

SHROPTALK

The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association

Summer 2022



To mark the SSBA's 140th anniversary, breed society members attending the National Show and Sale gathered together for a group photo, with the Shropshire breed champion, Stonegrove Cowan-Dickie, a shearling ram bred by Stonegrove Livestock.

PRESIDENT'S SUMMER UPDATE

Here in Monmouthshire we had an unremarkable, if drier than usual, spring. Our Shropshires started lambing indoors but were soon kicked out onto grass, and the NZ Romneys lambed outside in very favourable conditions. I doubt we will be so lucky next year!

In July the summer turned on us, with exceptionally hot weather. Our intrepid exhibitors and judge at the Royal Welsh endured conditions more like the Libyan desert than a Welsh hillside, and just about everyone's grass died off in a matter of a couple of weeks. The forecast as I write does not show rain and I do hope that by the time you read this it will have been proved wrong.

Celebrating 140 Years

The 140th Anniversary was celebrated with a photo of everyone present at the Show & Sale, in similar style to a photo taken in 1982 for the Centenary of the SSBA. It was good to see so many breeders supporting the event, and their breed society.

I commented in the Spring newsletter that I was surprised at how few of our members show their sheep, but I have since been encouraged and delighted every week as seasoned exhibitors and complete novices alike have emailed me their showing pictures, or posted them on social media. In this *ShropTalk* you will see plenty of photos of splendid sheep and their rosettes. Congratulations to everyone concerned, you

are a great advertisement for our breed. I have always thought that a good Shropshire stands out in a ring of mixed breeds, and this year has proved that there are judges out there who think the same.

Everyone who shows Shropshires this year is eligible for a special 140th Anniversary rosette, so don't forget to contact me to claim yours, if you have exhibited your stock.

The Show and Sale at Shrewsbury towards the end of July was a success and the organising committee should be congratulated. Thank you also to Richard Spencer for judging. His choices were certainly backed up by our members who invested heavily. Stonegrove Cowan-Dickie broke the record for a shearling ram at 1,100 guineas, and Millenheath Merlo broke the ram lamb record soon afterwards achieving a price of 850 guineas. There were strong prices for some very smart ewe lambs and shearling ewes from the Stonegrove, Millenheath and Goblindale flocks. It was good to see almost all females finding new homes and 100% clearance of the males. I'd also like to thank the organising committee for the social gathering on Friday evening, which was most enjoyable.

Shropshire rams are, once again, engaged in AHDB's RamCompare trial. Delivery of selected Signet-recorded tups to commercial farms throughout the country

has begun, ahead of tupping in November.

The Facebook Tree club, which started in Spring 2021 has continued to grow. We now have 240 members worldwide, with new additions almost daily. A high proportion are based in the UK, and many say they are not members, but are thinking of joining. Let's hope they join up soon.

SSBA representatives took the breed stand to the British Christmas Tree Growers' Open Day in Dumfriesshire in June, and were very well received. My thanks to Pippa Geddes, Charles Morris and Claire Jakeman for their time and effort. I am sure it was worthwhile and we will continue to represent SSBA in new markets for Shropshire Sheep.

The breed stand was out again at NSA Sheep 2022 at Malvern. Thanks to Sue Farquhar and Harvey Clay for organising this and supplying top quality sheep for the display, and to all other members who helped at the event.

Your Council has not been idle over the past

few months. We are currently overhauling the joining process for new members, which goes live quite soon, and also the process for membership renewals, to make it easier and quicker for members, and improve retention. We do want more members. Increasing membership is one of our central aims, is good for our finances, and, assuming they all keep pedigree Shropshires, will grow the national flock.

I hope your 2022 lamb crop has rewarded you for your efforts and that you have plans to tup again in the coming months.

Rob Kerby



NATIONAL SHOW AND SALE REPORT 2022

PRE-SALE SHOW RESULTS

Judge: Richard Spencer

Shearling Ram Class

1. Stonegrove Livestock
2. Mr Nigel Durnford
3. Mr Peter Harris
4. Mr Nigel Durnford
5. Mr Robert Webb

Ram Lamb Class

1. Stonegrove Livestock
2. Mrs Jeanette Hares
3. Mrs Jeanette Hares
4. Mr Robert Webb
5. Mrs Sue Farquhar

Breeding Ewe Class

1. Miss Ellie Russell

Shearling Ewe Class

1. Mrs Jeanette Hares
2. Mrs Jeanette Hares
3. Stonegrove Livestock
4. Coleman Family
5. Stonegrove Livestock
6. Coleman Family

Ewe Lamb Class

1. Mrs Jeanette Hares
2. Stonegrove Livestock
3. Mrs Jeanette Hares
4. Clay Family
5. Mr Robert Webb

Show Champion, winner of the Morley Trophy and Osmonds Interbreed Sheep Trophy

Stonegrove Livestock and
shearling ram Stonegrove
Cowan-Dickie

Reserve Champion and winner of the Roydon Trophy

Ellie Russell and Tushbrook Flora

Winner of the Southworth Trophy for the best prepared pen of Shropshire Sheep

The Coleman Family

Winner of the Halls' Trophy for the highest priced Shropshire sold from a small flock

Peter Harris, Ellerdine Flock

The Traditional, Native and Rare Breeds Show and Sale were held at Halls Auction Centre on 23rd July 2022. Shropshire female numbers were up by 20 compared with 2021 whilst ram numbers were the same and unable to meet the demand in the sale ring. Two new price records were set for males.

This year's judge was Richard Spencer from Derbyshire, a long term supporter of the breed.

No older rams were present. The Shearling Ram Class was won by Stonegrove Cowan-Dickie (674XP21) from Stonegrove Livestock, sired by Millenheath Monument. Finepines X Ray (701AEA21) from N. Durnford was Reserve. X Ray was sired by Piddington Santell. P. Harris was third with Stonegrove Oreo (666XP21).

The Ram Lamb Class was also won by Stonegrove Livestock. Stonegrove Big Billy (909XP22) was first, again sired by Millenheath Monument. Millenheath Merlo (614TW22) and Millenheath Memory (619TW22) were second and third for the Hares family. The respective sires being Millenheath Murray and Alderton Thomas.

The only Adult Ewe forward was Tushbrook 09XP19 from Ellie Russell who has now dispersed her flock. The ewe was sired by Stonegrove Conway.

The Shearling Ewe Class brought success for the Hares family. The winner was Millenheath 527TW21 with 523TW21 reserve. Both were sired by Apiary Brad. Stonegrove Livestock were third with Stonegrove 663XP21.

The Ewe Lamb Class again went to the Hares with Millenheath 602TW22 first and 617TW22 third. The winner was sired by Millenheath

Murray. Second place was taken by Stonegrove Livestock with Stonegrove 914XP22 sired by Millenheath Monument.

The Championship went to the Stonegrove Shearling Ram with the Adult Ewe reserve and best opposite sex to the Champion.

Market prices moved back to pre-Covid levels. There were not enough rams for the buyers present whilst all but three of the females found new homes. The top price was 1,100 guineas for the show champion, Stonegrove Cowan-Dickie from the Dorrell family. The Millenheath ram lambs (Merlo and Memory) from the Hares family sold for 850 and 720 guineas respectively. 720 guineas was also the price for the Stonegrove ram lamb, Big Billy. The top prices are records for this sale.

Top prices in the females were 470 guineas and 420 guineas for Millenheath ewes with 400 guineas paid to the Coleman family for a Goblindale ewe. Ellie Russell's two shear Tushbrook ewe fetched 380 guineas with a Stonegrove ewe lamb topping that section at 340 guineas.

Prices were much higher across the board with the males up by 200 guineas on average. Thanks to Jonny Dymond as Auctioneer again and to the SSBA team supporting the event.

Les Newman

Average prices: Shearling Rams 488gns (5 sold); Ram Lambs 465gns (5 sold); Aged Ewes 380gns (1 sold); Shearling Ewes 308gns (24 sold); Ewe Lambs 170gns (14 sold).



The Shearling Ewe class

CLASS WINNERS AT THE NATIONAL SHOW AND SALE



Shearling ram Stonegrove Cowan-Dickie, Show Champion and Interbreed Sheep Champion. Bred by Stonegrove Livestock.



Breeding Ewe Tushbrook Flora, Reserve Champion, bred by Ellie Russell.



Shearling Ewe from the Millenheath Flock, bred by Jeanette Hares.



Ram Lamb Stonegrove Big Billy, bred by Stonegrove Livestock



Ewe Lamb from the Millenheath Flock bred by Jeanette Hares.

NEW DISCOVERY AT

An astonishing and unexpected uplift in grape quality is one of the benefits of grazing Shropshire sheep within the vineyards at Thorrington Mill, near Colchester in Essex. The browsing sheep also replace mechanical or manual leaf removal, and they reduce the need for mowing between the vines at certain times of the year. Vineyard owners Mark and Polly Baines explain how their Thorrington Flock is now an integral part of their system of sustainable wine production.

“Having to mow the grass and herbage in vineyards always seems such an incredible waste of a potential resource,” says Mark Baines, “and with the recent hike in fuel prices, it’s even more pressing to find a sustainable alternative.”

He and his wife, Polly, are fully committed to finding environmentally friendly ways of land management on their 65-acre family farm, bordering the Colne estuary. Here, they have developed a luxury glamping business, making the most of the beautiful locality. Essex Saddleback Pigs and Belted Galloway Cattle are part of the enterprise mix, which they have created partly to enhance the quality of the rural holiday experience they offer.

The couple established a 12-acre vineyard in 2018 on the south facing slopes of their coastal farm. Varieties Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Bacchus were chosen for their popularity and suitability for the English climate. The grape crop is generally sold to large wineries with on-site processing, such as Itasca Wines in Hampshire, although this year Mark and Polly are having some of their own wine bottled and returned. They plan to build up on-farm sales of their “own label” to farm visitors and glamping customers.

Mark also runs a landscaping and fencing business and, after the couple had invested in some specialist machinery to look after their own vineyard, they started to provide services to other vineyard owners in the area.

While the Thorrington vines were getting established, Mark researched new, environmentally friendly viticulture practices and discovered Shropshire sheep can be used to keep down herbage in vineyards over winter. He decided to buy a small flock of Shropshires and purchased 12 ewes from the Rode Flock of Les and Tricia Newman in 2019.

Guidelines For Clearing Herbage

The Baineses followed the guidelines given in the SSBA’s booklet “Two Crops From One Acre” for managing sheep in French vineyards: Shropshires should be introduced in the autumn about a week after grape harvest. As long as there is sufficient herbage for them, they can remain amongst the vines until spring. They must be removed as soon as the vines are budding, because the sheep will eat young leaves and this would have a detrimental effect on vine productivity.

True to expectations, the sheep did an excellent job of clearing vineyard herbage. They ate the autumn leaves but did not touch the branches or woody stems of the vines.

Mark and Polly discovered quite by accident that the Shropshires could have a much larger role in the vineyard – and one that has brought surprising benefits in terms of vine health and grape quality.

Sheep “Break-In”

Two years ago, the sheep accidentally escaped back into the vines during the early summer. This could have been a disaster, but luckily the break-in occurred at a time when the fruit was set, but was very small and unpalatable.

“The sheep ate leaves in the ‘fruit zone’ neatly doing the job of a mechanical leaf stripper,” Mark recalls. “This is a job that is essential, and normally done either mechanically or by hand to ensure light and air can reach the fruit, giving it the best opportunity to achieve optimum yield and quality. Removing the need for mechanised leaf removal saves around £150 - £200/acre.”

The Shropshires did absolutely no damage to the vines themselves or the fruit – and the net effect was a significant saving in labour and time, plus a healthy, abundant crop of grapes.

Although Shropshires are “tree friendly”, in deciduous plantations they may eat the leaves up to about 1m from the ground. Crucially, if managed correctly, they don’t take bark off the trunks, so this leaf browsing does not damage the long-term viability of the trees. This behaviour was mirrored at Thorrington Mill, where the browse line fortunately coincided with the fruit zone.

Impressed by their accidental discovery, Polly and Mark decided to repeat the process in 2021 - allowing the sheep back into the vineyard after the fruit was set, but this time as part of a supervised and closely monitored trial.

They used 30 sheep in 1.5 acres at a time – allowing them 5 days in each area before moving them on to the next. The net effect was that around 50% of the leaves in the crucial fruit zone were removed. Again, there was no damage to the vines or the fruit.

“The results were much better than using a mechanical stripper – which can cause damage to the vines and, as growers know, this can open the door to diseases such as botrytis that can hit yield and quality. There is obviously only a relatively small window of opportunity to use sheep in this way – a few weeks before the grapes start to get larger, softer and more palatable,” Mark points out. “The safe period will depend on the season, of course, so the situation needs

THORRINGTON MILL VINEYARD

to be monitored carefully by the vineyard manager.”

Quality Boost

As a result of the improved vine health and much lower levels of fungal disease, the couple noticed that the grapes could be left on the vine for much longer than usual with an amazing dividend in terms of quality.

“We were one of last vineyards to harvest our Pinot Noir last year, with the crop coming off on 6th November. The grapes were very ripe and very clean, which meant that they were good enough for red wine production in a year when other vineyards struggled to reach the necessary quality because of botrytis,” Mark recalls.

The grapes were processed by Bolney Wines in Sussex. Helen Cheshire of the Bolney Wines Estate commented: “Thank you so much for your amazing Pinot Noir, the fruit is fantastic, and we are so pleased that all your hard work has aid off in a very challenging year. This certainly the quality level we are looking for in the future.”

On the strength of these results, Mark has used the sheep to partially defoliate the fruit zone in all the vines again this year, and happily the flock has increased so that he now has 100 ewes and lambs to employ on this task.

Future Potential

There is also scope for improving output in terms of the butchers’ lambs produced by vineyard grazing, by growing a more nutritious cover crop between the vines. Mark has been experimenting with seed mixes that include several species, as well as grass. This year he is planting a three-year cover crop including red clover, fodder radish, stubble turnips and sainfoin, as well as ryegrasses, cocksfoot and wildflowers such as self heal and yarrow. This will go in every-other row between the vines, alternating with grass.

Shropshire sheep under Mark’s supervision have been supplied for use in two other local vineyards. He is currently working with 10 others as a contractor and he sees great potential for vineyard grazing as one of the services he offers.

He plans to grow the number of Shropshires so that he can supply the sheep to others at the crucial times of year: “Some wine producers will not want the responsibility of running livestock. Although they are a docile and attractive breed, the Shropshires won’t suit everyone, so a mobile service where the sheep are supplied by an experienced third party should work well and allow many more growers to get the natural benefit of using Shropshire sheep,” he believes. And what is there not to like about using Shropshires amongst vines? They represent a more natural way of managing vineyards and will surely become even more popular as the cost of fuel and agrochemicals continues to rise.



Pictured above: Shropshires from the Thorrington Flock at work defoliating the fruit zone.

Pictured right: The vines after the Shropshires have done their job.

More information about the vineyard is available on the website:

www.thorringtonmill.co.uk



IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT SHEEP ADVERTS PLACED ON SELL MY LIVESTOCK

The SSBA would like to make all members aware that only adverts that accurately portray the status of their sheep, and adverts that have been placed by a current member of the SSBA will be given the “Shropshire Society Stamp” and allowed onto the Shropshire portal of Sell My Livestock. Also, adverts may be delayed or blocked from appearing in the Shropshire portal if the member concerned has NOT ticked the GDPR box on their annual Membership Renewal form. If the box was not ticked, the breeder’s details are not visible on Grassroots.

Our Sales Officer, Claire Jakeman, has been tasked by Council with the job of checking adverts when they come in, to make sure that the status of sheep advertised is correct (eg if the advert says “ewe lambs eligible for registration” she will check that the breeder concerned has properly Birth Notified his or her lambs by checking on Grassroots). This has become necessary because, unfortunately, buyers are sometimes led to purchase sheep that they believe can be registered, only to find out at a later date that this is not the case.

Claire also checks that each advertiser who claims to be a registered flock is actually a bona fide member of the SSBA - yes, we do get a few claiming to be Pedigree who are in fact lapsed members or who have never joined the Society.

If you are advertising, please make sure that the sheep for sale are either fully registered or eligible for registration by being correctly birth notified. If you did not tick the GDPR box, you can now give permission on-line for your details to be visible on Grassroots. This will allow Claire to properly check the accuracy of the advert. If she cannot carry out the checks she always attempts to contact the breeder concerned, but some people do not respond, or take some time to respond, which delays the advert appearing.

SSBA SPONSORSHIP FOR LET'S FARM

Earlier this year, the SSBA's Council decided the breed society would sponsor Group Associate Membership and individual branded T-shirts for a new initiative that helps adults with learning difficulties. Called "Let's Farm", the scheme was co-founded by one of our Members, Rosemarie Lee (Rosaline Flock). Here, Rosie explains what Let's Farm is all about, and how the Let's Farm Rangers responded to the SSBA's support.

Let's Farm was founded in 2021 by myself and Nicola Colenso, who has 30 years' experience of working with adults with learning difficulties. Together we've developed this unique project for young people aged 18 plus and who live in Cheshire. Our aim is to help them gain valuable employment skills and independent living skills.

The base for Let's Farm is my family's farm, close to Winsford. We have 100 acres including a lake, woodland and meadows. It is a real working farm with traditional British breeds, including our flock of Shropshires, along with Ruby Red Devon and Hereford cattle, Gloucester Old Spot pigs, various poultry and other small animals.

Let's Farm is a paid for service funded through social budgets or privately. Its key focus is to give our Farm Rangers (as we call our participants) an excellent quality of life and offer them experience on a working farm, taking part in all farming life and daily stock duties.

Covid 19 has had a massive impact on everyone, but in particular those with learning disabilities who have lost opportunities and become socially isolated and de-skilled. This has had a negative impact on their mental health. Everybody needs something to get up for that is meaningful and has a purpose!

ACTIVITIES

All the activities we organise help the Rangers to make new friendships, learn, and work on their employability.

Working on the farm provides an unbelievable experience for them, while they learn to work as a team and expand their knowledge in a safe controlled but exciting environment. Most importantly Let's Farm is about having fun and supporting the mental wellbeing of this group of young people.

We currently have 19 Farm Rangers and they assist with all the activities that take place on our farm, such as:

- lambing
- Topping
- Farrowing
- Calving
- Using an incubator to hatch eggs
- Health checking animals
- Preparing animals for shows
- Showing animals in competitions

We also run a conservation and environmental enrichment programme for those who are not so keen on the animal side of farming. This follows a conservation calendar including: habitats, migration, making bird boxes and fat balls; harvesting the orchard and making produce; and maintaining woodland and wetland areas.

Due to the wide biodiversity of the farm, we target rare species. The wetland encourages rare ground nesting birds such as Snipe and Woodcock. We have a pond area that attracts dragonflies and damsel flies, and a four-acre field that has been planted with low input cereal bird feed to attract many wild birds. We will be building bird hides for us to monitor the activity in the field.

The opportunities that Let's Farm can offer are endless. We work on employability skills and move people into employment where we can. We also work on the Rangers' functional skills, independent living skills and, guided by individual care plans, we set personal targets to suit everyone's individual needs. Over time there will be opportunities to open up the Let's Farm service to others within the community from different age groups, such as young people excluded from schools, NEETs (young people not in education, employment or training), the elderly and local special schools. We also plan to offer bespoke educational enrichment programmes.

SSBA SPONSORSHIP

Everyone involved with Let's Farm was absolutely delighted that the SSBA chose to recognise the initiative and our Farm Rangers. The Associate Membership for the group as a whole was announced by Registrar Alison Schofield, at the Royal Cheshire Show, where the SSBA's special branded T-shirts were also presented to the Rangers in one of the show-rings.

Taking part in the show as exhibitors has been the icing on the cake for the Rangers. The experience of entering the show ring under scrutiny, leading lambs raised by them this season, cleaned washed and carded for the first time, has been incredible

Our expectations were to just be part of the

Cheshire Show - to enter and leave the ring with our sheep. It turned out to be so much more than that. We were welcomed by all the other Shropshire breeders showing on the day - everybody helped everybody.

The lambs achieved rosettes: 3rd in the trimmed ram lamb class; 2nd for a ewe lamb in the untrimmed class and 3rd place for the Group of Three. Four Rangers came out in white coats, but the whole team joined us on the day.

The Rangers were invited to assist other breeders, and their smiles in the photograph say it all. Alison gave an inspirational speech and some of the Rangers' parents were moved to tears at the ringside.

The T-shirts sponsored by the Society have been such a hit that the Rangers have worn them every day since! They have made the Rangers feel so much part of a team. We will definitely be back at the show next year.

Thank you SSBA for this recognition and support, which means so much to everyone at Let's Farm.



Rosie receiving the Associate Membership Certificate from Alison Schofield at the Royal Cheshire show. Below: The Let's Farm team of Farm Rangers at the show.



FIRST TIME IN THE SHOW-RING



Tom and Susanna David's two-shear ram took first place in his class at the Nantwich show (right) and was then Champion in the Downland Breed Section. Susanna (pictured) had never shown sheep before and did a great job, says Tom.



The Draco Flock from Newcastle Emlyn chose the Royal Three Counties for their first show outing. They did very well including first place in the Ram Lamb class (pictured left), 2nd in the Shearling Ram class, 2nd in the Ewe Lamb Class, 3rd in the Group of Three and 3rd in the Pairs class.



Sidney, Meredith and Harry, grandchildren of Marion & Aubrey Webb (Ushers Flock) showed Shropshires for the first time at Ashby Show. They were 7th, 1st and 4th respectively in the young handlers' classes - Sidney is not yet three, but they start 'em young in Leicestershire!



Sophie Royle, showing for the first time at the Royal Lancashire, won first place in the native short wool class with her ewe lamb (above), and went on to take Reserve Champion in that section.



Official Breed Society Sale of Shropshires at Worcester Market Saturday 8th October

Closing date for entries: 9th September

Schedules and entry forms available from mid August

All sheep will be inspected prior to the sale and all will be sold through the ring

SHROPTALK

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