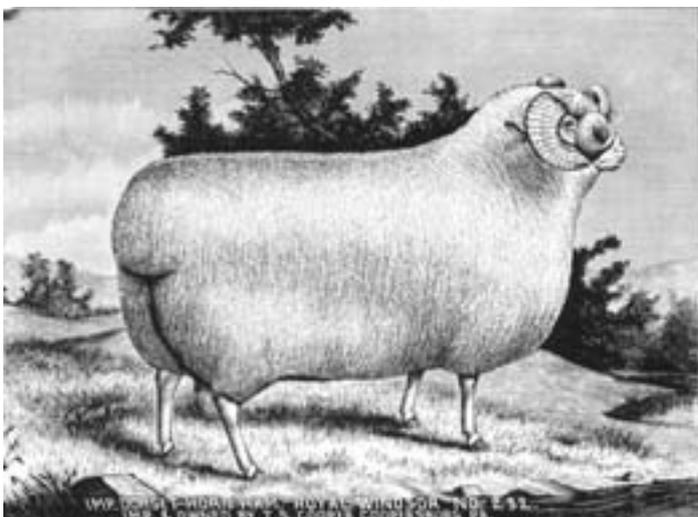
Technology Inspires Importation

By Ivan Heazlewood

"They are certainly very fine sheep with strong characteristics and a carcass which should be marketable."

This is part of the description, given by a reporter from the Australian Pastoralists Review, of the first documented representatives of the Dorset Horn breed to arrive in Australia in May 1895. The comprehensive, and for the times comparatively restrained report was penned when they had been in quarantine (in South Australia) about a week and had "had the pleasure of inspecting them with the Chief Inspector of Stock and Mr Fox of Elder Smith & Co."

In itself the report is almost unique in that it pin points with unusual accuracy the arrival of one of the many breeds of British sheep in Australia. With one or two exceptions the establishment of most of our longwool and meat breeds from the Mother Country is clouded with uncertainty. We know that there were Southdowns in Australia around 1800, that Teeswaters were here by 1804, English Leicesters 1824 and Cotswolds by 1826, Cheviots by the early 1830's and Romney in 1844.



Lack of Movement Restrictions

In all these cases the date of introduction we recognise is one which has some written documentation but, considering the apparent lack of restrictions on the movement of livestock current in those days, it is likely that some of those dates may have been pre-empted by some low profile importers. Obviously other people than the Rev. Samuel Marsden, Major Johnstone or the Van Demens Land Company could easily have obtained sheep from Britain without attracting the attention of officialdom or the press.

Actually till the last quarter of the 19th Century there would have been little incentive to import Dorset Horns and it is probable that the activities of the South Australian grazier on which we focus is indeed the first importation of that breed and 1995 is the correct year in which to celebrate the centenary of their arrival.

In the first half of the 19th Century the Southdown and the Leicester were the two popular breeds in England and it was natural that they should be taken in numbers to the New World by venturing colonists. Once here and having to face the tests of economic reality it was found after about 1840, that terminal sire breeds were not required and for forty years the Southdown had to wait in the wings.

The bearers of the Golden Fleece dominated numerically, longwool (Leicesters) were useful to increase wool lengths and weight and improve carcass size but more meat was not required. Unlike wool it could not be exported and Australians had no hope of eating the surpluses which occurred regularly. The only product of the Sheep's carcass which could take the long journey to Europe was tallow, and boiling-down works appeared on the outskirts of many Australian country towns.

Frozen Meat Prompts Importation

By the late 1870's however, technology provided a solution when it was demonstrated that frozen meat could be successfully shipped to Britain. There was now a requirement for a terminal sire and because they had been there since colonisation Southdowns almost exclusively filled that role.



Almost but not quite exclusively for it is known that Hampshire Downs were present in the 1860's, Oxford Downs in the 1870's and Shropshires in the 1880's. It was only in the 1890's however that any significant challenge to the Southdown occurred. In that decade hundreds of Shropshires came from England and in 1895 a Shropshire Breeder's Association was formed in Tasmania and a Flock Book published.

It is obvious then that by 1895 the export of mutton and lamb was gaining momentum and that Australian graziers were searching for the most efficient prime lamb terminal sires. "Our own correspondent" to the Pastoralists Review relates that "for some years past Mr. John Melrose of Uloloo Station, South Australia had had an inclination to try Dorset Horns which was strengthened when he learned that they were held in much esteem across the herring pond and that several American breeders had recently introduced them into their flocks".

Dorset Horn Destined For Major Role

The Dorset Horn was destined to play a major role in Australia's sheep industry but it is perhaps fortuitous that it was not imported earlier as it was only in the middle of the 19th Century that it was evolved into a form resembling the meat machine we now know. Four historical essays by leading breeders of the time published in Volume 1 of the Dorset Horn Flock Book, 1892, all assert that the original black nosed Dorset Horned sheep were blended with pink nosed larger, taller sheep of the neighbouring county, Somerset. "The horns ceased, in a great measure, to grow upwards and backwards and as a rule curled round the side of the face without rising above the head or inclining backwards".

"It is not too much to say that this breed excels all others in fecundity and early maturity", wrote one of the chroniclers. He was right! They were unique amongst the many breeds in Britain "their readiness to receive the male at an early season" and produce lambs for the premium Christmas market. Because they were reared indoors these lambs were known as 'House Lambs'. They were intensively milk reared; ewes that had lost their lambs or whose lambs had been weaned off were forced to contribute milk several times a day, as well as the natural mothers. The lambs were ready for the butcher at 8 weeks, surely a remarkable performance for the mid 18th Century.

The Dorset Horn, however, suffered a severe set-back in its own territory. The Southdown, on its wave of popularity, was used as a sire on Dorset Horn ewes and the number of pure flocks diminished.

From about 1840 Dorset breeders made a determined effort both to improve and promote their sheep. Taking advantage of the sheep's inherent characteristics of early lambing, early maturity and a remarkable favourable ratio to fat, they not only restored the Dorset Horn to supremacy in the South West of England but attracted the attention of sheep farmers in Canada and U.S.A.

By 1895 the Dorset Horn was a breed well worthy to "cross the herring pond" and make its momentous contribution to the sheep meat industry of Australia.



Kent Dorset, Sold at the 1963 Melbourne Royal Show sales sold to Mr G.P. Thrpe, Kalynna Park, Numurkah, Vic

So in June 1895 our rural journalist was able to record “through Elder Smith & Co., Mr. Melrose purchased three two year old ewes, five yearling ewes, and one ram one-and-a-half years old, from the noted flock of Mr. W.C. Groves, Whitecombe, Dorchester and one ram one-and-a-half years old from Mr. T. Ridner Bickley, Somersetshire.

Mr. John Thornton selected the sheep, which itself is sufficient guarantee as to their being ones of their type.

The ram from Whitecombe was the pick of two first-prized rams at the Royal Agricultural Show at Cambridge. The sheep came out by the liner Warrigal and arrived in first class condition.”

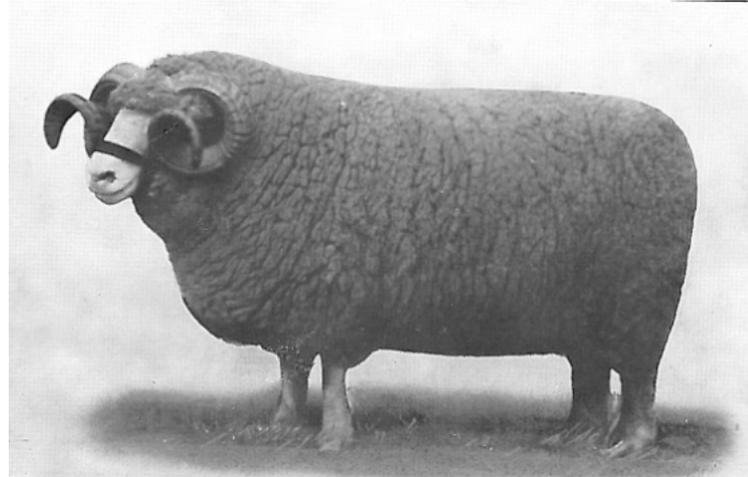
Noble Looking Sheep

Fortunately the custom of the period allowed the reporter to proceed with a fairly detailed description of the new arrivals. “The Dorset Horn ram is a noble-looking sheep, with a proud looking head, well set, with beautifully curved horns. The ewes are decidedly handsome, with nicely turned horns, clean white faces and large bright eyes. The ram and ewes have a fine carriage, the former showing great activity. They impress one as having a fine carcass suitable for the butcher or for exporting. They have a good depth of rib, finely-turned buttocks, deep through the heart, broad and straight along the back, with full and prominent briskets. They are certainly very fine sheep, with strong characteristics, and a carcass which should be very marketable. All sheep-breeders will join in congratulating Mr. Melrose upon his pluck and enterprise and wishing him every success with his Dorsets.”

Whether Mr. Melrose had success with those initial Dorset Horns we may not know but we do know that the breed had outstanding success in Australia, beyond the wildest



Australian Dorset Horn ewes exported to New Zealand breeder Mr.R.Y. Pratt (Glengary Stud) by Mr.T.S Austin, Victoria, in 1940.



Flock Book for British Breeds of Sheep in Australia, Volume 28, a typical Dorset Horn Ram.

dreams of the handful of devoted breeders in the South West of England who had but a few decades before standardised and consolidated the breed.

For two reasons 1935 is an appropriate year to make an initial review of Dorset Horn progress. It is in the year in which the Australian Longwool Association amalgamated with the A.S.B.B.S. and it is 40 years after the breeds introduction.

First Flock Book

The flock book published in that year listed almost 200 flocks of Dorset Horns out of a total of 1255 for all breeds. Dorset flocks were only outnumbered by Border Leicester 413 and Southdown 266. Comments in the preface of that volume (27) noted that “the export lamb trade from Australia has shown remarkable progress during the last decade and Down sheep breeders can look forward to a fairly constant demand for rams.”

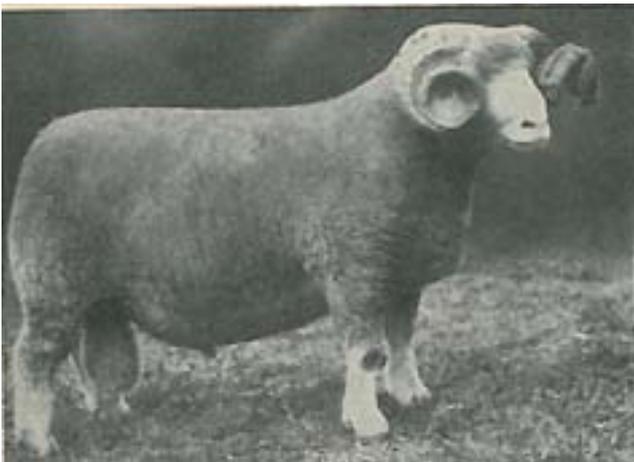
The Dorset Horn had undoubtedly arrived in Australia at an opportune time and it had obviously made good progress against the other well entrenched terminal breed. Studs were distributed throughout higher rainfall areas of Western Australia, South Australia, Victoria and N.S.W. with only three in Tasmania and one in Queensland.

This satisfactory progress was however only a curtain raiser to the boom performance which would take place in the next 20 years.

Open Minds, Hearts and Pockets

There are several reasons why Australian graziers opened their minds, their hearts and their pockets to Dorset Horns. The greatest asset of the Dorset, however, was its ability to perform in the brevity and uncertainty of the Australian flush. It was quick maturing and could be brought to a very marketable state before the on-set of the hot Australian summer.

By 1950 the Dorset with 540 registered flocks was well on its way to the domination of the terminal sire role in the Australian sheep meat industry. There was however one disadvantage – already being addressed. The thousands of Dorset flock rams were leaving scars and bruises on the legs and arms of their handlers and their owners found little pleasure in the, often dangerous, task of releasing them when they became entangled in wire fences.



*1964 Tasmanian National Show at Launceston
 Reserve Champion Dorset Horn Ram, W. & E Roberts-
 Thompson, Cable Farm, Wynyard*

Success Leads To Offshoot

The Poll Dorset had to be developed, not because the Dorset Horn was a failure but because it was such a success. In all other respects the Dorset was eminently suited to Australia's physical and marketing environment. So during the 1940's three prominent breeders set about developing a hornless Dorset. Almost 60 years after its introduction to Australia the Dorset Horn's polled prodigy was officially launched when the Australian Poll Dorset Association was formed in September 1954.

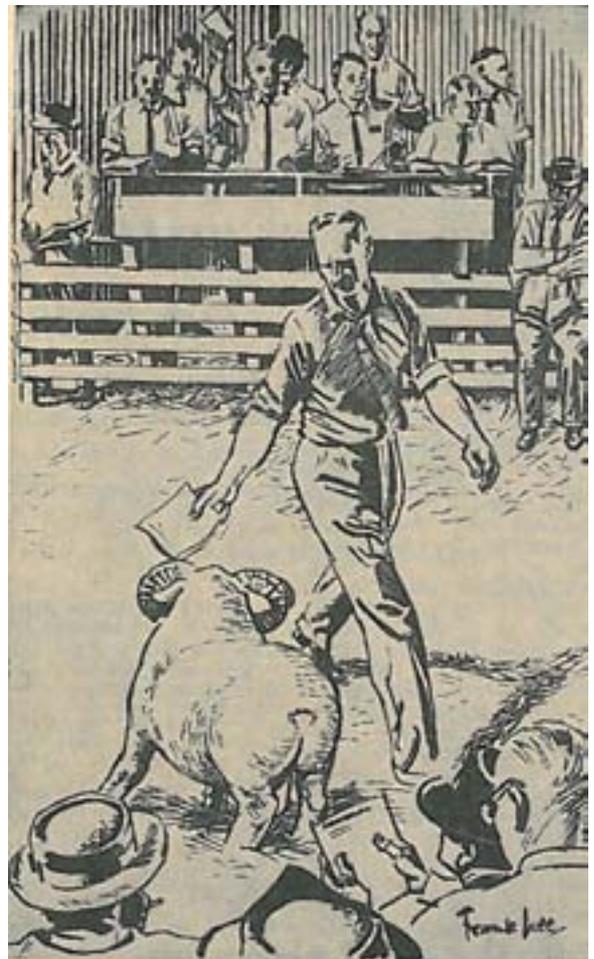
By 1960 there were 1400 Dorset Horn flocks registered compared with a total combination of 968 for all other short wool

breeds. The Poll Dorset association was also registering 335 flocks that year.

During Australia's history various breeds of British sheep have, because of environmental or economic circumstance ruling at the time enjoyed a period of boom. It is possible that none of them have rivaled the attention which the Dorset, Horned and Polled, received in the 50's and 60's.

It was a period of dramatic expansion and improvement of Australian pastures; markets for sheep meats were good and there was no shortage of perceptive, experienced and dedicated stud masters competent to take the Dorset to levels of usefulness, acceptance and popularity which it would never have achieved in Britain.

Unique characteristics lead to setting standards without suppression of its characteristics of early conception, good fleshing and early maturity. It is not surprising then that a generation of Australian graziers have come to take it for granted that Dorset is the standard by which all prime lamb breeds are evaluated.



Australian Stud and Farm Monthly, November 1964

In 1892 when those four Dorsetshire farmers sat down to write a recommendation of their local sheep they recorded it's history, gave a summary of its virtues, its uses and performance in their own area and then concluded with some modest predictions of its wider potential. It is safe to assume that they could not have visualised the role their breed would play in a comparatively arid continent on the far side of the globe.

Could they then have imagined that when 60 years had passed their breed would have become the leading terminal sire in a land of 150 million sheep, that it would have given rise, in a slightly modified form of itself, to a new breed. Could they have envisaged that the mirror of itself would spread into every major sheep producing country in the world including the pastures of Dorsetshire, that it would not be considered unusual to attract 80 entries to a single class at a major Australian show and that it would, at the close of the next century, make a major contribution to the "whitening" of another British Breed finding favour in Australia.

And what of the rural reporter of a century ago; was it just chance that he got it right? Was it just a nice bit of journalism, a fortunate choice of words? Was the unknown South Australian correspondent of the Pastoralists' Review merely relishing the opportunity to describe in favourable terms, the arrival of a new breed, was he just following the habit of reporters, then and now, heaping superlatives on things new or did he perhaps feel obliged to give praise to the pioneer importer Mr. Melrose?

I would like to think he was a good judge of sheep and that when he looked, on that chilly Adelaide morning of June 5th 1895, at that small group of sheep which so recently had "crossed the herring pond" that he instinctively knew that they "certainly were very fine sheep" that Australia would indeed had "a carcass which was very marketable".



*1964 Tasmanian National Show at Launceston
 Champion Dorset Horn Ewe exhibited by W. & E Roberts-Thompson, Cable Farm, Wynyard.*

References

- The Australasian Pastoralists' Review, June 15, 1895.
- The Dorset Horn Sheep Breeders' Association (England) Flock Book, Vol.64, 1955.
- British Pure Bred Sheep, 1952.
- A.S.B.B.S. Flock Books (of various dates).
- Sheep, Their Breeds, Management and Diseases, Wm Youatt, 1837.
- Two Hundred Years of British Farm Livestock, British Museum, 1989.



*Australian Sheep and Wool Show 2003
 Dorset Horn Championship lineup.*

*Left Royal Melbourne Show 1997 Champion Dorset Horn Ewe
 exhibited by Deloraine Partnership, Vic.*

Thankyou- Ivan Heazlewood

Although not directly connected to the Dorset Horn breed, Mr. Ivan Heazlewood agreed to research and write a short history for the Dorset Horn Centenary in 1995.

The Dorset Horn Association thanked Mr. Heazlewood for writing this informative article. The Muster No. 33 April 1995.

Heritage Sheep Australia is indebted to Mr. Heazlewood for this article and many others he has written. The style, accuracy, and true historical account can only be attained by a "perceptive, experienced and dedicated" stud master and author. These accounts contain very valuable lessons for all sheep breeders of today and for the future.



Ivan Heazlewood Champion English Leicester ewe, Launceston 1934



Ivan Heazlewood, centre, with his Champion English Leicester's he bred and exhibited at the Royal Melbourne Show Lustre Feature 1994



Heritage Sheep Australia members that bred Dorset Horns

Robert Grieve & Family

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Founded 1931

Phone 03 5368 9243

hillend@netconnect.com.au

Tamsin Vale

Timberlea Stud

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Darryl & Jan Mac Donald

Fairburn Stud

Founded 1976

Phone 03 53487630

John Harbour

Yinell Stud

Founded 1981

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Terry McGoldrick

Binbadeen Stud

Phone 02 6842 8204

Geoffrey Baker 1927-2010



Geoffrey Baker, one of Heritage Sheep Australia's inaugural members, breeding Southdown's and Shropshire's passed away on March 16, 2010.

A dedicated stud master Geoff spent his entire life working with, and breeding stock. The family farm consisted of dairying, pigs and sheep however Geoff's passion was breeding stud sheep.

At the age of 17 he was introduced to his first Melbourne Royal Show as groom for his father's Shropshire stud. By the 1950's Geoff was exhibiting his own Shropshire sheep followed by Southdowns and Texal Downs at shows all over Australia. His enthusiasm for shows saw him often exhibiting 30 to 40 animals, the biggest and most successful exhibitor in the sheep section regularly. Prized Championship ribbons and trophies were proudly brought home. The culmination of this tireless support for the Royal Agricultural Society of Victoria saw him being awarded the prestigious Presidents Medal at the 2007 Royal Melbourne Show.

Geoff married Nancy Wheaton in 1953, and hence forth Geoff referred to Nancy as "his Bride". When Geoff and "his Bride" were setting off for another show, the children would always say "Gee Dad you going on another holiday?" Definite answer from Geoff"Business, not pleasure!" But his children are certain he combined them beautifully with life long friendships and business prospects to his very last day.

Throughout the 70's sheep breeding and showing was going strong, winning all over the countryside but the Southdown breed was changing and becoming vastly different to what the breed originally was. Geoff's eye for stock and breeding saw him travel to New Zealand and eventually purchase some New Zealand rams and later on, part of a top New Zealand flock with two other Southdown breeders. Geoff's children said that if Geoff's Bride ever tried to oppose any of Geoff's purchases he would tell her "I bought them for you darlin".

Geoff was a great supporter of Heritage Breeds Australia breeding Southdown's and Shropshire's and ever willing to present them before the public either showing or in our Royal Melbourne Show display. He never missed an opportunity to share their historical importance and future importance in the Australian sheep industry. He will be greatly missed by his "sheep family" but his humor, smiling face and wise words but be long remembered by Heritage Sheep Australia and their members.



The late Geoff Baker receiving the 2007 Presidents Medal from the President of the day Mr. Jack Seymour at the Royal Melbourne Show, in recognition of support to the RASV over many, many years.

Strong Wool Breeders Fair

The 23rd annual Sheep and Wool Fair held at the Benella Showgrounds earlier this month set a record for the number of entries.

Held on Sunday, May 2, the Strong Wool Breeders Fair saw 19 exhibitors coming from as far as Qeanbeyan, Gippsland and Hamilton.

Of particular note as a first time exhibitor was The Collingwood Children's Farm, which travelled from Melbourne with sheep coordinator Bridget, four children and the farm's three English Leicester ewes.

This year's fair featured centered around the "lustre feature of wool", which involved lustre breeds – Lincoln and English Leicester.

The other Heritage breed represented at the fair was the Cheviot.

The wool section attracted 40 fleeces representing all breeds, which was judged by Mark Bazely.

The fair also included a photographic section and a display of handcrafted items made from strong wool.

The lunchtime program included the official opening of the fair by Mayor Bill Hill, the sashing of the Championships and a talk by Godfrey Marple on lustre wool.

Cr Hill congratulated all the strong wool breeders on the "big show" describing it as a great community event.

The Strong Wool Breeders Association extended its thanks to all supporters of the fair.

- Supreme Champion Ram, Lincoln, Beattie Farms
- Reserve Champion Ram, English Leicester, E Stephenson
- Reserve Champion Ewe, Lincoln, I&R Christie
- Roy Hull Perpetual trophy, Lincoln, D Grey
- Ray Brooks Transport Perpetual trophy, English Leicester E Stephenson
- Best Head, Lincoln, I&R Christie
- Best Woolled, Lincoln, D Grey
- Most Lustrous, English Leicester Ram, E Stephenson
- Most Lustrous, English Leicester Ewe, E Stephenson
- Most Lustrous, Lincoln Ram, F &G Richardson & Sons
- Most Lustrous, Lincoln Ewe, I&R Christie
- Champion Lustre Sheep, E Stephenson
- Champion Lustre Fleece, E Stephenson
- Champion Lincoln Fleece, F &G Richardson & Sons
- Reserve Champion Lincoln Fleece, F &G Richardson & Sons
- Champion English Leicester Fleece, E Stephenson
- Reserve Champion English Leicester Fleece, M Kingman
- Supreme Champion Fleece, Arthur Evans Memorial Shield, Lincoln, F &G Richardson & Sons



2010 Sheep and Wool Fair, Benella
 Line-up for the most Lustrous Sheep of Show
 Champion Lustre Sheep, English Leicester, E Stephenson

July 2010 Newsletter No 19

Thank you to all those members who have contributed to this issue.

The next deadline is **1st July 2010**. I would be delighted for any contributions from members, either email or post.

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Correction



Geelong Show 2009, Champion Ryeland Group was exhibited by Denise Humphries, Peartree Stud, Cambrian Hill, Vic..
 Photo Courtesy Jill Shalders .

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 Rod Crook on 03 9373 2500**