



Whitefaced Woodland Sheep Society

Newsletter 69 – March 2010

Chairman's Message

Woody weather!!

Deserves comment doesn't it? If only in general commiseration with all of us longing to see the colour green return to the landscape and a fresh bite for our long suffering ewes. And after all that lovely flushing grass in the autumn as well, now a distant memory. Still, on the bright side, any barrens will be welcome down at the market with "strong woodlands" making £64 plus at Bakewell last week, beating "meated swales" which were at £50. Strong woody ewe lambs were selling at £72 in Leek towards the end of the autumn store and breeding sheep sales, with lesser late born lambs reaching £45.

Woodland register

Members of long standing will be relieved to hear that this matter has now come to a positive conclusion. We were hoping to establish a breed register of the quality of sheep required to supply commercial breeders with tups and ewes with a recorded pedigree. This being the first essential step towards promoting our breed as a strong, hardy, prolific and milky hill sheep well suited for terminal crossing without the need for an intermediate mule.

We had hoped to manage the register in cooperation with the Rare Breeds Survival Trust (RBST) which of course manages a register of Whitefaced Woodland sheep in the Combined Flock Book (CFB) along with several other 'rare breeds' of sheep without a breed society. The advantage of cooperation with RBST was that we could use a common registration system.

However, and despite very clear understandings between ourselves and RBST during the summer last year, RBST has proceeded without us, and without further consultation, to add to their CFB collection a further register of Whitefaced Woodland Hill flocks. This CFB register category, along with the Supplementary Register introduced a couple of years ago (and with no

entries forward) carries with it the now usual high costs of inspection by RBST and DNA testing. The RBST Hill Flock Register is not what we want at all, and indeed, we are rather pointedly excluded from any participation in it whatsoever.

So, our Society's committee, now nine strong, resolved last month, to continue with our "hill register" as it was called when started last year, but to re brand it the *Register of Whitefaced Woodland Sheep*. Our Register will continue to be open to tups (from their second year of birth) and ewes (any age) drawn from any flock. Sheep will be subject to inspection (free of charge for the time being) by two nominated inspectors (one of whom will be a senior inspector) with the criteria for acceptance being achieving a superior grade within the card grading system.

The Rules for Registration were set out and adopted at our AGM in September last year, and included in the AGM draft minutes circulated to members. They can shortly be viewed on our website or further paper copies can be supplied on request. So it is with sincere regret that we part company with RBST over this, but let it be clear: RBST has abandoned us, we haven't abandoned RBST nor our joint members who register sheep in the CFB.

Five of our committee register sheep with the CFB and hope to continue to do so. I myself bought into my flock 20 young CFB registered females this last autumn. The CFB "A" Register has some 950 registered animals and these should continue to be a source of valuable breeding animals because of the genetic diversity represented within the CFB flock. The CFB flock is a conservation flock because of its diversity and because it is widely dispersed around the UK and therefore able to better withstand the onslaught of any future Defra disease control cull. Dual registration is of course quite feasible but members will, I imagine, be led by the market on this point.

Melton Woodlands

We are of course desperately keen to support CFB registering members and in particular, this year, to do what we can to rejuvenate Melton as a show and sale where CFB members and crucially their Woodland stock, can change hands. We will this year, as we have done previously, supply a judge and rosette and card graders, but what is really required is commitment by members to enter stock, at least for the sale, prior to the mid summer catalogue cut off date. To this end, if members will notify Ann or myself of their intent to enter stock or perhaps more importantly, to be present to buy stock, then we can publish this information, which may then encourage more to come forward prior to the cut off date

Woody Word

The last edition trailed *fleak*. Well, as I'm sure everyone already knows because it's still in common parlance (isn't it?) a fleak is simply a sheep hurdle, traditionally made from split (riven) green wood rods. Origin unknown, as is extent of usage. Next edition's word is *starved*...possibly not what you think it means!

Woodland census

John Jones, our intrepid enumerator continues his pursuit of further hill flocks 'uncovered' during the initial round of questionnaires last summer. His results thus far suggest some 950 head in the CFB (this tallies with figures supplied by Grassroots) and some 2,250 on the hill. We will be following up as soon as we can those 25 or so requests for registration derived from individual flock owners during the breed census last year.

Woody photos

Karen is collecting photographs of woodies in seasonal settings for inclusion in a 2011 calendar. If you have any you think may be suitable, please email or post them to her (address on back page). We need to make our photograph selection by late summer, to get everything organised in time.

Woodland flock profiles

In this edition we have a profile of James Gill's celebrated flock - another of Philip Onions' amazingly gifted pieces. We intend eventually to print these as an anthology, along with a brief reprinted breed history. *In the next edition...the Beckermonds are coming...Followed by Christmas Hill, Byway and Neville Belfield*

Best of luck with your lambing!

Rob Ford

Shows and Sales in 2010

These are shows with specific Woodland classes – with the exception of the [Westmorland County Show in September](#), where we are invited to enter the Rare Breeds classes. We hope that, given enough support, we might be able to have our own classes in future. It is reported to be an excellent show, so perhaps especially breeders in the North West will be encouraged to enter.

Neither the Suffolk Show (2-3 June) nor Wayland (1 August) have Woodland classes this year, but will be pleased to accept entries in their Native Breeds classes. For Suffolk entries, contact: Liz Payne on 01473 707115. Wayland enquiries to Gail Sprake on 01986 782251.

12 June – [Honley Show](#), Honley, West Yorks. Contact: Paul Sykes 01484 680731. Judge: Paul Dixon, Holmfirth

18-20 June – [East of England Country Show](#), Peterborough. Phone 01733 234451 or visit www.eastofengland.org.uk. Judge: Chris Steel

20 June – [Harden Moss Sheep Show and Sheepdog Trials](#), Holmfirth. Contact: Christine Smith 01484 680823.

30 June-1 July – [Royal Norfolk Show](#), Norwich. Judge: John Maxwell, Ely. Schedule from mary@royalnorfolkshow.co.uk or phone 01603 731965. www.royalnorfolkshow.co.uk

13-15 July – [Great Yorkshire Show](#), Harrogate. Contact: Amanda West on 01423 546231 or amandaw@yas.co.uk. Judge: James Gill, Hoyland. www.greatyorkshireshow.com

14 Aug – [Manifold Show](#), Ilam, Staffs. Contact: David Belfield: 01538 308362, mob. 07866 465161.

15 Aug – [Mottram Show](#), Mottram, near Glossop. Contact: Angela Oldham 0161 351 1263.

Mon 30 Aug – [Hope Show](#). Champion of Champions follows regular WFW classes. Contact.: Mrs H Morris 01663 750318; hope-morris@tiscali.co.uk or jane.dalton@lineone.net.

4 Sept – [Rare Breeds Show & Sale](#) at Skipton. Craven Cattle Marts 01756 792375..

9 Sept – [Westmorland County Show, Kendal](#) Rare breeds classes -entries close 16 August www.westmorlandshow.co.uk or 01539 567804.

Show information continues on page 7

The Man of the Moment

Up here on the limestone hills around Hutton Roof we don't hold much with this celebrity culture that seems to obsess our society. Oh I've heard that Robbie Williams on the tractor radio and the lad seems to be able to hold a tune and I'm told that David Beckham can kick a football, but what the heck Paris Hilton is all about, escapes me!

On the other hand, if there is someone worthy of some attention, then for me it has to be James Gill! James has smashed the record *yet again*, for his Ram selling for the highest price at the annual Bretton Mill Whitefaced Woodland sale.



James Gill with the Ken Wild Memorial Trophy for the best Tup at Bretton Mill

Having admired the size of his sheep for many years now, the question that I most wanted to ask was "What on Earth do you feed them on?" But having visited James and spent a couple of hours with him, I realise just how naïve this question is, because if there is a magic ingredient that can explain away all of James'

success, then it is quite obviously James himself. James is a professional shepherd, in every sense of the word. It is his no nonsense professionalism and attention to detail, which is the key to his success.

As soon as my son and I entered James' field, James focussed on his sheep, a soft whistle and his dog was away, gathering them up. Modestly James mentions that he was once on "One Man and His Dog". Then he goes on to tell us about the breeding behind each sheep. He knows them all well, but doesn't fuss about naming them. James points out sheep after sheep, discussing the best and worst features of each animal critically but honestly.

I struggle to get a clear photo of his tup lamb, so James politely waits a moment, then gathers them with his dog and snatches the tup from the flock as they pass. Holding it, he calmly tells me all about its breeding and its qualities – it is out of Paul Thorp's tup that he just sold at Bretton Mill. Then he opens its mouth, and like an electric shock I realise just how young the lamb is and it's huge! He then tells me that it is only seven months old!



This is a Seven-Month-Old lamb!

A Master-Class in keeping and breeding Whitefaced Woodlands then followed and all I could think of at the end, was that if all Woodlands were like this, every sheep farmer would want to keep them and it would not be a rare breed!

This tup must be the way forward for the whole breed!

Flock Profile 3

24/10/09

Name of Flock: James Gill's Flock

Name of Breeder: Mr James Gill

Contact Details: 6, Green Acres, Hoyland,
Barnsley, South Yorkshire, S74 0HL

Telephone: 01226 743663

Mobile: 0798 468 2272

Flock Details: Hill Registered.

Size of Flock: Medium

[Small 1 - 20, Medium 21 - 50, Large 51 - 100,
Major Flock 101 +]

James Gill and a Shearling Ewe,
Out of the Tup that won the Ken Wild Trophy
at Bretton Mill,
Bred by Paul Thorp



Breeding Policy

James has a clear idea of what he is looking for; above all else, he wants size. The sheep have to have the frame, or bone to carry that weight. When James first bought Paul Thorp's tup, what he most liked about it was that it had a 'Right good back. The back has got to be straight – no dip at the shoulder – and a tight skin.' That means a tightly packed closed fleece that sheds water and keeps the sheep warm. 'And good on his feet, that takes bone, good bone.'

When it comes to the head, James likes the Roman nose, he shyly admits. He likes it to be broad too. The tup lamb that James then

showed me has many of the qualities that he is looking for. It has the size, a straight back and a broad Roman nose. It has a tight skin, strong bone and good feet. It has kinder horns than its father too and James thinks that it looks like these horns will not be too close to its head as they grow.

'If he had a fault,' James says of the tup that he's just sold. 'Then I would have to say that his horns were too hard. The one that I bought from Mr Lees has kinder horns. I'm hoping that he'll make his lambs' horns a bit kinder too, it's always the tup that does that, isn't it?' He explains that for the horns to be kinder, they have to be narrower.

Part of the breeding policy is a very strong cull programme. With limited land available to him, James can't afford to keep any sheep that does not have a place in his breeding programme. Store lambs go in July, cast ewes follow quickly; any ewes with qualities that don't measure up to the rest have to go too. All rams have to go after two years or else they might end up back on their daughters. 'I didn't want to let that tup go, but I had to make room for his son!'



**James' new Seven Month Old Tup
Lamb!**

Out of the Champion Paul Thorp Tup

James tries to keep five or six of his best gimmers to breed from each year. He has kept ten ewes off Paul Thorp's tup and six gimmers, that's all he has room for.

Marketing Policy

James has a 'no nonsense' marketing policy too, his full time work as a shepherd, doesn't give him enough time to trail about, so all lambs not wanted for breeding go as store lambs to the farmer he works for, who puts them through the farm shop. Tups are sold after two years' work to prevent in-breeding, or as shearlings for the same reason.

Showing Achievements

Too numerous to mention all; most notable are Supreme Champion of Woodlands twice at the Hope show and twice Champion of Champions at Hope, with Paul Thorp's tup. At Hayfield, Champion Woodland Tup twice and Bretton Mill Champion four times!



James Gill's dog gathers some sheep through the Autumnal mists; note the size of the ewes!

Farm Details:

Year Started Here: 2006

Size of Farm: Group A

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

Land Classification: None LFA

Farm Type: Sheep

A Gimmer Lamb of Seven Months out of the same tup.



No other crops/livestock.

Farm Description

James used to work as a shepherd in the High Peak. He originally got sheep of his own, so that he could train his dogs, without upsetting his employers if the dog got over enthusiastic. He kept Woodlands to avoid them getting mixed up when run with his employer's black faced sheep. When James

moved to Hoyland he got a field of his own, it is quite large, flat, free draining, fertile land that grows grass well. In winter, James is able to graze several other fields, including the large twelve plus acre silage field above; he intends to take these sheep off and to put just six gimmers on it to winter! James has built a very useful small

lambing shed in his field, where he can keep his lambing sheep that have problems. Next to his lambing shed he has a shipping container for about fifty bales of hay, which will need refilling before spring and near by a round gathering pen to hold sheep while he trains his dog – he keeps a few well dogged half bred sheep in this field over winter to train dogs on. As soon as they saw his dog they ran to us, as well dogged sheep do. Some of these were woody crosses.

Flock Management

James Gill's sheep are managed carefully to encourage them to fully reach the potential of their breeding. Lambs are reared only from the best parents. Lambs are grown on without check or hindrance. Grass is managed to keep it fresh, with sheep being moved onto fresh ground every six weeks or so during summer – the field is divided up to allow this. All sheep have access to powdered minerals at all times. All get multivit drenches twice a year. Lambs are wormed every month starting in May, when they also get a multivit drench. Ewes are wormed twice a year. There is no fluke problem on the farm. All sheep are in the Heptavac system.



The Tup Purchased from Mr Lees at the Bretton Mill Sale this year.

James hopes that it will bring 'kinder' horns to his flock.

Because James sells his store lambs and unwanted sheep in July this frees up the land for the ewes to get back into top condition. James does not believe that sheep can be too fit at tugging. James' sheep were all in superb condition this October; I could not feel their backbone at all. James achieves a 175% lambing rate. All ewes are tailed before tugging and kept "clean" through to lambing.

At tugging time, 18th October onwards, the ewes are moved off James' land to his over wintering land to rest it and allow the

grass to grow back for lambing. James would like to spread slurry on his land then, as he used to, but the new NVZ rules prevent this now and he doesn't want to spread slurry in the spring where his sheep are to graze. No other fertilizers are used. The ewes are moved around several small fields as they eat up the grass. When these pictures were taken, they were in fields that had held no livestock all summer on a neighbour's land, this neighbour had intended to make hay on some of it, but here it was too rough to mow. The grass was uncut from summer.

James does not feed corn or cake to any of his sheep, but those brought into the lambing shed may get some sugar beet nuts. With dogs as well trained as James has, he does not need to feed cake to tups to get raddle on them, nor does he use harnesses. James feeds them some very high quality hay in the worst of winter. There was no sign that any of the sheep wanted or needed extra feeding when we were there.

Philip Onions 24/10/09

Coming up in the next newsletter, I have prepared a Flock Profile for the Beckermond Flock. The Beckermond Flock has been hugely influential for the CFB, concentrating on conserving some of the rare, foundation bloodlines, used to establish the original RBST stock. For those dedicated to the fight to conserve this rare breed, I hope that this will be an interesting and informative read. The Whitefaced Woodland is such a small breed, that it is essential that we keep all these bloodlines alive, if we are to prevent inbreeding and we must try and support all those working tirelessly to do so. I hope that you enjoy it.

PJO

Shows and Sales continued from page 2

10-11 Sept – National (RBST) Show & Sale for CFB registered stock at Melton Mowbray 01664 562971. www.meltonmowbraymarkets.co.uk

11 Sept – Penistone Show. Contact: Mrs Earnshaw 01484 605805.

18 Sept – Show & Sale of Rare & Minority Breeds at Carlisle. Harrison & Hetherington : 01228 640924 www.livestock-sales.co.uk
Entries close 9 Aug.

18 Sept – Show & Sale of Rare & Traditional Breeds, Chelford, Cheshire. Frank Marshall Ltd. 01625 861122. www.frankmarshall.co.uk

Sun 19 Sept - Hayfield Country Show, High Peak. Contact: Sarah Mellor 01663 746580.

25 Sept - Annual Whitefaced Woodland Show and Sale at Bretton Mill, near Barnsley. Contact Paul Dixon at William Sykes 01484 683543.

1-2 Oct – Show & Sale of Rare & Minority Breeds York Livestock Centre 01904 489731 www.ylc.co.uk Entries close 2 Sept.

Have Legs, Will Travel

The Whitefaced Woodland breed came originally from the Woodlands district of Derbyshire; of that there is no question. However, did the breed develop in isolation, or could other breeds have been instrumental in its earliest development? Before Land Rovers and I for Williams trailers, could breeding stock have travelled even say 20 miles to “improve” other breeds? Around these parts we have a saying, “have legs, will travel”.

I have absolutely no doubt that Abbey – who has now passed on to a better place (and I don't mean the knackerman) - would have followed me to the ends of the Earth for a bucket of provin! But try and drive her anywhere and you had a problem on your hands. She once swam across the smaller fishing lake at Tewitfield not once but twice on the same day to avoid being gathered with the rest of the flock by our dog! Nip was eager to follow until I stopped him; I thought that I was going to have to go in myself to rescue this irritating little beast, until I realised who it was, then I just rattled a bucket and waited for her to come ashore! Which she did immediately and

promptly stuck her head in the bucket, dripping profusely, as if nothing was up!

There is evidence that Abbey's ancestors shared her ability to escape and travel. There are several accounts of some Penistone sheep being sold to a farm in Kent. These sheep then apparently escaped and set off home! According to Robert Wallace ⁽¹⁾: “In the early part of the last century a number of Penistone moorland sheep were sold from Rowlee Farm in the Woodlands and sent into Kent. Three of them did not settle there and started back, and two of them it is recorded actually got back, and the horns of one of them were hung up in Hope Church.” [Now in Penistone I understand]

Whether you want to believe this account or not, is totally up to you, for my part, although sceptical at first, I am now not so sure. What is clear however is that straying sheep were a common problem before the Enclosure Acts.

Wallace also writes of the *Orders of the Shepherds' Society*, - the principal sheep keepers in the Liberties (Commons) of Woodlands, Penistone, Bradfield, Longdendale, Saddleworth, Holmfirth, Glossop and Kinder.

“At a meeting held at the house of Thomas Taylor, at Saltersbrook, on the 20th July 1807, the following conditions were agreed on by those who entered into this Society: I. That two meetings be held at the aforesaid place annually...[in July and November] II. Any person bringing strayed sheep to the above meeting, the owner or owners of such sheep shall pay or cause to be paid reasonable expenses for taking up, keeping, and bringing them to the said meeting. Lastly: That all finders who have books of marks, if any sheep come into their hands belonging to any member of this Society, they shall take them to their respective owners, who shall pay them reasonably for their trouble.”

So it seems that although our Society is now all about breeding, showing and promoting the breed, originally two hundred years ago, our predecessors were more concerned about stopping the little blighters running off! Could they travel twenty miles? No problem!

Then, as I have reported before, in 1810 Merino rams were imported from Spain to ‘improve’ the quality of this breed of sheep. These rams were imported from Spain to Liverpool from whence they were taken to the Chatsworth Estate. These Merinos would have been quite capable of walking this distance. According to William Youatt ⁽²⁾ some Merino sheep, which he describes as migratory, “after spending the winter cantoned on the north bank of the Guadiana (Spain), in Estremadura, begin their march about the 15th of April in divisions of two or three thousand...to the Kingdom of Leon... where they graze until September.” Others made similar marches to Madrid then on

to Soria and others crossed the Ebro in order to proceed to Navarre and the Pyrenees. Youatt says that these journeys could be traced back to the fourteenth century when these flocks were granted a right to graze on all open and common land that lay in the way.

"The number of migratory sheep is calculated at ten millions [in Spain]. Several of the sheep, principally wethers, are perfectly tamed, and taught to obey signals of the shepherds. These follow the leading shepherd, having been accustomed to be fed from his hand; they lead the flock – there is no driving – and the rest quietly follow. "When passing through the enclosures, they sometimes travel eighteen or twenty miles a day: but when they reach an open country, with good pasture, they proceed more leisurely. Their whole journey is usually more than four hundred miles, which they accomplish in six weeks, and thus spend, in going and returning, nearly one quarter of the year in this injurious manner." - Every year!

It would be a mistake to assume that moving sheep in large numbers on foot was unique to Spain; in 1795 John Holt ⁽³⁾ wrote "Those [sheep] which are kept upon the feeding districts [of Lancashire] are bred in Scotland, and purchased by the Westmorland farmer from thence at a year old, and afterwards by the Lancashire grazier from Westmorland at four years old, fatted and sold for slaughtering."

What this account does not mention is the part played by the Highland Drovers. These men regularly brought herds of cattle and flocks of sheep from the Highlands of Scotland to the lucrative markets of the south and eventually to the richest market of all – London. (Oxford, was

originally just that, an ox ford, on a commonly used river crossing point for these Highland Drovers, on their way to London with their livestock.)

The Drovers did this by following one of three routes south into England, but to avoid the heavy tolls on the roads, the canny Highlanders took their stock through the open heath-land, across the fells, the moors and commons before the Enclosure Acts. They grazed their stock as they wished for they travelled heavily armed and were notoriously rough and dangerous. The term Drover is a corruption of the Gaelic word for a thief.

So, if a shepherd in the Woodlands really wanted to improve the quality of his own livestock, then the opportunity certainly existed to use sheep from elsewhere. Some sheep probably passed through his local commons from up north every year and may well have done some "improving" of their own! If not, then the local markets would certainly have sold sheep from much further away than a mere twenty miles!

(1) *Farm Livestock of Great Britain*, 1923, p 619, copied from Spooner's *History of Sheep* 1844.

(2) *Sheep: Their Breeds, Management and Diseases*, 1854

(3) *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Lancashire*, 1795 p.166.

Philip Onions

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

Chairman: Rob Ford
Parkside, Park Road, Leek, Staffs ST13 8JT
Phone: 01538 398290 e-mail:
RobFord@whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Vice Chairman: Paul Dixon
C/o William Sykes & Son, 38 Huddersfield Road,
Holmfirth, West Yorks HD9 3JH
Phone: 01484 683543, mobile: 07720 765094,
e-mail: PaulDixon@whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Secretary & Membership: Rachel Godschalk
North Park Cottage, Rokeby, Barnard Castle,
DL12 9RZ Phone: 01833 627102
mobile: 07962 152242; e-mail:
RachelGodschalk@whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Treasurer: Karen Dowey
Pikenaze Farm, Woodhead, Glossop, Derbys
SK13 1JD Mobile: 07787 241960 e-mail:
KarenDowey@whitefacedwoodland.co.uk

Newsletter Editor: Ann Godschalk
37A Silver Street, Ashwell, Herts SG7 5QH
Phone: 01462 742837, e-mail:
AnnGodschalk@whitefacedwoodland.co.uk