



Leicester Lowdown

June 2016

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From the President's Pen

Welcome to the June edition of the Leicester Lowdown. With all the rain that has fallen over Australia's east coast during the last few weeks I hope that you and your sheep are safe and well.

It is a pleasure once again to welcome two new members. Katherine Wheeler, Lavington NSW and Wendy Beer from Moorngag, Vic. They have both registered flocks in the past 12 months. We wish them both well with the English Leicesters and I am sure that they will get a lot of pleasure from their sheep.

We send our best wishes to Ethel Stephenson and Malcolm Baird. Ethel is still residing in the Morrie Evans Aged Care Wing of the Benalla Hospital and Malcolm is in the Campbell Town hospital as the result of a fall. We wish you both well.

A reminder to all members that yearly membership fees are due to be paid at the end of July. These can be paid by either direct debit or cheque sent to our treasurer Lisa Docherty. Your membership of the English Leicester Association is important as the association promotes the breed and acts as a contact point for people interested in English Leicesters.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held in September and I encourage members to attend and take an active role in the association. I would also welcome stories and articles from members for future newsletters as this is an ideal way to tell others of your experiences with English Leicesters.

In conclusion I would like to take the opportunity to indulge in a little self-pride in announcing that Duncan and Jane produced Anne and I a grandson last August, Alexander Brodie Heazlewood. Alexander is the 7th generation and will hopefully be one day looking after the English Leicesters.

Brenton Heazlewood - President

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Above: Three generations: Alexander, Duncan and Brenton Heazlewood

Right: Jane, Alexander and Brenton Heazlewood.



Should the English Leicester have modernized?

Brenton Heazlewood

Should all sheep breeds have kept pace with modern trends? That is, kept “modern”?

This is a question that stud stock breeders must have been asking themselves ever since Robert Bakewell did the first major sheep breeding improvement in the second half of the 1700's by breeding the New Leicester.

It is certainly true that present day breeds that have continued to develop, such as the Poll Dorset, White Suffolk and Border Leicester are popular and widely used in their sector of the sheep industry. They have kept pace with today's requirements for quicker maturity, more muscle and less fat etc. It is relatively easy for today's stud and commercial breeders to make changes in their breeding programmes to keep pace with consumer requirements through the use of performance recording and now DNA testing.

If all breeds kept changing to stay modern, the sheep industry would soon lack the genetic diversity that it has today. I think it is important that the so-called heritage breeds stay as they are, even though they may not be an economical enterprise for their keepers.

The English Leicester has perhaps the greatest role in “staying as it is”. It has undoubtedly contributed more to other breeds of sheep than any other sheep breed.

How do we tell if the English Leicester has changed significantly in the last 225 years? One way is to look at the early descriptions given to the breed by the breeders and authors of the time.

The following description of the New Leicester is taken from the book “Bischoff on Wool Woollens and Sheep” Vol II, published in 1842. If this description is compared with the one in today's flock book we can see that the basis of the breed is still the same.

As a lowland sheep, and destined to live on good pasture, the New Leicester is without a rival: in fact, he has improved, if he has not given the principal value to all the other long woolled sheep.

The head should be hornless, long, small, tapering towards the muzzle, and projecting horizontally forwards. The eyes prominent, but with quiet expression. The ears thin, rather long, and directed backwards. The neck full and broad at its base, where it proceeds from the chest, but gradually tapering towards the head, and being particularly fine at the junction of the head and neck; the neck seeming to project straight from the chest, so that there is, with the slightest deviation, one continued horizontal line from the rump to the poll. The breast broad and full, the shoulders also broad and round, and no uneven or angular formation where the shoulders join the either the neck or the back, particularly no rising of the withers, or hollow behind the situation of these bones. The arm fleshy through its whole extent, and even down to the knee. The bones of the legs small, standing wide apart, no looseness of skin about them, and comparatively bare of wool. The chest and barrel at once deep and round, the ribs forming a considerable arch from the spine, so as in some cases, and especially when the animal is in good condition, to make the apparent width of the chest even greater than the depth. The barrel ribbed well home, no irregularity of line on the back or the belly, but on the side the carcass very gradually diminishing in width towards the rump. The quarters long and full, and, as with the fore legs, the muscles extending down to the hock; the thighs also wide and full. The legs of a moderate length, the pelt also moderately thin, but soft and elastic, and covered with a good quality of white wool, not so long as in some breeds, but considerably finer.

The principal recommendations of this breed are its beauty and its fullness of form, comprising, in the same apparent dimensions, greater weight than any other sheep, an early maturity, and a prosperity to fatten, equaled by no other breed; a diminution in the proportion of offal, and the return of most money for the quantity of food consumed.

Should the English Leicester have modernised? In my opinion - no.

The English Leicester is the breed it is because it has not significantly changed. The characteristics which Bakewell so strongly fixed in the breed have served it and the wider sheep industry well for over two centuries.

Mulesing and the English Leicester

Brenton Heazlewood

It may not be widely known that there is a connection between the developer of the mulesing operation, Mr JHW Mules and English Leicesters.

In 1931 Mr Mules, while living at Woodside(SA) set out to minimise the blowfly strike in sheep by removing the folds and breech on merino sheep. On August 10, 1931 he demonstrated his method to Sir Charles Martin (Chief of the Animal Nutrition Division of the CSIRO) and Dr LB Bull who were both impressed by the possibilities this operation had in reducing the costly loss to fly strike the sheep industry suffered.

Koonamore and Melton stations in the north-east of South Australia were the first to try out the operation.

Mr Mules was born in 1876 at Semaphore and in the 1890's worked on the Oraporinna and Coongy stations. He later farmed at Strathalbyn, Grenfell and Ideraway (NSW), Emerald and Keppel Island (Qld). In 1916 he returned to South Australia and managed Bon Bon Station and later Arcoona. He then bought Three Creeks in the Flinders Rangers and then property at Woodside and Teal Flat on the River Murray before retiring in 1937.

It was while he was farming at Ideraway in 1906 that he imported 85 Leicester sheep from New Zealand from which he hoped to breed a good type of ram for producing crossbred lambs from Merino ewes. He exhibited the English Leicesters that he had imported at the Toowoomba and Brisbane shows in July and August of 1906 so those who were interested " would have an excellent opportunity of examining the new importations".

In 1936 Mr Mules is again using the English Leicester when he set out to produce a new breed of sheep. To do this he crossed a pure Peppin Merino ram with pure bred English Leicester ewes. The English Leicesters were chosen because of their good mothering and he hoped they would increase the milk yield of the female sheep of the new breed. The breed would be hornless and the wool was expected to be of bright colour and full of lustre.

I have not been able to find any reports on the success or otherwise of this venture but I would assume that nothing came of it as Mr Mules retired the following year.

Not only was Mr Mules an innovator in the sheep industry but he was also interested in introducing new pasture species to help improve pasture production.

In 1935 while at Woodside he announces in an advertisement in The Mount Barker Courier that he has been appointed the sole South Australian representative of the New England Pure Seeds Association, of Glen Innes, NSW, and as such has a small quantity of Phalaris seed for sale.

There is no doubt that Mr Mules was an innovator in the agricultural scene of his time. Whilst the mulesing operation which he developed has now come in for criticism from animal welfare groups, it cannot be denied that it has saved the lives of many thousands of sheep over the past 100 years.

Mr Mules was a true Merino man, but like many innovative sheep breeders over the years since Bakewell bred the Leicester, he saw the potential that the Leicester had to help him achieve his sheep breeding aims.

Did you know...

Wool fibres are very durable and flexible. Wool fibre can withstand being bent 20,000 times without breaking. In comparison, cotton breaks after 3,000 bends and silk after 2,000 bends. Wool is a hard wearing and wool's natural elasticity means that the fibres will stretch under pressure and "spring back" when the pressure is released, making wool the perfect filling for wool quilts.

- See more at: <https://www.minijumbuk.com.au>

Dangers of eating Leicester Sheep

[Warwick Examiner and Times, Qld. Saturday 25 March 1876]

An astonishing discovery, made by Mr Justice Ward of New Zealand, is recorded in the *Wellington Evening Post*. The learned gentleman has ascertained that crime is attributable, in a great measure, to the consumption of Leicester sheep, and he sets forth his theory in the following words:-

“As a machine for the production of wool and tallow, I believe the Leicester sheep to be unrivalled; but the creature is utterly unfit for human food. The human stomach was not intended to be turned into a tallow vat, except in the Polar Regions. I attribute a large proportion of the crime in the colony to the abominable animal, the Leicester sheep. In the best form it is simply an animal mass of tallow. Its consumption leads inevitably to dyspepsia, and dyspepsia to drink. Drink takes a man direct to the assizes, and the assizes lead him to lowed depths still.”

The *Post* suggests that “if eating Leicester sheep leads a man to drink, and to commit assaults, burglary, forgery and murder – because that in truth is all implied in the assertion of Mr Justice Ward – then an Act of Parliament should be passed forth-with, providing that Leicester sheep should henceforth be disposed of solely by being boiled down.”

A Letter to a Lamb

*When you grow and you certainly will
Your coat will be shorn and washed until
It becomes a rainbow of colours that fill
Shelves in the shops; woven in the mill*

*Threading the wool through groves in the loom
And winding the hank as I sit in my room
Listening to the sounds outside in the gloom
The warmth of the firelight means memories bloom*

*I weave them into the work in my hand
The rib, the collar, the gathering band
Lovingly tending each silver strand
And hear the sounds of the lambs of the land*

*See colours that knit as a golden seem,
A windmill of wool, by a cool run stream
That creeps through the meadow with fish that seem
To wear twilight sequins on backs that gleam.*

*When this falling day returns to its end,
When tomorrow the colours I blend
Into the yarn this thought I send
I salute you my animal friend.*

[Leicester Longwool Sheepbreeders' Magazine
Issue 7]



OF ALL THE ANIMALS THAT HAVE BEEN DOMESTICATED BY MAN, NONE HAS RENDERED HIM MORE ESSENTIAL SERVICE THAN THE SHEEP. A LARGE PART OF THE FOOD AND CLOTHING OF THE CIVILISED WORLD IS SUPPLIED BY THIS USEFUL ANIMAL. THE CULTURE, IMPROVEMENT, AND MANUFACTURE OF ITS FLEECE, HAVE CONSTANTLY ACCOMPANIED AND MARKED THE PROGRESS OF CIVILISATION BOTH IN ANCIENT AND MODERN TIMES.
[Abraham Rees, Cyclopaedia 1819]