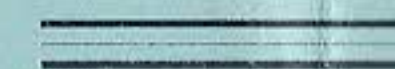


Shropshire Sheep Breeders' Association  
and Flock Book Society,



# History of Shropshire Sheep

BY

ALFRED MANSELL.

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*(Revised Edition).*



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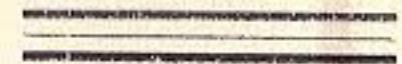
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## HISTORY OF SHROPSHIRE SHEEP.

THE history of Shropshire Sheep has been dealt with by many writers, and though the origin of the breed is more or less lost in obscurity there is a general concensus of opinion that it existed in Shropshire and Staffordshire in the early years of the 19th century.

Morfe Common, near Bridgnorth, Shropshire, occupying an area of about 4,000 acres on the Borders of the River Severn, was certainly one of the homes of the original Shropshires, and this idea is supported by Professor Wilson who, in his report of the breeds of sheep in the Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society, Vol. 16, states that when the Bristol Society in 1792 procured as much information as possible regarding sheep in England they reported as follows in reference to Morfe Common Sheep:—

“ On Morfe Common, near Bridgnorth, there are about 10,000 sheep kept during the summer months, which produce wool of a superior quality. They are considered a native breed, are black faced, or brown, or spotted-faced horned sheep, little subject to either rot or scab, weighing the wethers from 11 to 14 lb., and the ewes from 9 to 11 lb., per quarter, after being fed with clover and turnips, and clipping near 2 lb. per fleece; exclusive of the breeching. This appears to be the original Stock from which the present breed of Shropshire Sheep has sprung.”

Youatt, alluding to the Morfe Sheep, says it was probably this species of Shropshire wool that in 1343 was the choicest and dearest in England, and at every succeeding period when mention has been made fit justice has been done to its excellent quality. He further adds in a foot-note: “ The Shropshire short wool must not be quitted without another testimony to the degree of estimation in which it was formerly held.”

Joseph Plymley, Archdeacon of Salop, writing on the Agriculture of Shropshire in 1803, describes a somewhat similar sheep to that found on Morfe Common. Plymley says there is a breed of sheep on the Longmynd, a hilly range near Church Stretton, with horns and black faces that seem an indigenous sort. They are nimble, hardy and weigh nearly 10 lb. per quarter when fatted. The fleeces on the average may weigh  $2\frac{1}{2}$  lb.

The author of a very interesting and valuable work on the commercial politics of the times in 1694 used the following language:—“ It is no small advantage to trade to be fitted with a complete sortment of goods abounding in the middle sort of wools excellent of its kind and suitable to a middle sort of people, which

are far the greater number, and herein is chiefly our strength, not that we in the least fall short in the merit of our fine wool, our Herefordshire and our Shropshire wool is not to be equalled in its kind by any part of the world and suitable to almost any degree." A page or two afterwards this author again speaks of the Shropshire and Herefordshire wool in these terms:—"So comprehensive in excellency is our English wool that it may be improved to the thickest felt which will secure from the most violent storms of wet and be likewise drawn to the finest crape and still carrying a merit with it and thereby rendering itself a most acceptable commodity both in hot and cold climates."

Smith in his *History of Wool and Woollen Manufactures* (*Chron. Rusticum*, published 1641), quotes the wool of Shropshire as being the choicest and dearest in England, and this is confirmed by Anderson in his "*Origin of Commerce*," giving prices for English Wool in 1343.

Cannock Chase in Staffordshire, an unenclosed Common, was also the habitat of a very similar and equally valuable race of a somewhat heavier type from which many of the best flocks in Staffordshire were originally descended.

William Pitt, writing in 1817, describes a grey-faced hornless sheep with fine wool, natives of Cannock Chase and Sutton Coldfield. These, he states, are the native common sheep, their characteristics are grey faces, lighter or darker, varying in white from white to black in different shades, the legs the same colour, wool fine, closely and compactly covering the carcass. The better breed of these sheep are similar to the South Down and not inferior, their general fault being a want of thickness in proportion to their length. This is confirmed by a Lincolnshire grazier, who in 1833 wrote thus:—"The Cannock Heath sheep are bred upon an extensive waste so named in Staffordshire. They are generally grey-faced without horns, bear fine wool and from many points of similitude between them and the Southdown it has been thought that they have been derived from the same stock. The bone, however, is coarser, nor do they possess the same beauty and compactness as the Southdown. In some of the neighbouring counties of Herefordshire, both in England and Wales, there is a breed of sheep very much resembling the Ryelands, known as the Shropshire Morfe. They bear wool of fine quality, generally have white faces and legs, though sometimes are a little freckled, are light in the bone, and have small clean limbs. There are two species, which from inattention to the breeds, are often blended, the one polled and the other having small light crooked horns."

A report to the Board of Agriculture in 1796 speaks of Sheep on a Common near Market Drayton, in the north of the County of Shropshire, and at Kinver Hill, and mentions the name of Dyott of Freeford, near Lichfield, as an early breeder.

The *Farmers' Magazine* alluding to the 1857 Salisbury Meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society, contains the following:—"The disposition of the Royal Agricultural Society to recognise more generally the different breeds of sheep in England by instituting a prize at the last meeting (Salisbury) for any short-wooled sheep not Southdown, has already had a beneficial tendency, inasmuch as it had been the means of bringing more immediately before the public a breed which even now is but partially known, and which but a few years ago was in utter obscurity. The original Shropshire can be traced to the Longmynd and other adjacent mountains in mid-Shropshire, and in its improved state may be thus described: a small but wide and well-formed head with a good countenance, a dark grey and somewhat speckled face with a whitening tendency towards the ear, somewhat erect and thickset in the neck, short, but symmetrically fine in the leg, broad in the shoulder, with very deep, full and well-developed brisket, rather long and particularly broad and level in the back, with ribs well covered and of a rounded tendency, low in the flank with exceedingly heavy hindquarters, and a leg very thick, round and low. The average weight at sixteen months would be about 20 to 22 lbs. per quarter, and a good flock would average 6—8 lbs. fleece. Their original mountain-breeding has stamped them with a remarkable hardihood of constitution. They will thrive and do well on land of a sterile nature, while in more generous districts the rapidity of their growth and their natural tendency to fatten are most extraordinary. Thickly depastured in the undulating districts of their native county they are ever a source of ready profit to their owners, who, beginning now to generally understand their superiority, tend them with the greatest skill, care and management. Hence this sheep, hitherto so little known, is now taking its proper place, and the few real Shropshire breeders who have been so indefatigable and untiring in their efforts to produce a perfect animal have at length been rewarded by obtaining for them a name and first class position amongst the sheep of this country. They possess to a singular degree the quality and symmetry which have made the Southdown so famous, but are much larger in scale, earlier at maturity and heavier in their wool-cutting properties. They cannot compete with the Hampshire Downs for size, but when weighed against their larger antagonists the compact and well-developed points of the Shropshire render the apparent disparity in size amply compensated for by the actual weight, while in fineness of quality they are very far their superiors.

It will be remembered that at the 1857 Royal meeting the Hampshire Down No. 722 took the first special prize awarded to its class, and being eligible to compete also in the class "Short-wooled sheep other than Southdown," was shown against the Shropshires, and with the others exhibited was defeated by Messrs.

Adney and Meire, two well-known county breeders of Shropshire sheep, who carried off two firsts and one second prize from this class. Mr. Adney's first prize shearling ram was afterwards let for the season to the Earl of Aylesford for 65 guineas.

From these parent stocks has evolved the modern Shropshire, but there are no reliable records as to how the improvement in size, in uniformity of character, and in the value and weight of the fleece was effected. In the early days, some historians say the Southdown ram was introduced for this purpose, whilst others equally well qualified to express an opinion assert that the present uniformity of character and perfection of form is the result of selection from home-bred sheep of the best type. Speaking from personal knowledge far back into the last century, I am in a position to assert that no one who has achieved any success as a breeder or exhibitor has deviated from a line of pure breeding for the last eighty to ninety years.

Two pioneer breeders must be mentioned in any article relating to Shropshire sheep, viz., Mr. Samuel Meire, formerly of Berrington but latterly of Harley, and Mr. George Adney, of Harley. Both these breeders did much to improve the original stock, and for many years sold rams at remunerative prices, and there is no doubt that many of the best present-day flocks contain much of the Meire and Adney blood.

A sidelight on the foundation of Mr. Adney's famous flock is given in the *Farmers' Magazine* for 1859 in the report of live-stock, which reads as follows:—"Mr. Adney, a famous breeder of Shropshire Downs, has generally a first-class letting; his flock was founded upwards of forty years ago upon the old black or grey faced sheep of the county, taking care to keep the dark-faced character and the fine and good wools. His first regular sales and lettings commenced in 1851 at good prices, and for the last four years his sales and lettings have averaged £18 each, many of his best varying from 25 to 84 guineas each."

Mr. Edward Holland's flock, we understand, quite equals this in his sales and lettings.

This is verified by a report in a Shrewsbury paper giving an account of one of Mr. Adney's sales at Harley, when upwards of 800 gentlemen partook of luncheon well supplied with wine and other beverages. Competition was keen and large prices easily realised. Rams made from 15 to 95 guineas, ewes from 4 to 8 guineas, theaves from 3 to 5 guineas, ram lambs from 8 to 22 guineas, and ewe lambs 2 to 2½ guineas. Buyers attended from Australia, France, Ireland, and several English counties.

The modern Shropshire bears no resemblance to the Shropshire sheep of seventy to eighty years ago, save and except its natural hardihood and its aptitude to adapt itself to all soils and climes.

The Shropshires which Messrs. Thomas Horton, George Adney, Samuel Meire, W. O. Foster, J. & E. Crane, Mrs. Baker, Messrs. John Coxon, Edward Holland, Thomas Mansell, Thomas Horley, John Stubbs, Sampson Byrd, Col. Dyott, Messrs. E. Thornton, and H. J. Sheldon successfully exhibited at the Royal Shows of 1853 to 1865, were for the most part brown with speckled faces and speckled legs, fine in the bone and devoid of wool, with bare bellies, and too often sickle hocked and crooked spines were the rule rather than the exception. The head of the male lacked masculine strength and character and carried little or no wool on the poll, and the sheep generally stood on much longer legs than the modern Shropshire. Little attention at this early date had been paid to the wool, which was generally of a soft open character and greatly lacking that density, length of staple and fineness which is now one of the leading attributes of the breed.

The present Shropshire is the result of great skill and judgment on the part of the breeder during the last eighty years. By degrees, nice soft black (not sooty) face and legs have supplanted the brown or speckled faced sheep, a straight spine has been obtained, the head of the male now possesses strength and character, and in both sexes the head is beautifully covered with wool of a valuable staple, which in addition to its charm against sore heads and flies, is a distinct improvement to the general appearance of the sheep. The wool is now the most valuable of all the short-wooled breeds when weight, denseness and length and fineness of staples are taken into account, and it is this fact which has proved of great value when crossing the Shropshire ram on the merino or com-back ewe, the result being an ideal mutton sheep, whilst the wool loses little of its merino character for density and fineness.

The extensive foreign trade for the last 45-50 years and the demand for black faces and legs has done much to eliminate the brown face and legs, and it is found in practice that the black leg which the Shropshire always puts on the cross-bred is a feature when they have to be marketed in London or elsewhere.

None of these great improvements in the contour and appearance of the present-day Shropshire have been obtained at the sacrifice of essential points, for the sheep of to-day is wider, deeper and fuller of flesh than the improved sheep of which we write, whilst its quality of wool and mutton have been greatly improved, and in addition the breed enjoys the reputation of being the hardiest, most prolific, and the earliest maturing of all the short-wooled varieties.

The spread of the Shropshire sheep is amongst the most remarkable features of the latter day livestock trade, brought about largely by the magnificent display of Shropshire sheep at the Royal Agricultural Show at Shrewsbury in 1884, when 875 sheep were exhibited as against 420 of all other breeds of sheep. No less than sixty competitors hailing from fifteen counties exhibited Shropshire sheep.

This remarkable exhibit brought a quick response in a most extraordinary foreign demand for Shropshires, mainly from the United States and Canada, and this in its turn stimulated home breeding, and Shropshires became universally spread over Great Britain and Ireland, doing particularly well in the Emerald Isle, where they have always been great favourites, and Shropshires have also done well North of the Tweed.

The public appearance of the breed in the Royal Showyard at Gloucester in 1853 was the turning point with the Shropshire sheep, and encouraged breeders to use their best judgment in selection, and do all in their power to place their breed of sheep in the front rank. The reports available state that Shropshires were in great force amongst the other short-woolled sheep.

The prizes on this occasion were won by Mr. Thomas Horton and Mr. W. O. Foster, the other exhibitors including Mr. Samuel Meire, Castle Hill, Much Wenlock; Mr. Charles Randell, Chadbury, Evesham; Mr. George Haughton, Pitchford; Mr. B. Vaughan, Burway, Ludlow; the Earl of Aylesford, and Mr. James Hand and Mr. F. Lloyd, both of Ludlow, who exhibited respectively what were styled old Shropshire grey ewes and Shropshire Down ewes.

It should, however, be noted that at the Royal Show at Shrewsbury in 1845 several Shropshire rams of various ages were exhibited by Mr. John Davies, of Halford, Ludlow, and that Mr. Forester, of High Ercall, Salop, also exhibited a ram forty months old, bred by Mr. Salisbury, Dordon, near Atherstone.

Shropshires were next seen at the Great National Show in 1857 at Salisbury. Reporting on this Show in the *Farmers' Magazine* we have the following:—

“The Shropshire Downs have for several years stood high as a distinct breed, they are very prolific breeders, they fatten upon very moderate food, their form is in good proportion, and they yield good fleeces.

“In reporting upon the Gloucester meeting (1853) we said something like this, that the best sheep in the Show was Shropshire Down. From that time our eye has been upon them, and, taking them in every point, we have yet to be convinced that they are to be surpassed by any other breed.”

At Chester Royal Show in 1858, Messrs. J. & E. Crane with *Celebrity*, Mr. W. O. Foster, Mrs. Annie Baker with *Chester Billy*, and Mr. G. Adney with *Patentee* and *Earl Salisbury*, were successful competitors, and the Reports of Judges at the Royal and at local Shows in succeeding years continue to draw attention to the qualities of the breed, which was first recognised as distinct at the Warwick Meeting in 1859, when special classes were admitted into the R.A.S.E. prize list, in which 192 sheep competed. At the Leeds Meeting in 1861, the judges of Shropshires reported:—“Perhaps no description

of sheep excited more interest in the Showyard than these. We find them in greater number than any other breed shown. It is impossible not to be struck with the appearance of these as a most useful rent-paying kind of animal. It would be well for breeders of these sheep to bear in mind that the qualities which have brought their sheep into notice are their aptitude to produce great weight and quality of both mutton and wool, combined with early maturity, while they will bear to be stocked more thickly than any other breed of equal weight. In addition to these good qualities, they are far more prolific than any other breed, and capital nurses.”

About this period the principal breeders were Mr. Sampson Byrd, Mr. Henry Mathews, Mr. Pryce W. Bowen, Lord Wenlock, all of whom were successful exhibitors at the Royal, and other breeders showing at that time and not already mentioned, include Mr. J. H. Bradburne, Mr. R. H. Masfen, Mr. Joseph Meire, Mr. Maddox, Mr. John Preece, Mr. John Stubbs, Mr. C. R. Keeling, Colonel Dyott, Mr. William Grindle, Mr. J. B. Green, Mr. T. C. Whitmore, Mr. Edward Thornton, Mr. Tarte, Mr. Urwick, Mr. Thomas Marsh, Mr. Grewcock, Mr. Nurse, &c., &c.

To repeat what has been so well put forward by experts in the middle of the last century, no breed is so prolific and with ordinary management and care during the autumn and winter, at least 50 per cent. of doubles may be looked for, though in many instances I have known a much larger crop, and the increase when a Shropshire ram is put upon long-woolled ewes is, to quote Professor Coleman's own words, “much greater.” In his work on the sheep of Great Britain he states that in the autumn he usually purchases forty Banffshire ewes, *i.e.*, a description of Border Leicesters, with a slight Cheviot cross, and serves them with a Shropshire ram, either a shearling or a ram lamb. In 1872, thirty-six ewes produced seventy-eight lambs (216 $\frac{2}{3}$  per cent.), all sold fat. In a subsequent year, forty ewes produced eighty-two lambs, but owing to unfavourable causes ten were lost.

Shropshires are not only very prolific, but they are capital nurses, and I have frequently seen one of a triplet take a leading position at the annual exhibitions and ultimately prove a good sire, whilst the other two in due time formed part of the breeder's own flock. This shows that triplets from Shropshire ewes can be reared successfully.

In November, 1862, Mr. F. J. Fox issued the following report from the Parlington Tenant Farmers' Club:—

The members of this Club having brought to a close their second experiment in summer grazing the following different breeds of shearling sheep—Shropshire, Leicester, Lincoln, and North sheep—for the purpose of ascertaining with an equal or given quantity of food the class most profitably adapted to their locality, comply with the wishes of their friends in again publishing the result.

The lambs were wintered together and alike until May 20, clipped and brought to pasture, twelve of each class and upon about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  acres of seeds equally alike and without cake, and the tabular statement speaks for itself:—

Class of Sheep.	Weight of twelve sheep on May 20, 1862, when brought to test.		Total increase October 20, 1862.		Total Weight October 20, 1862.	
	st.	lb.	st.	lb.	st.	lb.
Shropshire .. ..	108	2	49	9	157	9
Leicester .. ..	99	10	42	3	141	13
Lincoln .. ..	119	6	38	10	158	2
North Sheep .. ..	109	9	34	8	144	3

Mr. Fox adds that should reference be made to the first experiment it will appear that the second trial verifies the first in showing the leading propensities of the Shropshire to gain weight.

That Shropshires still lead in this direction is strikingly evidenced by an experiment carried out by the Leeds University in 1932-33 with the object of determining the merits of sires of different breeds of sheep for the production of fat lambs.

Four breeds of pure bred lambs were used, 20 Cheviot ewes being put to each ram on the 29th September, and the rams were taken away on November 23rd, 1932.

The Shropshire Crosses headed the list for the live weight increase per head per week with an average of 3.79 lbs., against 3.76, 3.54 and 3.53 lbs. for the other breeds.

The Shropshire Cross carcasses averaged 49.8 per cent., while the average age at which the lambs were fit was again in favour of the Shropshire Crosses by nearly four days. The single lambs averaged 37 lbs. in 92 days, the nearest to this being 33 lbs. in 95 days.

It is also worthy of note that the highest selling price was realised by the Shropshire Cross lambs.

Nowhere do Shropshires thrive better than in the humid climate of the Emerald Isle; even in the Highlands of Scotland the Shropshire has been bred for a lengthened period with signal success, and the Shropshire cross for fat lambs have for several years secured a large proportion of the prizes at the Highland and the Agricultural Society's annual shows.

The hardihood and longevity of the breed is testified to in *Saddle and Sirloin* (Mr. Dixon, p. 449), where he states that Mr. Samuel Meire's *Magnum Bonum* (first Royal Show at Salisbury, 1857), was used for eleven seasons, and that his dam lived till she was twenty.

Again in 1896, the present writer saw a Shropshire ewe nineteen years old, hale and hearty, having reared thirty-three lambs and during the whole of this time she had enjoyed absolute immunity from foot-rot.

To quote another instance: the dam of *Beaconsfield* 338, bred by Mr. T. Mansell and used successfully by Mr. Matthew Williams, was thirteen years old when this ram was born.

Again going back to 1860, it seems clear that at that period several first-class flocks existed. An expert, commenting on the display of Shropshires at Canterbury Royal Show, 1860, speaks in these words:—"Two wonderfully good rams were the heroes of the new class of Shropshires, and a very good class too. We honestly admit this grant has worked even thus early, far better than we expected. It has brought out men who did not care to send to Birmingham and Smithfield, and the world never knew how many good flocks of Shropshires there were till now. Mr. Holland, the Member for Worcestershire, who has some good sheep of his own, gave the stiff price of £126 for Mr. Byrd's first prize ram, *Canterbury Patentee* 13. There were over 40 shearling rams and 20 others. The mere fact that such old established breeders as Mr. Orme Foster, Mr. Smith, of Sutton Maddock, and Mr. H. J. Sheldon, of Brailes, could get no nearer than a commendation will go to show how excellent was the entry, and how strong the competition."

*The Farmers' Magazine* again (1860) reiterates its opinion that the Shropshire is one of the most profitable and best of the modern breeds, and that it may be said to possess the most commendable points of the Southdown and Leicester breeds, being such a judicious commingling and blending of the two characters of the animals, in size and proportion, and in wool, as to produce a kind second to none in every phase of their character. They are exceedingly prolific, possess handsome and large frames, come early to maturity, are very hardy, and yield a great weight, both of wool and mutton, both exceedingly good in quality. This breed is also extending itself over a large tract of country, and is fast becoming not only a very numerous but a very important breed of sheep.

It is also worthy of note that at the Essex Agricultural Show held at Witham in 1863, Mr. F. Smith, of West Hanningfield, won the first prize of £5 for Shropshire Shearling rams in a class where Shropshires and Oxfords competed; that in a class of five ewes of any breed that have reared lambs, Mr. H. Moss was placed second with a pen of Shropshires, and that in a class for wool, Mr. F. Smith, who showed Shropshire wool, was only beaten by Mr. Charles Sturgeon's merino.

Referring to published reports of some of the principal shows commencing in 1856, we find Shropshires have even then been extensively exhibited and were rapidly coming into public favour. *The Farmers' Magazine* commenting on the Birmingham Fat Cattle Show in 1856, says the sheep show was not a large one, but with good pens of Shropshires as usual. Mr. S. C. Pilgrim, Burbage, Hinckley, near Leicester, won first prize and the silver medal for three fat wethers, the other prizewinners including the Earl of Aylesford and Mr. H. Smith, junr., whilst the Right Hon. Robert Curzon, of Hagley, near Rugeley, was commended.

The writer goes on to say he specially admired Mr. Henry Smith's first prize wethers exceeding twenty-two months for their splendid quality of meat, broad chines and full plaits, wonderfully good loins and rumps.

In Ireland about the same period Shropshires were being exhibited at the meeting of the Royal Agricultural Society of Ireland and the Royal Dublin Society's Show by Mr. C. W. Hamilton, of Dunboyne, Mr. Peter Broughton, of Kells, Mr. L. W. Lambart, Beau Parc, Mr. L. H. King Harmara and Lord Londonderry, Lt.-Col. Tottenham, Mr. C. H. Hamilton, Mr. Tuite and Mr. Atkinson.

Shropshires were first recognised by the London Smithfield Club in 1861, but numerically they were poorly represented, and all the prizes fell to Mr. Holland, of Dumbleton, Evesham, and Mr. W. O. Foster. They are described as undeniably fine animals with great expansive frames and all the evidence of vigour both in the touch and wool.

At the International Fat Stock Show held at Poissy, France, in the same year the report of the meeting commenting on the sheep classes says:—Save for one middling animal, Mr. Edward Holland's first prize pen of Shrops. (which also won the first prize at the London Smithfield Show), formed the most even pen in the show. The five weighed eighty-two stones.

From 1857-63 several fresh names had been added to the successful list of breeders, including Lord Wenlock, Lord Dartmouth, Mr. G. A. May, Mr. J. Coxon, and Mr. Thomas Mansell, of Adcott, who won prizes at the Birmingham Christmas Show in 1863; and Mr. John Coxon, Mr. J. H. Sheldon, and Mr. Thomas Horley, junr., who were in the Prize List at Warwick, 1859. Mr. Coxon sold his ram, *Juvenile 8th*, for £100 to go to Ireland.

It is only stating a truism to say that the breed is much valued and widely spread over the earth's surface, and it would be well to consider how it has gained this extraordinary popularity.

*Favourable Points.*—150 to 175 lambs per 100 ewes is the usual average. A return from 11,666 ewes gave 168 lambs per 100 ewes.

*The ewes good mothers.*—Shropshire ewes are excellent nurses, and nature has endowed them with great milk-yielding properties.

*Wool properties.*—The Shropshire sheep cuts a heavy fleece of wool of the most marketable description, being of good staple, fine in texture and very dense, with small loss in scour and always readily saleable. Average weight of fleece for whole flock 7-8 lb. Individual fleeces much more. Shearling rams up to 18 lb. Shearling ewes up to 13 lb.

Shropshire wool has won the Championship at the Royal Show on three occasions, in 1920 against all breeds, and in 1931 and 1934 for short-woolled sheep.

*Adaptability to various soils and climes.*—The most ubiquitous sheep extant, in every County in England the Shropshire sheep flourishes, also in the Highlands of Scotland, the humid climate of Ireland, and in the mountainous districts of Wales, frequently at an altitude of 1,000 ft. above sea level.

The Shropshire also thrives and does well in the United States, Canada, South America, Russia, France, Germany, the Australian Colonies, South Africa, Jamaica, and the Falkland Isles, and indeed in every part of the world.

*Early maturity.*—If well cared for the wethers are fit for the butcher at 10 to 12 months old, and that on a moderate consumption of food. Shropshire Lambs, mature very early as fat lambs and the Shropshire cross for the fat lamb trade cannot be beaten Throughout Australia, Tasmania, and New Zealand, the Shropshire ram is largely used for this special purpose with wonderful results.

*Constitution and hardihood.*—The breed is notoriously sound in constitution, and capable of withstanding extreme variations of heat and cold, and is one of the most hardy breeds in existence.

*Quality of mutton.*—The mutton of the Shropshire is rich in flavour, close in grain, juicy, and contains a large percentage of lean meat, and commands the highest price in the London, Manchester, Liverpool, and all the principal markets in Great Britain. Note the report of the "Block Test" in the *Live Stock Journal*, January 3, 1913:—Shropshire lambs, first in class, bred and exhibited by Mr. Kenneth Milnes; age, about 9 months; average live weight, 156 lb.; average daily gain of live weight, 0.58 lb.; average weight of dressed carcass, 95 lb.; average weight of skin, 15 lb.; average weight of caul fat, 8 lb.; average percentage of dressed carcass to gross live weight, 61.06 lb.

These sheep dressed out very evenly, and cut full of lean, in fact they were ideal butcher's carcasses.

*General purpose sheep.*—Shropshire sheep have rapidly increased in favour in all parts of the world, and combining as they do the most desirable points (from a wool and mutton point of view)



with the minimum of objectionable features, they have obtained an eminent and permanent position in the estimation of sheep-breeders all over the world. In fact, they meet all the requirements of the present day as a successful general purpose sheep and are therefore very profitable to farmers and graziers. The Shropshire has been very largely bred for crossing purposes to produce freezers with splendid results. The Shropshire-Merino cross produces a very fine sheep, and is preferred by many who have tried it to any other cross. The half-bred is a deep, square-set sheep, well covered with a fine close fleece, which gives a high percentage of clean, scoured wool, and commands a comparatively high price, whilst the sheep are hardy and fatten to nice handy weights at a very early age.

Probably one of the most valuable attributes Shropshire sheep possess is their power to sustain life on the poorest and scantiest of food, and this has been forcibly brought to my mind by the comparatively small mortality amongst Shropshire flocks on Australian Stations during a prolonged drought as compared with Merinos. This hardy character is no doubt inherited from the original parent stock which largely roamed the hills and commons of Shropshire and Staffordshire.

It has never been the custom to judge Shropshire sheep by points, which in the writer's opinion is a method somewhat difficult of application, and more correct results will be obtained by the judge weighing the points for and against in his own mind and then giving his decision.

The best type of Shropshire should possess (particularly in the male) a well-developed head, with clean and striking expression of countenance, a muscular neck well set on good shoulders, the body symmetrical and deep, placed as squarely as possible on short strong legs, due regard being paid to grandeur of style, the face and legs should be a nice soft black (not sooty), the head should be nicely covered, and the wool generally should be fine, of great density and length of staple.

The skin should be nice cherry colour and the belly and scrotum (in the males) should be well woolled.

In all breeds there are more or less two types, and it is to a certain extent the case with Shropshire sheep. Some favour the short-legged, symmetrical, deep, lean-fleshed sheep, covered with a dense heavy fleece, while others prefer the longer-legged animal with more size, and open, soft wool, and possibly a little more bone. Personally I have always considered the Shropshire sheep as a medium-sized sheep of good quality with a robust constitution, maturing early at a small cost, admirably adapted as a general purpose sheep. What I wrote some years ago I again repeat, and it fully expresses my views on medium *versus* large sheep. Some farmers prefer a big coarse sheep on long legs, but I

am quite convinced of this, that the most rent-paying class is the moderate-sized sheep of good quality, because the butchers can sell them the more readily and at better prices, and a greater weight per acre can be raised than where the larger and coarser sheep is resorted to, for 100 ewes in the former instance require as much land for their support as 130-140 well-bred moderate-sized ewes.

Men are too apt to look at the price per head of their teg sheep rather than the return per acre of mutton, and the better prices obtained for moderate-weighted sheep as compared with those which dress 70-90 lb.

To Shropshire breeders will belong the credit for all time of having founded the first Flock-Book ever published in this or any country. In the autumn of 1882 a meeting was called of the leading Shropshire breeders who formed themselves into the Shropshire Sheep Breeders and Flock Book Society. The first volume was published in 1883, and since then a volume has appeared annually.

At the 1934 International Live Stock Exposition at Chicago, the American Shropshire Registry Association celebrated their Golden Jubilee, this Association having been in existence for 50 years, and being the second oldest Sheep Register in the World. The Grand Champion Wether of the entire Show was a Shropshire, and the Grand Champion Car load also contained Shropshires.

The Flock Book Society has done much to encourage breeders and disseminate knowledge abroad of the valuable attributes of the breed, and to this source alone much of the extraordinary demand of the last forty years can be traced.

#### OFFICIAL DESCRIPTION.

**"A long, low, deep sheep on short legs, with good flesh, dense wool, cherry skin, and nice soft black face and legs. The covering (wool) on the head must not be excessive, in fact, a nice covering on the poll shall be deemed sufficient, and this applies with even more force to the legs. Bone of good quality is essential."**

ALFRED MANSELL.

*College Hill,  
Shrewsbury.*

