



# Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Society

Newsletter 70 – June 2010

## Chairman's Message

### Woody Weather!!

Well the grass came at last and whilst some of us are able to get out to make hay in the sunshine a good few of us are carting water now in many areas where there has been little rain for what seems like weeks and weeks. But at least these dry conditions suits this year's lamb crop and no sign as far as I can see of the fluke menace we were warned of by the NSA earlier. I suppose the extreme winter cold also killed off a good deal of the snail vectors.

### Woodland Register

Ann and Rachel have been busy on this, having acquired a suitable computer programme in the Spring. We hope to get the first certificates out to those so far registered, being mainly those inspected in the Autumn of last year. Apologies to those still waiting a visit but we do hope to get out to some of you now that lambing is out of the way and fodder harvesting is getting clear.

We continue to receive enquiries from new commercial hill breeders and registration by inspection offers a great opportunity to make sure they are fixed up with good strong hardy stock without them having to tour the country looking at individual flocks. It's quite clear that demand for breeding stock outstrips supply and we really must try to plan ahead in a coordinated way.

### Combined Flock Book news

I have over the last few days spoken with both Claire Barber (Technical Officer with RBST) and Ruth Dalton (their newly appointed Northern Area Field Officer). Both are highly supportive and positive about reinvigorating the CFB and in getting the annual show and sale at Melton back on the map as a major stock exchange venue for CFB stock.

The CFB flock is of immense importance to our breed for it has, as far as can be interpreted from

the various blood line analyses made by RBST recently, more genetic diversity within it than is possibly found on the hill. The hill flock will need to continue to draw from this preserved pool of blood lines so as to maintain its own health. As Claire points out, the CFB flock represents the "original population" of woodland sheep as "found" on the hill over 30 years ago. And Claire makes a comparison with the original population of Angus cattle. It seems to me though that the original population of Woodland sheep can still be found on the hill and without any obvious evidence of cross breeding (introgression) any more than is found in the CFB flock. Although of course the CFB flock has more than 30 years of recorded bloodline traceability, which is its main virtue.

However, it seems that some bloodlines are rather more represented than others and various suggestions have been made in the past to try and use some of the lesser represented lines, for which certain tups were identified. Nothing happened to even things out though, mainly I imagine because of the travel distances between the CFB flocks, which are widely dispersed. Claire and Ruth advise that the best way forward is simply to change your tup as frequently as possible, register more and if necessary just get rid of them, so that you can move on to new stock rather than keep the same old boy year on year. So on to Melton to get rid of your used (and proven) tups and get a new one!

The CFB itself is suffering from a marked drop in registered numbers. Claire has supplied a graph showing registration numbers annually from foundation year (volume 30 is 2003). I don't know how the graph has been analysed, but it's clear to me that, like a lot of things in nature, there is a distinct regular wave pattern discernable and if it continues on past trends, then we are due for a sharp uplift in numbers!

So come on then. Get yourselves over to Melton and do some timely buying and selling. I understand from Ruth that some Whitehouse stock will be forward and that's some of the best there is in the CFB and indeed on the hill. Your Society will ensure that a buyer will be present at least to take 6 to 9 young stock up county for further dispersal, as we have some difficulty in finding stock for new and existing breeders in the autumn who cannot (or who are unwilling to) travel too far. We would aim to bid some £5 above the killing man. (he'll be there right enough, he's got a big sheep transporter parked in the vehicle park and he will take anything with a pulse, including prime breeding stock and we can't allow that.) At least he keeps things keen and so you should have no fear of being disappointed on price. Entries by 30 July (online by 6 August). Any queries: ask Ann (Rachel is a bit difficult to catch because she's working 6 days a week and often out of mobile range)

### Woody Wool

It's obvious no doubt to most of you but only just recently to me, that there is something of a resurgence of interest in wool and hand spinning, weaving etc. There were at least two trade stands at Hope last year using Woodland wool and the breed was well broadcast as a wool provider at the Builth Wells Woolfest earlier this year. I was particularly impressed by just how much wool you could get through using a peg loom to weave a coarse floor rug (drugget?) of the sort we of the 70's young married generation used to flock to Habitat to get. So something of a marketing opportunity here, I think, if someone out there would like to give it a go. The Wool Board don't mind if they don't get the fleeces, so long as they aren't sent to a machine processor. The going rate for a woody fleece seems to be about £3.50 which compares well to the Wool Board's quid.

### Woody Word

Last edition's trailed word was **starved**...which as you all know doesn't mean a sheep short of food but a sheep that's cold and miserable - like a woody anywhere this winter with an open fleece and the resultant line of slush lying down its back. Next edition's word is **Woodland**...very probably not what you think it means but rather topical I think (!)

Happy shearing and see you at Hope Show...a premier event for Woodies and the sort of traditional show you can enter stock into straight out the field and without feeling obliged to wear a white coat - and it's the AGM venue this year.

Rob Ford

## Notice of Annual General Meeting

The Society's AGM this year will be held at the Hope Show Ground on Monday 30 August.

**Please note this is a new date and venue.**

The full address is: Marsh Farm, Castleton Road, Hope, Hope Valley, Derbyshire S336RD. The meeting is in the Livestock Secretary's tent and will start at 1.30 pm.

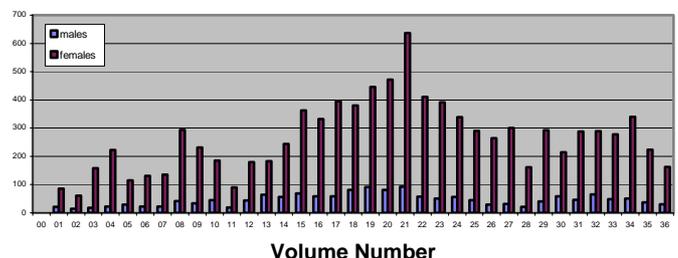
Please let Rachel have your nominations for Society Officers or Committee Members (with proposer and seconder) before 12 August. A list of current Officers and Committee Members is on the back page. Similarly, please send her any resolutions you wish put to the meeting, before 12 August, so that they can be circulated to the membership beforehand.

## Photo Call for the Woodland Calendar

We are intending that photos for our calendar will be displayed and selected at the Great Yorks Show - 13 to 15 July. Please can you either bring photos with you, or send to Karen Dowey in good time, so that she can bring them with her - remember the Show sets up on Monday 12 July, so don't leave it till the last minute! - E-mail or post your photos - Karen's contact details are on the back page.

**Our new Whitefaced Woodland mugs** should be making their debut at the Yorkshire and will also be available at the Hope Show.

## Whitefaced Woodland Registrations



The graph above is from Claire Barber at RBST, showing numbers of sheep registered in each of 36 annual volumes of the Combined Flock Book. (Vol. 36 was for 2009.) 'Tall' bars are ewe registrations, smaller blocks are the rams.

## **Dr. Ross Harrison - 1922-2010**

Members will be saddened to hear of the death of Dr Ross Harrison on Monday 24<sup>th</sup> May. Ross passed away peacefully after a long struggle with illness, comforted by the latest news on the progress of lambing in the Beckermond flock.

Born in Rotherham, Ross grew up in Sheffield, where he wanted to go to university to study medicine, but unfortunately the War got in the way, so he went into the RAF where he was a Close Combat Photographic Officer. After the War, Ross attended Sheffield University to study Medicine. Ross remained a loyal Sheffield Wednesday fan all his life, and a dedicated supporter of the Yorkshire Cricket Club. Following graduation, he was posted to the West Indies to serve his probationary year at a rural hospital that mainly served the local plantations.

On his return to England, Ross became a GP in Lincolnshire, before moving to Eccleshall in Staffordshire. Ross soon joined the Governors of Lonsdale Primary School, during the winter of 1958-59, retiring as Chairman of the Governors in 1985, a post that he had held for some ten years. He also held the title of Medical Officer at the Staffordshire County College of Further Education, where he met and then married their Vice Principal, Avril. During his time in Eccleshall, Ross also helped set up the Eccleshall Cricket Club.

In 1985, Ross 'retired' and to keep him out of mischief, Avril had already bought him a couple of sheep to provide him with something to take care of, which would give structure to his day. So, being Ross, he set up the Beckermond flock, played an active role in the RBST, set up the Dales Support Group for the RBST and the Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Breeders' Group. Avril will modestly tell you that this was done with the support of many others, but then, perhaps that was one of Ross' greatest gifts, being able to enable others.

It was my privilege to visit the Beckermond Flock last December; the Flock Profile that I wrote then, follows shortly, with Avril Harrison's kind permission. Although I did not know Ross very well, I feel that his passing has left a huge hole in the Woodland world; he will be greatly missed.

PJO

### **Carole Muddiman writes:**

At a meeting at the Cotswold Farm Park on the 22nd May 1986, the Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Breeders' Group was formed and Dr Ross Harrison was elected its first Chairman. The Group could not have made a better or wiser choice. There was absolutely nothing that Ross did not know about Whitefaced Woodlands and he was generous in sharing his knowledge and expertise. A great ambassador for the breed, always keen to promote the sheep and encourage new flock owners. He was a wise and skillful chairman guiding the Group through its early stages until handing over to Jimmy Howard at the 1988 AGM. He continued to be a stalwart supporter helping make the 1993 Rare Breeds Show and Sale a pinnacle for the breed, when both the inter breed sheep and fleece championships were won by Jimmy Howard and Ross Harrison respectively, their picture making the front cover of the November 1994 Ark. The Whitefaced Woodland sheep and their shepherds have lost a very dear friend and whilst sending our condolences to Avril, we would add our sincere and grateful thanks for all that she and Ross have done for the breed.

## **The Beckermond Flock**

It was a bleak, wet, winter's dawn as I made my way through the snow speckled limestone peaks and dales of Malham moor to profile the Beckermond Flock in Wharfedale. I don't have to delve too deeply into my own sheep's pedigrees before I meet the Beckermond Prefix, so for me this was a pilgrimage into the history of my own sheep. But for other breeders too, the Beckermond Flock and Dr and Mrs Harrison have played a huge role in the conservation of the Whitefaced Woodland breed over the past quarter of a century, so this has been a hugely influential flock!

This is Swaledale country and that breed still dominates the hills and dales, although here and there Texel tups are working amongst the black-faced flocks and on the opposite side of the road to the Beckermond Flock there was a field of Wensleydale sheep. But despite this, because of various schemes and conservation initiatives, the hills also now contain a scattering of rare breeds such as Longhorn cattle and Belted Galloways as rarer breeds become part of the mainstream, so what could be more appropriate than Whitefaced Woodland sheep on these hills?

PJO

## Flock Profile 4

**Date of Profile:** 5/12/9

**Name of Flock:** The Beckermond Flock

**Flock Prefix:** Beckermond

**Name of Breeder:** Mr Ric Halsall

**Contact Details:**

**Telephone:** 01756 760296

**Email:** [richalsalls@aol.com](mailto:richalsalls@aol.com)

### Flock Details

**Year pedigree flock formed:** 1983

**Year started farming here:** 1985

**Size of pedigree flock:** Medium

*[Small: 1-20; Medium: 21-50; Large: 50-100; Major Flock: 101+]*

### Flock History

The Beckermond Flock started in 1983. Ross and Avril Harrison moved up to Wharfedale in 1985, bringing six ewes with them from Staffordshire. Six more ewes were purchased locally and the flock then became a closed flock but for the occasional addition of more tups over the years.

The Harrisons, keen on conservation, have set about concentrating on some of the rare bloodlines from within the breed. "We concentrated on avoiding the Cherry Tree and Pickenaze bloodlines in particular because we felt that they were over represented in the CFB (Combined Flock Book) in the late 1980's", Avril told me. "It's important for the whole breed that we don't get too hung up on just a few of the major bloodlines, otherwise we will end up getting a genetic bottleneck within the breed and this will lead to in-breeding."

*Ric Halsall with Beckermond Richard out of the Riffhams Bloodline*



The Beckermond flock is managed in such a way as to maintain rare bloodlines such as Riffhams, School Green, Ecolan, Whitehouse Acclaim [which is the Fairbanks line apparently] and Hayridge. When talking to Avril, it is clear that she puts the greatest importance over bloodlines and in the past, new additions to the flock have been chosen with bloodlines very much in mind.

Avril was most upset when she found out that Beckermond Whisky Mac from the Ash and Pennine lines was lost to them and the CFB, because they'd sold his offspring into an unregistered flock.

Dr Harrison with the help of others was instrumental in setting up the Whitefaced Woodland breeders group in 1986 and the group has worked closely with the RBST over the years to help conserve the breed. Ross and Avril have contributed at every level, from showing sheep to sending wool to the wool board for testing. Ross has judged sheep classes at many shows. They have many showing successes themselves [more later] and have sold sheep throughout the UK. Avril showed me a list of people and flocks they've sent sheep to over the years and it is very impressive!

Ross and Avril Harrison have passed their flock over to Ric Halsall now, as they enter their



*Avril Harrison and Ric Halsall*

second retirement, as the land is too steep and the sheep too big for them to cope with any more and I really don't blame them as I was quite breathless climbing even a small part of the hill myself! Ric, their "lad" – as they say in these parts – has been helping the Harrisons out ever since he took early retirement in 2002.

Unusually, the RBST have agreed to allow Ric to keep the Beckermond prefix because he has bought the entire flock and farms them on the same land, in much the same way; usually this can only be done when a flock passes on down through a family.



*A gimmer (pictured in the rain)*

### **Breeding Policy:**

Ric is trying to maintain the bloodlines that Ross and Avril originally set up, however he is also trying to improve the quality of the sheep under his own care. With this in mind, Ric is looking for size and conformation within his group.

“What I look for in a sheep is basically what I look for in a woman,” he laughs. “I want good looks! I think Woodies are good looking sheep! That’s what I look for!”

“So what makes a good woody then?” I ask.

“One that stays alive!” he quips back, with typical Dales humour.

“So a bad one would presumably be a dead one!” I laugh.

“Exactly!” he chuckles. I soon come to realise that Ric is a very practically minded man!

### **Marketing Policy:**

Breeding sheep are sold from the farm or at Skipton’s Rare Breed Sale. Tup lambs and unwanted gimmers are sold as stores through Skipton Auction Mart too. Ric told me that last year he castrated most of their male lambs, thinking that they would do better and make more in the store lamb ring, but he also sold some entire. These ram lambs turned out to be bigger than the castrated lambs, even the twins, and made £1 per head more! So this year he didn’t castrate any!

The Beckermond Flock has enjoyed some success with their wool (champion fleece at the Great Yorkshire Show in 2007) so they have always sold some shearling fleeces to local spinners.

### **Showing Achievements**

The list of their successes is very long and impressive, so I asked Avril which showing achievements she was most proud of. She immediately said that it was winning the prize for the Supreme Fleece at the RBST show at Stoneleigh in 1994 and the Champion Fleece at

the Great Yorkshire Show in 2007 where she felt that she won on behalf of the Whitefaced Woodland Breed against all other breeds.



*The ewe on the right gave the Champion Fleece at the Great Yorkshire Show in 2007, with her daughter on the left.*

### **Farm Details**

**Year Started to Farm Here:** 1985

**Size of Farm:** Group B

*[Group A 1 - 20 ha, B 21 - 50 ha, C 51 - 100 ha, D 101 - 500, E 501 - 1000 ha, F 1000 +ha]*

**Land Classification:** LFA, SDA

**Farm Type:** Sheep

**Other Crops:** None

**Other Livestock Kept:** Some woody crosses

### **Farm Description:**

The farm rises steeply from 700 to 1750 feet. Most lies within a ring fence. The lower pastures are flatter, with good quality grass, but the upper fields are steep with coarse, poor quality grazing. The soil is thin, acidic and rocky, but has a wide range of wild flowers and herbs in summer apparently.

### **Flock Management:**

Historically, the Beckermond Flock has been fed a coarse sheep mix all year around in small quantities; this was to keep the sheep manageable and in the best condition. Ric has kept this practice up, even though there was no shortage of grass when I visited in December, but it was poor and coarse.

Ric lambs outside at the end of April and into May, ewes and lambs are brought down into the barns for 48 hours before being turned out again. Lambs are sprayed and ear tagged and tailed where appropriate. Foxes are not a problem on the farm and they have no known fluke problem. They are now only Bluetongue vaccinating sheep intended to be sold.

**Philip Onions 5/12/9**  
[philip@keerfalls.co.uk](mailto:philip@keerfalls.co.uk)

## Show results

Honley Show – 12 June - Judge: Paul Dixon

Shearling ram: James Gill  
Ram lamb: James Gill  
Aged ewe: James Gill  
Shearling ewe: James Gill  
Ewe lamb: Robert & Angela Crampton  
Champion: James Gill's aged ewe  
Reserve Champion: James Gill's shearling ewe  
2 competitors

East of England Country Show - 18-20 June

Sadly, there was only one entrant for the Woodland classes, which were therefore cancelled. They have asked to keep the WFWSS rosette, and present it to the Woodland judged as best at their Autumn Show in October.

Harden Moss Sheep Show and Sheepdog Trials – 20 June - Judge: David Robinson

Aged ram: James Gill  
Shearling ram: Paul Thorp  
Aged ewe: James Gill  
Shearling ewe: John Cottrill  
Champion: John Cottrill's shearling ewe  
4 competitors

## Stock for Sale or Wanted

**Richard Stacey** is keen to re establish a flock of Woodlands and needs say 15 to 20 shearling or 2-shear ewes plus an unrelated tup this year.  
Phone: 01873 890712, mobile: 07742 117007.  
(Cwmyoy, Monmouthshire) E-mail:  
[hedgehogequipment@btinternet.com](mailto:hedgehogequipment@btinternet.com)

**Stuart Mason** in Ceredigion writes:

I am interested in keeping and maintaining the breed strength of the Whitefaced woodlands. I live just outside Tregaron and I am looking for a small amount of good quality animals to start with. I have plenty of time and enough land to devote to them. Can you help me, please?  
Tel.: 01570 493615, mobile 07590 983008,  
e-mail: [angelsfarm@live.com](mailto:angelsfarm@live.com)

**We have been contacted by someone from Cumbria** looking to purchase some Woodland breeding females, 20 to 100 for grass moorland zone. He will take ewes with lambs at foot or this year's shearlings. *Further details from Rob Ford*

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## C O N T A C T D E T A I L S

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