

SHROPTALK



The Newsletter of the Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association

Winter 2013

NEWS FROM THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

OUR Annual General Meeting was held on 9th November at Sandwell Park Farm, West Bromwich, with 34 members of the SSBA in attendance.

President, Liz Bowles, welcomed everyone present and summarised the main achievements of the breed society over the past 12 months. Highlights included an increase in membership to the current total of 210, with an associated rise in sheep registrations. Entries at both National Shows and Sales were up from the previous year, and the Shrewsbury sale saw records broken for ram lamb prices with three lambs making over £600/head.

Shropshires were officially removed from the RBST's Watchlist in February and our breed is now classified as "Traditional", not "Rare". This achievement was noted by HRH the Prince of Wales, who has subsequently formed a flock of Shropshires at his Highgrove Estate.

Other key breed society activities were the completion of the first stage of DNA sampling for the breed profiling project, supported by the RBST, and the Association's first on-line members' survey, which gained a response from 49% of the SSBA.

Liz went on to thank John and Pauline Bowles and James Thompson for sponsoring the new Sansaw Sidedowns Most Prolific Ewe Competition. The export team of Sue Farquhar and Claire Jakeman were also praised for their efforts in securing orders and managing exports to many EU countries, the Isle of Man and Guernsey.

She thanked Pippa Geddes for her professional appearance in front of the BBC cameras on Countryfile and the quality of the sheep filmed, which had led to a further spike of interest in the breed and helped many members sell their surplus stock.

Registrar Alison Schofield, Treasurer Marion Webb and Secretary Simon Mackay were all thanked for their on-going support and for coping with increasing workloads.

Non-Discrimination Clause

In order to comply with new legislation introduced by DEFRA, the breed society members at the AGM voted to adopt a new clause to declare that the breed society does

not discriminate between its members. This will now be added to our Memorandum and Articles of Association.

New On-line Registration System

Alison Schofield demonstrated a facility that enables breeders to register and transfer their stock on-line via a new website: www.ssbaregistrations.co.uk. Alison, who is an IT specialist, has written the program and developed the website herself, at no cost to the SSBA. Members of the breed society are now welcome to try it out, although payments must still be made either by BACS transfer or by cheque. Anyone who uses the website and sends fees to the SSBA by BACS is asked to send a clear reference with the internet banking payment so that the Treasurer can tell what the payment is for, or to send her an email explaining the same. The website will eventually allow birth notifications to be completed on-line as well. Paper registrations will, however, remain an option for breeders.

Changes to Council

Liz Bowles was re-elected as President for the coming 12 months and Les Newman was elected as Vice President. Five new Council Members have been appointed: Gillian Dixon from Devon, Jackie Lewis from Powys, Janet Morris from Shropshire, Paul Redgate from Nottinghamshire and Paul Stead from Oxfordshire. They will be introduced to the SSBA more fully in the next *ShropTalk*.

Lorie Newman from Norfolk has kindly agreed to take minutes at Council Meetings. Jeanette Hares takes over as Publicity Officer and Trevor Lightfoot and Monique Hustinx have agreed to work on a project to obtain more information about the management



Ellie Butcher is this year's winner of the Junior Members' Hornpipe Quaich. Ellie's pictured above at the Royal Welsh Show with her grandmother, Sue Farquhar, talking with a very distinguished visitor. Other Society trophy winners are pictured over the page.

of Shropshires used in vineyards, orchards and other deciduous tree plantations. Janet Morris has agreed to look after and bring up-to-date the breed society's "scrap-book" of historical information and press cuttings.

Sue Farquhar and Anne Harvey have completed their three-year terms of office and step down from Council as voting members, but will continue to attend Council meetings as the Export and Merchandise Officers, respectively. All other officers of the society agreed to continue in their current posts, which are listed in full on the SSBA's website.

A group of Alderton ewes pictured on a frosty morning in Shropshire. The Alderton flock was featured on BBC1's Countryfile in September.



DIARY DATES FOR 2014
National Show and Sale (West)
at Shrewsbury Livestock Market:
Saturday 26th July
National Show and Sale (East)
at Melton Mowbray Livestock
Market: Friday 12th and Saturday
13th September

GRADING-UP SCHEME TO CLOSE

COUNCIL would like to remind members that the SSBA's Grading-Up Scheme will officially close on 31st March 2014. Flocks that have joined the scheme before that date will be allowed to complete the grading-up process. However, no new flocks will be permitted onto the scheme after the March deadline. Full details of the grading-up scheme are provided in the 2012 Flock Book. For more details, please contact the Secretary or the Registrar.



SHEEP TRIMMING WORKSHOPS

WOULD you like to learn how to trim and prepare Shropshire sheep for the show-ring? If there is sufficient demand, the breed society will organise trimming workshops in 2014 to enable participants to gain new skills - or "brush up" existing skills - in time for the show season. If you are interested in attending, please contact the breed society's secretary, Simon Mackay.

EXPORT PRICES 2014

NEXT year's export prices have been set by Council as follows: **Shearling Rams:** £630/head for ARR/ARR Scrapie genotype, £500/head for unspecified genotype; **Ram Lambs:** £480/head for ARR/ARR genotype, £400/head for unspecified genotype; **Shearling Ewes:** £280/head. **Two-Shear Breeding Ewes:** £240/head and **Ewe Lambs** £200/head. The SSBA's export levy payable on stock sold overseas will be reviewed at the next Council meeting in March.

Breeders wishing to participate in Society-led exports must tick the appropriate box on their Annual Flock Return and ensure that this is completed and sent to the Registrar by 31st January 2014. Export sheep must be Scrapie Monitored or of the ARR/ARR Scrapie Genotype, confirmed by a blood test taken by a vet and tested at a DEFRA approved laboratory. Sheep for Society-led exports must also be MV Accredited. For more information please contact the Export Officer, Sue Farquhar, on 01531 670439.

FLOCK BOOK PICTURES NEEDED

THE SSBA is looking for good quality images of Shropshire sheep for its 2013 Flock Book (published in spring 2014). Images should be well lit and in focus. They can cover a range of subjects such as show winners, pastoral scenes with Shropshires and other images to illustrate the versatility of our breed. Please send to the Registrar, Ali Schofield, by the end of 2013 (alisonschofield@hotmail.com).

AWARD WINNERS AT THE 2013 AGM



Anne Harvey (above left, with President Liz Bowles) won the Farquhar Trophy for the most points gained in Shropshire breed show classes this season. This is the second year in a row that Anne and her Roydon Flock have triumphed in this award. In 2013 she clocked up an impressive 122 points. The runner-up was Jeanette Hares (Millenheath Flock) with 101 points and in 3rd place were Marion and Aubrey Webb (Ushers Flock) with 66 points.

Pictured above right is the winner of the Novice Showing Trophy, Efa Glyn-Jones with her father Robin and Liz. Efa's novice points total was 21. Second was Mark Carus with 14 points and 3rd Charlie Morgan-Jones (4 pts).

Sally Evans (right) and her Heath End show team won the President's Trophy with a total of 122. The runner-up was Clive Davies with 76 points. Ellie Butcher (see page 1) took the Junior's Hornpipe Quaich with a total of 252 points. The runner-up was Efa Glyn-Jones with 209 points, Alice Clay was 3rd with 128 points and George Clay 4th with 114 points.

Many congratulations to all our winners!



Sally Evans, winner of the President's Trophy for the most points gained in "Any Other Breed" Show Classes.



Pictured above are the joint winners of the first annual Sansaw Sidedowns Award for the Most Prolific Shropshire Ewe: Simon Hope from Natural England (Stoke Flock), Liz Bowles, Hayne Oak Flock and Alison Schofield, Hornpipe Flock. Holding the trophy with Simon are John and Pauline Bowles, who generously donated a prize fund of £500 to the breed society for this award. James Thompson, Sansaw Flock, (not present at the AGM) kindly agreed that the Hardwicke Perpetual Trophy can be used as the silverware for the winner(s) of this new contest.

SHROPSHIRE SHEEP FEATURE TWICE ON THE BBC

OUR breed has received great publicity from a recent appearance on BBC1's popular "Countryfile". Shropshires will also feature on "Escape To The Country" before the end of 2013. Both programmes filmed the Alderton Flock of Pippa and Peter Geddes, near Montford Bridge, Shropshire.

Broadcast at the end of September, Countryfile included Shropshires in an episode that focussed on the Ludlow Food Festival. Pippa takes up the story: "We were contacted out of the blue by a BBC researcher. Having done some Internet surfing, she'd discovered that Shropshire has its own sheep breed with a fascinating story behind it.

"After an initial chat, the BBC paid us a visit to find out more about the sheep and to have a look around our farm before making a commitment to film us. They found the tree-friendly nature of the breed particularly interesting and luckily I was able to arrange a visit to Leaton Forest nearby, where they could see Shropshires grazing in Christmas tree plantations. The final piece in the jigsaw was: Could we supply a Shropshire lamb for a butchery demonstration in Ludlow in five days time? Again we were in luck having a few meat lambs still available. After a couple of phone calls it was all arranged with Griffiths' abattoir and Walls the butchers in Ludlow, although the timing was rather tight!

SPECIAL AGENT

"We were really pleased to be able to showcase the breed on behalf of SSBA members," continues Pippa, "but we were a bit nervous too, as animals can be unpredictable at the best of times. We needn't have worried - everything went like clockwork on the day. The sun shone and the sheep were friendly and grazed quietly despite the camera filming close by. Undoubtedly the star to the show was the ram, Alderton Special Agent, who was a very uninhibited chap and keen to get on with his job despite having an audience!"

Having filmed the Alderton flock and some footage of Shropshires grazing in Leaton Forest, the camera crew followed Matt Baker learning butchery skills in Ludlow. Matt then took a bag of Shropshire lamb chops to the Ludlow Food Festival to cook them, where they received a resounding "thumbs up" from army chef, Staff Sgt Major Andy Jones.

"The Shropshire sheep is a woolly wonder, a great grazer.....and the meat is marvelous!" Matt Baker, BBC1's Countryfile



Matt with Special Agent.

"These Shropshire lamb chops are absolutely beautiful - they've got marbling through the meat, not too much fat on the outside.....absolutely perfect chops."

Army Chef, Staff Sgt Major Andy Jones, 143 (West Midlands) Brigade



The second BBC programme to feature Shropshires is "Escape To The Country", which will include a short piece about our breed during an episode filmed in May and due to be broadcast before the end of the year.

Pippa and some of the Alderton Flock will be featured again - but this time the focus will be the excellent wool quality of our breed. All in all some great publicity for Shropshire sheep!



Pippa with "escapees" Ross and Wendy, in an episode of Escape To The Country.

IMPORTANT RULE CHANGE: PAYMENT OF TRANSFER FEES

THE rules about payment of transfer of ownership fees have changed with immediate effect. The fee of £3/head, payable to the SSBA within 10 days of a sale whenever a registered Shropshire is sold, *can now be paid by either the vendor or the purchaser*. The future progeny of sheep that have been sold cannot be registered with the SSBA until the transfer fee has been paid.

ENGRAVING OF TROPHIES

THE SSBA's Council would like to remind members who win Society and show trophies that it is their responsibility to get these engraved to record their name(s) and the year in which they won the award. If trophies are returned without the new winner recorded, the breed society will no longer carry out the engraving retrospectively.

SHEEP SOLUTION TO RISING ENERGY BILLS?



Two lambs from Trevor Lightfoot's Flock: "Is it true that Trevor's going to use us to generate his electricity?"



Pippa with Countryfile's Matt Baker and two of the BBC's film crew. The episode can still be viewed on YouTube (search for Countryfile Shropshire 29 09 2013).

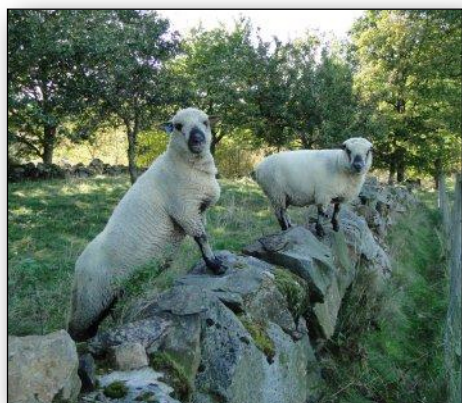
SHROPTALK

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Contributions are always welcome!



Visit our Facebook page:

Friends of Shropshire Sheep, and our
website: www.shropshire-sheep.co.uk
for all the latest news.



"Is anyone looking? Let's make a break for it!"
Two athletic Shropshires from Uwe Rutzen's flock in Norway.

MEMBERSHIP COMMUNICATIONS

IN view of rising postal charges, Council has decided that all large mailings to the membership will be switched to email, rather than using Royal Mail. Exceptions will be made for the very few members who do not use email and for the mailing of *ShropTalk*, the annual flock book and flock returns.

PLEASE HELP US BUILD UP BREED SOCIETY MEMBERSHIP

HAVE you sold Shropshire sheep to anyone who has not kept the breed before? If so, please can you send their details to our Secretary, Simon Mackay, so that we can encourage them to become members of the breed society. Simon's address is 146 Chandlers Way, Sutton Manor, St Helens, WA9 4TG. Or you can send him the details by email: shropshire_sheep@hotmail.com.

DOES ANYONE KNOW THE WHEREABOUTS OF THE HARDWICKE TROPHY BASE?

THE original base of this beautiful trophy has unfortunately gone missing. It is an unusual plinth with a tapering cone that secures the trophy when it's sitting on top. The picture below shows the trophy standing beside the base. If anyone has seen the base recently, please contact the Secretary of the breed society or any of the council members.



THE SSBA WISHES ALL ITS MEMBERS A HAPPY CHRISTMAS, A SUCCESSFUL LAMBING AND A PROSPEROUS NEW YEAR!

TREVOR'S FLOCK KEEPS THE CHURCHYARD TIDY



Shropshires from Trevor and Carol Lightfoot's Fairfield Flock have access to an unusual "pasture" - the graveyard of the local church in Wybunbury, Cheshire. The sheep were introduced a few years ago at the request of the parish council because the old churchyard was in a terrible state and very overgrown with weeds. The site is around two acres in total and Trevor splits it into two separate paddocks secured with an electric fence. Sheep graze off one paddock while the other is rested and any residual weeds, such as docks and thistles, are sprayed off. The system is working well and the sheep are very effective, low cost caretakers.

RESULTS FROM OUR MEMBERS' SURVEY

By Barry Hodson

Many thanks to those who took part in the Society's membership survey earlier this year. Some 49% of members participated, which is very positive. The comments have given our Council many things to think about and some changes may be implemented as a result.

It was particularly rewarding to see that most respondents had good things to say about our breed: Shropshires are versatile and adapt well to different management systems; Shropshire lambs finish early in the season and the quality of their meat is great. On the maternal side, Shropshire ewes make good mothers and have good feet - a very important thing in sheep!

A surprising thing is that many members first kept Shropshires because of their good looks. Only one respondent wasn't happy with the breed - he thinks Shropshires are too heavy compared with his Mules and other crossbreds, although he agrees with the other good points about Shropshires mentioned above.

THE IMPORTANCE OF WOOL

There seems to be an equal number of people keeping the breed as meat producing animals as there are people keeping Shropshires for grazing in tree plantations - both conifers and fruit trees. Wool is also an important product to members. It has, perhaps, a higher priority than you would expect, showing the continued importance of the Shropshire's ability to produce a high quality fleece. Besides wool, meat and breeding stock - "pleasure" is also a popular reason for keeping Shropshires.

It's good to see that if any advice is needed, then Council Members are the first port of call, followed by other members. We pride ourselves on being a friendly and approachable breed society, so please don't be afraid to ask for help.

It's good to hear that a number of flock

owners want to try showing their sheep. Shows are our "shop window" for the breed and hopefully a good way of capturing new members. As a result of this, I'm going to organise at least one trimming/show preparation workshop next year. Give me a call on 01744 811124 or contact Simon the breed secretary if you are interested in this. Experience isn't a requirement, just a willingness to give it a go - and enjoy yourself.



Just under half of those that responded also owned other breeds of sheep. The average flock size of survey respondents was 26. Not every flock owner has a ram - and if you need to borrow a ram, I advise you to look through the Flock Book to find a breeder near you who may be able to loan, share or swap. Publicity organised by the Society is seen by many - showing that we are targeting the right publications for the sale of members' sheep. The Breed Stand is a recognisable feature at the major sheep events promoting the breed. The Stock For Sale section on the website is a popular destination, so make full use of it. I'd like to thank Claire Jakeman on behalf of us all for her efforts in sourcing sheep and also helping to find homes for surplus stock.

Images of cartoon sheep in adjacent box, courtesy of pamsclipart.com