



# Portland Sheep Breeders Group



Newsletter Winter 2016



Armscote Manor Portland Sheep; Deborah Williams

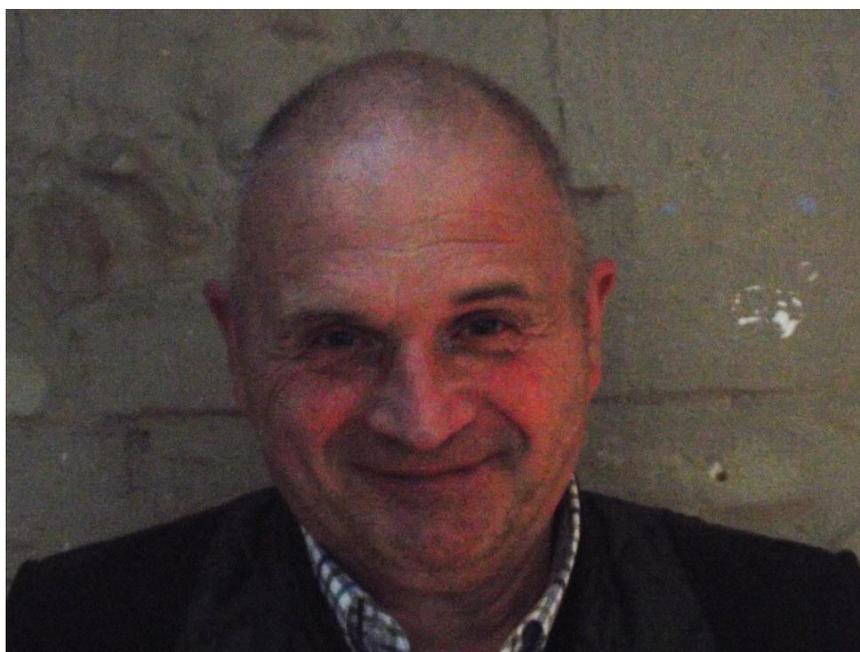
**The Copy Date For The Spring '17 Edition Is The 15<sup>th</sup> Of April.**

**If I could have any Articles, Pictures, Useful Information or Interesting Anecdotes by this date that would be very helpful.**

## Note from the chairman

My name is Steve Gould.

I would like to introduce myself as the new chairman of the Portland Sheep Breeders Group. I have been involved with Portland Sheep for over 30 years. I have a finishing unit for the breed on a small farm in the depths of the beautiful Dorset countryside. I have many years' experience in handling Portlands. I have built up a customer base for Portland Mutton and Hogget locally, which is starting to be appreciated again as people become increasingly aware of good quality, well reared meat and the issues of food traceability etc. The meat can be found in restaurants on the Isle of Portland. I look forward to seeing many of you at Shows and Workshops, anything I can do to help just ring Tel: 07891079615.



### Message from the Editor

Hello again and Happy Winter, the showing season is over for another year. I hope that all of you who show had fun and that those who don't also had fun. For me tugging is over as well, I know that some of you will still be in the middle of this as we are already looking forward to the spring and the lambing that comes with it. Thank you all for continuing to support our lovely little breed.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to you all.

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## Melton Mowbray – 2016

The Show and Sale at Melton Mowbray Market on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of September was the autumn meeting place for Portland Breeders from many parts of the country to get together and talk and view sheep from other flocks. There always seems to be a “buzz” of excited anticipation and happy reunions of friends new and old.

I was delighted and privileged to accept the kind invitation to judge the Portland classes on Saturday though sadly, there were not more sheep for me to judge. The animals brought forward were from several flocks from different parts of the UK, which is always really interesting.

My comments as a judge would be to remark on the somewhat poor state of the feet of some of the sheep. I do feel that as animals are to be sold it would seem sensible (not to mention the care of the animal) to present them having at least trimmed their feet before hand.

I was delighted though to have no problem in choosing the “perfect” little ewe, shown by Sue Stennet, as my champion with a close reserve, a handsome ram shown by Karen Wilson. Both of these animals were lovely examples of the breed and were shown with much professionalism, they walked beautifully in their halters and showed themselves off to the world so well!

Thank you for allowing me to get my hands on these special little sheep again. I thoroughly enjoyed the day.

Michelle Jones (ex Southover Flock)



Sue Stennett with her Champion shearling ewe and Southover crook



Karen Wilson with her Reserve Champion shearling ram

## 2016 WOOL-on-the-HOOF Assessment at Melton Mowbray

This year there were 35 adult sheep and 13 lambs entered for the sale at Melton Mowbray on Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> September. However the wool-on-the-hoof assessment is carried out on the Friday morning to accommodate the busy schedule of Stephen Spencer of the British Wool Marketing Board. Eighteen adults and three lambs were available in the pens at that time and received a thorough scrutiny. All vendor breeders that would like to see the full Wool Board results for their sheep are welcome to contact Kate Kershaw, who will send the individual reports when available. In the Portland study the wool is placed in one of six categories from Very Good (1) to Very Poor (6), with the median value of 50% falling between category 3, Above Average and category 4, Below Average, based on the breed characteristics. As a reminder, the Breed Standard states that "The wool is creamy white, close and fine with a short staple, but may be coarser on the britch where some red kemp fibres may be found."

For the 2016 study there were 10 ewes and 8 rams, shearlings or older, compared with 31 adults in 2015, (19 in 2014), a disappointing decrease in numbers. The rams were especially notable as all were in the one of the top four categories, including one Very Good. As usual the ewe results covered a wider range with three Good, four Average, two Poor, and one Very Poor (most were down-graded for excessive kemp beyond that acceptable in the britch). In line with the card grading procedures the lamb fleeces are assessed as either Typical of the breed or Non-typical. However this year a full report was also made on the same basis as the adults and it was pleasing that all three ewe lambs were classified as Above Average, with two being Good.

In summary, half of the adults (9 sheep) were placed in the two Average categories, with twice as many in the Good categories than in the Poor (3 sheep). Of the adult Portlands forward in 2016, 83% had wool in the top four of the six categories; a slightly lower result than 2015, based on only 58% of the previous sheep numbers. We are very grateful to Stephen for his careful observations of our Portlands and his independent overview of the wool.

## A Lost Flock for Re-Registering

In June 2015 we had been invited to a farm walk on the neighbouring farm estate, looking at their arable and dairy units. After the walk and enjoying their hospitality I was involved in a conversation about their flock of sheep which progressed into the farm manager offering their flock of Portland Sheep to the local dealer. I persuaded him to give me a week to try and get something sorted as it would have been awful to let this happen. I knew this flock, the Strangways flock, was an old flock and was the hard work and pride and joy of retired shepherd Richard Pullen.

The flock was unregistered and I was told there were about 80 ewes and lambs.

I spoke to Steve Gould my area rep and asked for advice, later that week I arranged for Steve and I to see the flock. We had a good look over them and a head count showed there were actually 120 head of stock. They were in good condition and fell well within the breed description.

We knew they had always used a registered ram as many came from the Southover flock nearby and we had the records of that years ram. As the flock were not registered or marked we did not know which lamb belonged to which ewe and as yet they were not quite weaned or ear-tagged.

Our next port of call was Karen Wilson in Lincolnshire since she had already had a lot of involvement with re registering flocks and was very interested.

She came down to look at them and was pleased with them although they were a little flighty due to living on the downland on the Dorset coast and only being round up by dogs and handled with the other 2000 commercial sheep.

After some negotiation Steve bought all the barren and cull ewes, I bought 24 wethers and Karen bought the ewes and ewe lambs.

With Chloe the shepherd we ear tagged the lambs and the ewes with no tags and transported them to their various destinations.

I put my wethers in a field on their own away from my flock, I walked through them everyday and watched them scatter to each corner of the field. Their feet seemed to deteriorate as soon as they touched my ground and I had to get Tracy Pullen and her dog to help get them penned and treat their feet. With her foot trimming skills it took two sessions and I have not had any trouble since. They have spent the winter with my flock until I ran out of grass and they were then moved to a paddock over the road.

They are much calmer now and at the moment I can move them on my own from one paddock to another, they are down to 15 now as the others have been going to slaughter slowly throughout the later part of this year. I am just about to sell two ewes from my flock and 8 wethers to control some grassland in Hampshire.

I had some lovely fleeces and carcasses from them and they are a good-looking healthy if not a little flighty bunch of boys.

Dawn Sprake

Herbury Flock

Dorset

Find out in the next newsletter what happened to Karen's ewes and lambs.

## Fifteen minutes of fame

In July this year I received a phone call from a television producer. At first quite skeptical, I soon discovered they had been in touch with the Melplash Show secretary and were looking to film sheep at the show in August.

They questioned about washing and clipping for showing, competing, and winning a prize for the big money. I tried to explain that our lovely little Portlands are shown in their working clothes. They are a rare breed and the only 'big money' is outgoing, not incoming!

In spite of this they still showed interest, so after a Skype conversation they scheduled a brief visit to the farm. A producer and cameraman arrived on a lovely morning and we spent a couple of hours chatting and filming, all in order to show the BBC executives the program setting.

All good so far...they would spend some time on the farm, filming us in preparation for the Melplash Show. (No, we would not wash and clip our sheep!) Then they would film on the day of the Show. It turned into the two most exhausting days of our lives!

Arriving on Tuesday, with the show on Thursday, we expected a morning of filming and an afternoon getting on with our regular chores around the farm.



The crew arrived, genuinely lovely camera people who immediately fell in love with our farm and our sheep. It turned into the hottest day of the summer and there were plenty of re-takes. Our ground is quite hilly and I shook that damned bucket and ran up and down with a flock of lambs following so beautifully I could have wept. The day went on with many laughs and some shocking swearing...by me, fed up, not remembering the poor sound man who heard me flip out at the silly requests by a distinctly 'townie' director who expected the Portlands to perform on cue! We ended the day loading the sheep and heading off to the show. Thank goodness we could turn around, drop them back and all of us have a Wednesday break before the Show Day.

I was quite honestly a wreck as we drove into the show ground on Thursday. There they were, waiting to pounce, cameras ready. The day turned into a challenging yet wonderful opportunity to spread the word about our gorgeous Portlands and show off the lovely friendly Portland breeders. And we think the producer 'got it' about our sheep. She even bought Norman Jones' book, **Portland Sheep – A breed with a History**. And she loved the whole day, the atmosphere of the Melplash Show, West Dorset at its best, real country people showing off their livestock and talents, and having a good time.

So what do we expect next year when the filming is broadcast? I think it will part of a series on farming, possibly 'A day at the Show'. My biggest hope is that our Portlands will be seen in all their glory and it will be wonderful publicity for our breed. I can tell you I have NO intention of watching it!!

Jo Stover

## **The Dreaded Black Spot!**

We moved to our farm near Sherborne in Dorset in 2012 and set about purchasing a number of ewes of differing ages from different flocks in order that we would get a wide range of maturity and genetic diversity. We were quite surprised at shearing time to discover two ewes with fairly large black skin patches, one on the left side of its abdomen, the other on its right rump. Both sheep had no visible pigmented wool, and as soon as it grew back the dark patches were hidden again until the next shearing.

Without doubt one of the most vexing issues associated with breeding and keeping the delightful Portland sheep breed is the phenomenon known to us all as black spot. Whether it be on a newly born lamb, or discovered at shearing time on a previously purchased ewe, I have experienced both. I expect most of you have similar stories too? The elation of watching one of our ewes give birth to another wonderful new lamb only to discover as we are rubbing it down that he/she has a black spot, can be quite depressing. In the case of males on our farm, its fate is then sealed and it is castrated. I remember very well the sinking feeling as I applied the rubber ring to a lovely little ram lamb last year at a time when I was hoping to keep more intact rams. This year seemed to be the year of the ewe lamb, with eight really nice individuals and only four ram lambs. However, out of the eight born one had a very striking black mark under her right eye, looking very much like eye liner we gave her the name of Amy, after Amy Winehouse. A second ewe lamb had a dark brown patch of wool on the mid-line of her back attached to a small patch of grey coloured skin. We had had the odd black spot on lambs in previous years, but this situation was more striking due to both the colour difference and the positioning of each mark.

Over this summer I started to have a look at the history of the Portland sheep, partly because I was fired up having had just read Norman Jones' book again and also because a line of my own family is from the Island and I have a very long association with the place. The information available is very thin and I expect that it will take me quite a while to dig up any more than Norman did. Having spent a career working in biomedical research, I was particularly interested in exploring the past/current research of pigmented wool/black spots in other breeds of white wool sheep, as I thought that surely this could not be limited to just our breed? I discovered a number of research papers on the subject, many written by M.R. Fleet and colleagues published in Australia. However, one of the most current was written by F. Penagaricano et al in the Journal of Applied Genetics (2012) "Gene expression analysis identifies new candidate genes associated with the development of black skin spots in Corridale sheep". The aim of the research was to assess that the genetic factors involved in the occurrence of black spots in the fleece of white coated sheep, as these were unknown. The conclusion of the work suggested that was no supportive evidence of the major genes associated with skin pigmentation directly influencing occurrence of black skin spots in white sheep. They went on to say that further research is necessary to look at the factors involved in the immediate cellular response to damage caused by ultraviolet light.

Next, I got in contact with Lawrence Alderson who as a geneticist, founding member of the RBST, has had much experience of the original saving of the Portland flock and its subsequent increase in numbers. Lawrence was extremely helpful in answering my questions and with filling in some of the gaps in my knowledge of the Portlands' story. We

spent a very interesting afternoon here at Willen Farm near Sherborne chewing over a number of topics, including the black spot phenomenon. I felt very positive at the end of our meeting, especially as Lawrence and I had much the same views on how we should deal with the black spot situation.

Based on the evidence so far the conclusions are:

1. There is no evidence to suggest that the Portland breed of sheep did not have occurrence of black spot in its past; i.e. it has always been in its genome.
2. The upgrading project in 1975-1986 involved the introduction of genes from Dorset Horn, Exmoor Horn, Poll Dorset, Llanwenog and St. Kilda. The Flock Book recorded some offspring as being "Bob-tailed, Black Muzzle, White Faced, polled or twins". In hindsight Lawrence Alderson thought that this project was unnecessary and that he would not now have undertaken the process (Jones, N. 2003).
3. The registration of the Calke Abbey flock in 1990 brought additional genetic material into the national flock over subsequent years. The flock was first introduced from the Isle Portland in 1770 and the old estate farm records mention that over the years was crossed with Suffolk, Hampshire and Scottish Halfbred sheep.
4. A full analysis of the Portland sheep genome could shed light on the black spot issue, but would be a huge task and very expensive, so is unlikely ever to happen.
5. The only practical option is to cull all rams with black spots thereby ensuring that they do not contribute to the National Flock.

Finally, black spot is an issue that we are all a part of, as our sheep have either shown evidence of it, and/or carry the ability to pass it on to their offspring. Whether evident as black or brown wool, black or grey skin patches with/without pigmented wool the causative factors are complicated and some remain unknown. However, it is a part of what the Portland sheep are and as such we are all very much a part of the story. So, I call upon you to tell us your experience of black spot in your sheep. Are you experiencing black or brown spots, or just black or grey skin patches? Please send you pictures with some explanation/story to our Newsletter Editor Jack Rashley in order that we may all share what is happening with everyone.

Jeremy Smith MSc FIAT

Willen Farm,

Dorset.

## Bibliography

Portland Sheep A Breed with History. Norman Jones. 2003. ISBN 0-9545981-0-5.

The Chance to Survive. Lawrence Alderson MA (Cantab) Cbiol FRBI FRAgS MSB1989. ISBN 0747000093.

F. Penagaricano et al. Journal of Applied Genetics (2012) 53. 99-106. DOI 10.1007/s13353-011-0066-9. Gene expression analysis identifies new candidate genes associated with the development of black spots in Corridale sheep.



Dark brown wool growing from a grey patch of skin along the midline of a ewe lamb born 2016



Black skin patch, no pigmented wool.



Black skin patch on right rump, no pigmented wool, only seen at shearing.



Black skin/wool patch under right eye, ewe lamb born 2016.

## PSBG Open Day

This year's event was hosted by the Butler family at Pooks Farm in West Sussex. The day was blessed with beautiful weather and a good turnout of members, some came from Dorset a couple from Coventry and one from Warwickshire.

It all started with refreshments and a fantastic array of cakes, provided by some of the members.

The main event of the morning was a talk on the use of Homeopathy in your flock. This was by Rachel Richards who is local to Sussex.

The topic for the rest of the day was wool, Jenny Davey brought along her spinning wheel and a selection of knits and wool and was joined by Tessa Hucklesby who also brought along her spinning wheel. Some people were able to have a go and really enjoyed the experience.

Before lunch there was a farm walk led by Graham and Louise. On show in the barn was a selection of Portland sheep from the Hawthorn Tree flock, including a Monkton ewe who is now 19 yrs old, and retired!! Also on display were a few of Louise Butlers Black Welsh Mountain sheep.

There was a fleece competition and a very good turnout of entries, with a very high standard. Very many thanks go to Paula Bull for judging it in two categories- fleece she would most like to take home won by Dawn Sprake of the Herbury flock and fleece nearest to Portland sheep standards won by Jo Stover of the Lewesdon Hill flock.



After the fleece competition was the result of the fun competition, guess the weight of the pair of Portland horns won by Dan Stover at 1.2kg. Also the draw was done for the raffle.

The day was rounded off with the PSBG AGM.

Many thanks go to all the people who helped and attended and made it such an enjoyable day.

Graham, Helen,  
Louise and Jake.



As new Treasurer and Membership secretary I have come into the possession of a recipe binder. It was compiled by the legendary Portland sheep breeder, Michelle Jones, and is a treasure trove of old mutton recipes. Not a Jamie Oliver in sight, although I am sure he would very much appreciate our beautiful tasting sheep!

The following recipe has a certain Christmas-y appeal to it. I have a shoulder of mutton to cook this weekend so will give it a try. Sounds interesting!

### **Mutton Spice pies**          circa 1935

Shortcrust pastry

Cold mutton

An equal amount by weight of:    Windfall apples and sugar

Nutmeg

A few chopped prunes

Make your shortcrust pastry with mutton fat if possible, keeping a little back for the top of the pies. Cut the cold mutton into small pieces. Pack the pie dish with this alternating with the chopped apples and plenty of seasoning. Sprinkle with a little sugar as you fill the pie dish, add a few chopped prunes and a grating of nutmeg. Finally cover the last layer with a little finely grated mutton suet. Put on the pastry top and bake in a good oven until a pale golden brown.



Do not add water as the apples will cook to a spicy sauce over the meat. If the pies are eaten cold, then a slit should be left in the top of each pie and hot red currant jelly is run into the pies. When cold, this will set stiffly again and form a delicious layer of sweetness on the surface of the meat layer.

Jo Stover

**ENTRIES OPEN FOR BRITISH WOOL FASHION SHOW:** Griffiths' Mill and the Rare Breeds Survival Trust is looking for knitters, crocheters, felters and tailors to take part in the British Wool Fashion Show on 16<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> June 2017 at the Three Counties Showground, Malvern, Worcestershire. Set to be a fashion show with a difference, the catwalk will not only feature models but also sheep breeds from which garments have been manufactured. Rules stipulate that all wool products entered must be British grown and processed and it is for wool only from any breed. Anyone interested should email their name, telephone number and a description of items intended for submission to [david@griffithsfarming.com](mailto:david@griffithsfarming.com).

## New Members

Hendrik Strauss, Surrey

Katie Allen, Gloucestershire

## PORTLAND SHEEP BREEDERS GROUP

### COMMITTEE 2016 – 2017

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Dan Stover, the new secretary.

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## **Letters and Advertisements**

I have kept Portlands for nearly 21 years at Armscote Manor. Last year we decided to refine the flock and even try and make money for a change. We successfully sold wethers to a specialist London butcher and for the last three years have been producing wool which we have processed by the Natural Fibre Company.

This year I decided to show them for the first time at the Moreton Show. We were delighted to do so well in our Heath and Hill class against some stiff opposition. Libby Henson was one of the judges.

Another thing I would like to mention is the Shipston on Stour Wool Fair. I am a Patron of this fair which has been reintroduced in ÆSheepstown<sup>1</sup> after a gap of 150 years. It is held on the last Bank Holiday Monday in May and I have encouraged the RBST to get involved and introduced as many local rare breed owners in the area as possible to show their sheep. My own Portlands and Black Welsh Mountain sheep are shown every year. It is a lovely family day out which I would recommend to your members.

[Www.shipstonwoolfair.co.uk](http://www.shipstonwoolfair.co.uk)

**Deborah Williams**

I have also received a letter from Michelle Jones that was sent to Norman Jones in May of 2005 from Col. Joe Symonds, he has a flock profile on page 137 of Portland Sheep; A Breed With A History. The letter is brilliant, it is of a man recalling a childhood with Portland sheep:

Dear Captain Jones

The point that you raise is probably best answered by telling you a little more about my Fathers farming during the 1930's when I was mostly living at Horchester.

Father kept a breeding flock (a flying flock of about 300 ewes) this flock comprised about 210 Exmoor Horn ewes which he replaced as necessary by buying Regular Draft Exmoor Horns at the Exmoor sheep fair. The flock also comprised about 90 Portland Ewes which he replenished as necessary by purchasing Portland ewes at the Dorchester Sheep Fair.

As time went by he was unable to buy Portland Ewes as there were none for sale. Finally he purchased Mr. Fred Mayo's Portland flock from Friar Waddon which put him in a strong position for a few years but as these slowly declined in numbers he was reduced to breeding Portland Sheep and I remember him purchasing a Portland Ram from an Estate in Derbyshire which arrived one evening in their guard's van on a passenger train all dressed up in a sack. I had to harness up a horse and wagon and go and collect it as all the men had gone home.

Father was a reluctant breeder of Portland Sheep as he said the wether lambs were not wanted by the market. Those were the days of Empire Preference and farmers had to produce what the market requires. The market requires small good quality early lambs. These were bred by using Southdown Rams on the whole flock. He replaced his Southdown Rams every year by purchasing 4 Ram Lambs at the breed society sale at Chichester.

It is correct to say that about 75 percent of the lambs sold to Mr. Andrews would have been out of Exmoor Ewes, the remaining 25 percent out of Portland Ewes, but that made no difference. They were all about the farm. The Portlands would have been just as good on the Exmoors as the

Portland Ewes always had single lambs and plenty of milk.

The whole flock was farmed as a single unit except when a few Portlands were picked out to go with the Portland Ram.

You do not need to breed many pure Portland Ewes as they live for a very long time.

With Best Wishes

Yours Col. Joe Symonds

### For Sale

Ewes from Fontmell Flock, Various ages can run with prizewinning and champion rams, Southover, Sharpeyed and Bramble blood line. Contact Mike Johnston; [mcj2010@outlook.com](mailto:mcj2010@outlook.com) 01747 811226

### For Sale

Three years ago I started producing DK undyed wool. I also have a few Black Welsh Mountain Sheep and have blended their wool with the Portland and have Portland with a dash of Black Mountain and Portland with a splash of Black Mountain. Please see the attached pictures. This year we are going to produce pure Black Welsh Mountain Sheep wool. Our British, undyed rare breed wool is processed in Launceston by Natural Fibre.

It retails for £5.50.

We also have two widowed ladies, Edna and Kate, who knit for us and have a selection of large and small cable cushions with British slate buttons, a baby cable throw and large reversible cable throw knitted in one piece. All items are available in all four colour ways. We could also knit to order in our wool.

With best wishes

Deborah

01608 682 375

