



Leicester Lowdown

August 2017

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From the Presidents Pen

Welcome to the 2017 Leicester Lowdown.

What a difference a year makes when talking about seasonal conditions. This time last year our sheep were swimming in the very wet conditions that eastern Australia in particular was experiencing, whereas this year we are very dry. These dry conditions are certainly easier on the livestock but we are perhaps suffering from a lack of good autumn growth.

It is very pleasing to welcome 3 new breeders to the English Leicester fold and one returning breeder.

Jim Fletcher lives at Cooma, NSW and is primarily a fine wool producer, marketing his own processed wool, but has gone to the opposite end of the scale in starting an English Leicester stud.

George Willows is 8 years old and lives at Evandale, Tasmania, carrying on a family tradition in English Leicesters. George's grandfather, Ian Campbell had the "Nant" English Leicester stud until his death 6 years ago at which time Edward Hogarth was given Nant ewes as the foundation for his stud. George has recently purchased Edward's entire stud which still carries the Nant bloodlines so will be continuing a family tradition. It is good to see young people interested in the breed.

Victor Goring from Wellcamp, Qld has had an interest in English Leicesters for a long time and when offered some sheep from Ethel's flock he took the opportunity and in so doing becomes the third English Leicester stud registered in Queensland.

Di MacFarlane from Jindivick, Vic, has re-registered her flock. Di is no stranger to English Leicesters as she was heavily involved in the English Leicester Association many years ago. It is good to have this flock re-registered.

The Associations website has received a major makeover thanks to Stuart. This will give us a much better presence in this digital age. I encourage all members to have a look at the website.
<http://www.englishleicester.org.au>

In closing I wish you all a good lambing season and may the weather be kind to us while the next generation of this important breed of sheep are being delivered.



Lambing with my grandson Alexander

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New beginnings – Kathy Wheeler

My purchase of six girls from Ethel Stephenson's herd dispersal was for me a serendipitous occasion.

I had been researching sheep breeds for fleece styles suitable for fibre arts for some time. I would have liked to procure some Wensleydale sheep for their luscious locks, as they were not only gorgeous but in demand in fibre art circles. Sadly the breed had died out in Australia.

The next most desirable breed I found for wonderful lustrous locks was the English Leicester, also known as the Leicester Longwool. And by luck they were still available in Australia!

My research had among other places led me to the English Leicester Association of Australia's website. Looking over the Members Directory I found breeders geographically close to our location on the NSW/Victorian border and stated emailing or ringing them.

In a pure stroke of luck I happened to be ringing Ethel Stephenson's number when her caretakers answered the phone. I learnt of Ethel's herd dispersal and was very keen to get some

foundation animals to start my flock.

My six girls arrived in July 2015, and now my small flock numbers twelve - six foundation ewes, plus four ewe lambs and two wether lambs.

At first my foundation girls were understandably stand-offish. The dominant ewe would stamp her foot if we came near. But in time they were won over by food (isn't everyone?) and now feeding out is like playing dodgem cars with big woolly pillows!

I do have my favourites. Some are more approachable than others, and one ewe actually seeks out a chin rub regularly.

I also have my naughties, especially one ewe lamb who can still get her head stuck in the mesh fences cause "the grass is always greener on the other side". They all have their own unique personalities.

Being able to get up close to body score and fleece check is important to me in my quest for their fibre and to learn more about them.

Although I have bred alpacas for nearly four years, and grew up in the country at Wagga, my only previous experience at keeping sheep was raising

a poddy Dorper lamb we found dumped with a broken leg barely a few days old. I told the poor little chap if he survived he could stay. He thrived, and the leg healed so well you wouldn't know it was ever broken. He lives with his poddy goat companion in a separate paddock - don't want them teaching the sheep their bad tricks!

There is still a long way for me to go in learning the requirements and husbandry for my ELs. Getting the timing right for shearing and crutching - and someone who knows how to do it - is still posing challenges. My wonderful alpaca shearers "don't do sheep". Fortunately the network of sheep breeders in this region is pretty good to call on for help, and things are slowly working out as I learn more about my small flock.

Their lustrous locks are what first attracted me to the English Leicester. I've been using locks from their first shearing with one of my other passions - natural dyes. I know the EL fleece also felts well, and being "strong-wool" makes it appealing to spin up for the warp on my tapestry and weaving looms.



English Leicesters in Queensland - Brenton Heazlewood

Today we do not think of English Leicesters having a place in the southern Queensland pastoral industry, but 100 years ago they were there in significant numbers. Not only was this breed that we usually associate with the cooler, temperate climate of southern Australia being used in the hotter northern pastoral areas, but a large number of them were being imported from New Zealand.

One hundred years ago the English Leicester and Lincoln, were at their peak in popularity in both Australia and New Zealand, with their numbers being second only to the Merino in Australia. They were the first choice as the sire for both the first cross ewe and the prime lamb itself. A common practice of the time was to put the English Leicester ram back over the English Leicester/Merino cross ewes to produce the prime lamb. It was for this reason, the good offspring that they produced when mated to the Merino, that they were used in the southern parts of Queensland, mainly on the Darling Downs.

Free settlement was not permitted in Queensland until 1842, and it was during the 1840's that there started to be a big push of sheep north from New South Wales, initially into the Darling Downs area. The sheep numbers must have increased significantly as in 1847 the port of Maryborough was opened as a wool port. Whether English Leicesters accompanied their Merino cousins in the opening up of the Queensland pastoral industry is hard to say, but it could be safely assumed that they would have soon followed.

In 1858, Mr Broughton of Ipswich was advertising "a number of pure improved Leicester sheep" for sale. This would indicate that Leicesters had arrived in Queensland earlier, rather than later, and most likely these early sheep would have been taken north from either New South Wales or Victoria. Certainly by the early 1870's Leicesters were being imported into Queensland directly from England. In July 1871, the *Ramsey* from London brought 40

pure bred Leicester sheep to Moreton Bay, and in November of the same year the Hon. James Taylor imported 2 Leicester rams and 5 ewes to Toowoomba at a cost of two hundred and fifty pounds.

Both Lincolns and Leicesters were exhibited at the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland show which was held in Toowoomba in 1873. C B Fisher won first prize in the class for the "Best pen of two Lincoln, Leicester or any other long-woolled rams", with his Leicesters. It is interesting to note that there were also classes for the best pen of two Lincoln, Leicester or any other long-woolled *Colonial* ram hoggets and *Colonial* ewe hoggets. The ram hogget class was won by the Cotswolds, a breed that is sadly no longer in Australia.

In 1876 the sheep population of Queensland was about 7.6 million. Of these about 5000 were Leicesters or other long-wool breeds, about 150,000 were cross-breeds, principally Leicester-Merino and the remainder Merinos.

In 1906 Mr JHW Mules 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. Although he was living at Ideraway (NSW) at the time 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". Mr Mules was the developer of what we now call the mulesing operation.

The "foremost breeder of English Leicesters in Queensland", Mr F GG Couper of Westbrook, writing in 1908, had great praise for the English Leicester as a ram to be crossed with the Merino ewe, and he believed better still, the second cross for producing fat lambs. Mr Couper founded his stud in 1905 with the purchase of ewes from New Zealand. This was the first English Leicester registered stud in Queensland.

English Leicesters in Queensland – continued ...

Mr A C Thompson, of Fairfield Stud Farm near Dalby made a major importation of English Leicesters from New Zealand in 1912. Again his aim was to supply the fat lamb market and he selected the Leicester because it was the foundation of the "Canterbury lamb, which has been described as the finest in the world". He could see no reason why they should not do well on the Downs, the annual rainfall he said was the same in Dalby as Christchurch, and although the climate was a little warmer he did not think that would affect them much, as "Leicesters were the best fitted of the longwools to stand the heat".

Mr Thompson travelled to New Zealand and purchased 54 rams and 64 ewes. The ewes and the best rams he said he would keep as a stud flock (although it appears that a stud was never registered), the remainder of the rams being used to cross with Merino ewes. The cross ewe lambs he planned to cross again with the Leicester ram "and anticipates being able to turn out lambs for export equal to any sent out by any other country".

Six years later, in 1918, Mr Thompson wrote an article that was published in The Sydney Stock and Station Journal in which he gave a report on his use of the English Leicester as a basis for his fat lamb enterprise. He reported that along with some other lamb breeders, he had sent to London a shipment of fat lambs and had received a report from Borthwick that they, "were equal to, if not better than prime Canterbury lamb". Mr Thompson also reported that he had had considerable success in the show ring with his Queensland bred rams.

The use of New Zealand English Leicester blood lines was not restricted to Queensland, with importations being made by breeders in other states, particularly South Australia.

New Zealand was of course not the only source of English Leicesters for the Queensland ram breeders. In 1910, my great grandfather, RG Heazlewood, sent, by the steamer *Gabo* to Brisbane, two English Leicester rams and several ewes which had

been purchased by Mr CH Grove of Kelvin Grove, Nanango. It would be fairly safe to assume that other breeders in Tasmania, and particularly those from the closer states of Victoria and New South Wales would have supplied quantities of English Leicesters to this northern market.

The history of registered English Leicester flocks in Queensland is a sorry one. As already mentioned, Mr FGG Couper of Westbrook, was the first Queenslander to register a stud, that being flock number 27 (no prefix is recorded). This stud was founded in 1905 but only appears in Volumes I, II and III (1910, 1911 and 1912) of the Flock Book for The Longwool Breeds of Sheep in Australia. It ceases to be registered after 1912. We then have to wait another 71 years for the only other English Leicester stud to be registered in Queensland. In 1983 RM Thompson of Pimpama founded flock number 353, prefix Cottage Hill. This stud only remained registered for 10 years.

As far as I can tell these are the only two studs to represent the English Leicester breed from Queensland in any of the following:

- Flock Book for The English Leicester and Border Leicester Breed of Sheep in Australia and Tasmania
- Flock Book for The Longwool Breeds of Sheep in Australia
- Flock Book for British Breeds of Sheep in Victoria
- Flock Book for British Breeds of Sheep in Australia
- Australian Flock Register

But all is not doom and gloom as a new stud has just been registered, being the third one for Queensland. Victor Gorrington, from Wellcamp near Toowoomba has just registered his sheep and plans to exhibit them in local shows. While this is certainly not a return to the glory of times past it is very pleasing to once again know that the English Leicester is represented in Queensland and has found a home in a part of the state where it was once so popular.

Bellevue Park – Jim Fletcher

Bellevue Park is a family owned and run farm, located at Rocky Plains near Berridale in the Snowy Mountains of N.S.W. Bellevue Park is made up of two properties - one at Rocky Plains and the other, more recent addition, "Braeside" is located at Dry Plains near Adaminaby. Bellevue sits on decomposed granite and Braeside is set on basalt country. Between the two properties we run about 3000 sheep and 30 cows with calves.

It all started with Jack Fletcher when he purchased Bellevue in 1922 from Patty O'Neil. Unfortunately, Jack passed away in 1932. His eldest son Frederick G. Fletcher took over at the age of 16 and ran the farm for 68 years. He handed it on to his second eldest son Frederick W. Fletcher (Bill). In 2014 an intergenerational hand over was started between Bill and Wendy Fletcher to their son James (Jim) Fletcher and his wife Elizabeth.

When Bellevue was purchased in 1922 there were approximately 100 Merino ewes included in the sale. These first merinos were fine-fine mediums, mainly based on Hazeldene blood. The Saxon merinos were only introduced in 1980 when Bill and

Wendy purchased 25 ewes and one ram from Grathlyn Merino Stud, Mudgee. From then the flock changed from the fine-fine mediums to a superfine line of merinos. This changeover took approx. fifteen years, slowly breeding up the superfine Merinos and culling based on wool strength and structure. Now the flock is made up of 1500 breeding ewes, 800 young ewes, 600 wethers and 100 rams. The flock has an average micron of 16.

In 2013/2014 the dollar value for our top lines of fleece wool had slipped to less than 1000 cents per kilo which wasn't even enough to cover our costs let alone support a family. This is when the idea was born to get our wool processed into knitting yarn. In 2014 we sent our first lot of wool to New Zealand for processing. We received it back as 18 colours in 4 and 8 ply in April 2015. We then had a second lot processed in 2016 boosting our range to 20 dyed colours as well 2, 4 and 8 ply undyed and unbleached yarn for hand dyeing.

In 2016 we added English Leicesters to our flock with the purchase of 9 ewes in lamb from Colin Taylor,

"Koenarl". Then in 2017 we purchased 5 ewes and 1 ram from Brenton Heazlewood, "Melton Park", Tasmania and another 3 Ewes from Colin.

The English Leicesters were added to our farm for a couple of reasons - one to help save a rare breed of sheep but the main reason being is that we would love to be able to blend the strong lustrous fibre of the Leicester with our superfine merino to make an all-natural fibre for sock yarns. There is also a big demand for the Leicester wool by hand spinners.

We are looking forward to building up our flock of English Leicesters to 100 breeding ewes while working on genetics to increase fleece weight and carcass traits. We also have plans to set up a mill on the farm so we can start processing small lots of wool at home. We want to keep growing our farm and wool business to make it profitable and sustainable for the next generation.

I would like to say a big thank you to Colin Taylor and Brenton Heazlewood for all their help with establishing our flock of English Leicesters.

Australian Sheep and Wool Show – Margaret Kingman

Firstly I would like to congratulate the four ELAA members Colin Taylor, Nick & Vanessa Wootton, Wendy Beer, and Jason & Colleen Southwell, who took sheep to the recent Aust. Sheep & Wool Show, Bendigo, and presented them so beautifully. They were fine examples of the breed and a credit to the breeders.

The feature breed this year was the combined 10 Heritage breeds and they all showed their best sheep.

In the English Leicester section, Colin Taylor's ewe won Champion English Leicester Ewe, then went on to win Supreme Longwool Heritage Exhibit. Another of his ewes was Reserve Champion E/L Ewe.

A young ram of Colin Taylor's won Champion English Leicester Ram, with Nick & Vanessa Wootton showing the Reserve Champion Ram.

Colin also won Duncan MacGregor Trophy for sheep under 1.5 y.o. in wool, and the inaugural E & P Stephenson Perpetual Trophy for Supreme Champion English Leicester Exhibit. Needless to say, he also won Most Successful Exhibitor.

Well done to all the studs

A Family of Leicesters

Advertisement in The Sydney Herald, Monday 21st of May 1832

To be sold by auction by Mr James Simmons

A Family of Pure Leicester Sheep, consisting of the parents, two rams and three ewes, their offspring. The heads of the family were imported into the Colony by the ship Portland, in 1828, and are, with their produce, considered the best specimen of pure Leicesters ever seen in New South Wales.

This breeds feeds to a great weight, and are, without exception, the best stock for the Shambles (slaughterhouse). The family would form a great acquisition to the lawn of any Gentleman's Estate, being objects of great beauty and interest, when the fleece attains its full length.

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Can you spot the lonely goat?



