



Background to Will Carter, Matthew Carter, and their Grandfather John Carter

Young Will Carter is the fourth generation to be involved in cattle and sheep farming on Bodmin Moor. John's Dad – another Will – left the Lizard peninsular in south west Cornwall until he moved here. John has been a hill sheep farmer on Bodmin Moor for most of his life, and has always worked dogs on the Moor as did his father, who, it is claimed, brought Border Collies to their part of Cornwall.

John, his wife Shirley and, at various times, other members of the family, live at Moonspark Farm in Delabole on the North Cornwall coast, not far from Padstow, and Tintagel in the opposite direction. No-one knows where the name of the farm originated but it seems to fit in with the Celtic ambience of the area. Stone for the original cottages was hewn from the locality, and it was where the first occupants of the farm lived while the farmhouse was built.

The holding at Moonspark is about 200 acres, there is another farm at the south of the Bodmin Moor – Siblyback, which is about 250 acres and supports both sheep and cattle. Herdwicks, Blackface and Cheviots are the breeds that Nigel, John's son, runs – all hill sheep that live out all year round and that can cope with harsh conditions. The Cheviots and Herdwicks remain pure bred. All three locations – Moons Park, Candra and Siblyback all have ewes and lambs – about 1000 at Siblyback. There is a mixture of breeds humorously known as the Bodmin mule. Candra, near Roughtor, is where the Carter family lived until they moved to Moonspark.



Bodmin Moor is a raw, bleak, unforgiving place. The artery A30 road slices its way through the middle – thousands of visitors to Cornwall would find it hard to imagine the privation of folk in days gone by, living in the abject poverty that went with the territory. Pockets of civilisation appear on the edges of the moorland – villages like Warleggan; St Neots; St Breward and Bolventor - where the world famous Jamaica Inn is located. Daphne du Maurier captured the essence of Bodmin Moor in her book of the same name. The River Fowey rises in these parts.

John and Shirley had three children - Barry, Nigel and their sister Sue, all lived with their parents on Bodmin Moor at Candra, for the first part of their lives. Nigel and Barry both helped John on the farm, before and after school, joining the family business when they left school. They finally left Candra to live at Moonspark in Delabole in about 1976, when Nigel was about 15 years of age. It must have been a hard life – Bodmin Moor is both bleak and raw. They didn't know any different though. Barry, a couple of years older than Nigel, sadly passed away a couple of years ago leaving his son, Will and stepson Matthew to help John.



There was a time when Matt was very involved in sheepdog trialing but at the moment, life has other pleasures (see photo taken in 2009). During his years as an accomplished young handler Matt Carter represented England in the International Young Handler competition.



In reference to the dogs that Nigel uses he says that, 'Anything that's no good Father passes on to me!' They work well for me despite Dad having started them! John Carter is a well known breeder of good strong Border collies that have a line going back many decades. They are bred to deal with the harsh underfoot conditions

of the Moor. 'Probably got about 6 or 7 here. I usually take them all with me in the Landrover and then use one or two to suit the situation. Not always the same one or two. Always handy to have a selection. Their working life is around 10 years but they do not work every day. The sheep are not as spread out as they might be'. The distances between farms is considerable. It is about 12 miles from Siblyback to Candra, and another 10 –to 11 miles to Moons Park. Much time is spent in the Landrover! When we do a Gather, it is a family occasion – the nieces will join us. We use the Landrovers, quad bikes and all the dogs. At Siblyback, the sheep do not run over the Moor as they do at Candra”.

John takes up the Carter story, “When I was a child, we moved to Camperdown near Alex Tor and walked to school from there to St. Breward. Mother would walk to Camelford with the pony, and the kids on top, to fetch her shopping. My siblings and I started school at the same time although we are a year apart in age. So at 5, 6 and 7 years of age, we walked to school. I was not over impressed with school!”

Leaving school as soon as he could, and eventually the family started a dairy farm taking the milk to the road in an old taxi, as there was no proper road from the farmstead. This was an improvement from taking milk to the road in a wheelbarrow, as was the case in the initial years.

John also became involved with the sheep shearing when he met up with Godfrey Bowen and his brother at the Royal Cornwall Show, sometime in the '50's. John spent three days watching the Bowen brothers so that when he got home he could shear the Bowen way, which was fine for the little Hill sheep but no use at all for the big Devon Longwools with their dense fleeces that had to be shorn in the traditional manner. “In the late fifties at Camperdown I started contract shearing and helping father on the farm. My brother was always mechanically minded so it was up to me to take on the livestock side of things. I got married, and moved to a cottage on the Hamatethy Estate. The family also bought the farm, buildings and forty acres for £750!”

In the spirit of expanding his business John rented a farm close by, in the sixties, and milked there until he took his herd of thirty cows to Moonspark in 1972, where he continued to milk regularly until a few years back. His granddaughters have taken on the milking tradition, and are Relief Milkers in the area.

Courtesy of the ISDS Sheepdog Archive/HLF Project,
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The move to Moonspark was the result of a tip off that he had when he was contract-shearing. On the sale day, he took a gamble as they had standing corn and kale, and the farm was all ready to be moved into. The auctioneer was helpful and said they'd wait on his bank manager until the end of the day. John added, "Mind you, I don't think there was anyone else on, anyway – I took the gamble and bought it all! Last year we built a new shed over the road here, and it cost around about the same as the whole farm did 30 years ago! Kept the farm at Candra, having put in a road, and then sold the house to buy more land".

John had mentioned that back in the late forties there were no border collies Cornwall and that his Dad brought the first border collie into the area from Scotland when he bought a load of sheep. He had brought the sheep to Camelford Station and walked them up to Camperdown – about 6 miles.

It must be said that John's involvement with sheep is as a working shepherd and his dogs are important to him as working tools on the farm. He enjoys trialling very much and it has given him the chance to travel out of Cornwall many times, and he has enjoyed the friendship of people from other parts of the world. His interest in sheepdog trialling was the result of meeting up with Harry Thomas. With this group of sheepdog triallists, John found new friends with whom he travelled the length and breadth of England, sometimes Wales and many visits to Ireland. In common with most hill farmers, he is a far-seeing man and is bringing on his 'replacements' in the form of his grandchildren, some of whom are training their dogs and taking part in local trials. Matthew, who has stepped down from competing in trials for a while, is John's late son Barry's stepson, and has had much regional success. Will is Matt's younger half brother.

John continued, "Another thing, years ago, I used to ride the moor on horseback, and the dogs would have to spend the day running about, but nowadays they hop into the back of the Landrover and as a result they have less stamina. In the old days, the dogs were stronger and the breeding of them reflected the type of work they were expected to do. There is a shepherd – one of our triallists – who lives in the South Hams of Devon who will not let his dogs onto his quad bike, and as a result he has some pretty strong dogs – stronger than mine!"

Nigel is John's son, and lives at Siblyback on the south of Bodmin Moor. He is not so into trialling as his father but uses the family dog gene pool as his source of good working stock (see photo taken in 2015).



Let me tell you the story of how I came to be trialling, John continues 'It was with the Bill dog in about 1980, I think. I went up to Malvern where they hold the Sheep Shows. I went there with a lot of my neighbours and one of them, Jimmy Cleave, went into the Agricultural Training Board

and asked if he could learn how to work collies. They put him in touch with Harry Thomas from the other side of Cornwall. Anyway, one Sunday, he said to me "I'm going out to Harry Thomas to learn to train my dog, will you go with me?" So I went out with him and watched them playing around and thought to myself "This isn't all



that difficult". The following week, they had what I suppose was a nursery trial there, and they wanted me to join in but I didn't want to do that but when it had all finished Harry said "you can have a go if you want". So I went out with Moss, and couldn't get her to stop where I wanted her to. That's where it all started. I went out with Harry a few times, and after that Harry and I became great friends. When Harry was very ill in his final illness, the Vicar was there and he said to me "Oh, you've known Harry for a long time haven't you? You're one of his sheepdog friends?" "Yes", I said "Me and Harry have travelled hundreds of miles together, been to Wales, been to Ireland – two or three times, never been to Scotland. We travelled everywhere together, we've even slept together" - but I can't repeat here what I also said! "Very interesting", said the Vicar!

John continues, "There was one incident when we were taking it in turns driving, coming home one night. Tackley, near Oxford, I think it was. It was up near where John Thomas lives, anyway. I woke up to find Harry driving like a mad thing, he overtook a white van and suddenly I saw there was a roundabout, "Harry" I said, "There's a roundabout!" Well he couldn't stop or turn. He hit the roundabout square, and ended up on the top of the island looking out of the window. The white van stopped and looked up, and Harry drove off. Next day he took his truck to check on damage and there was none! I must have hit the roundabout just right! Harry didn't drive any more after that! I took over the driving.'



'Aberceiro trial was a big hill trial in Wales, where you can't see your dog at the top – I won that with a little bitch called Kay in 2003. But getting in the England Team with Jess was the biggest highlight, that was in 1998/99. Matt and Kay both qualified for the 2002 World Trial.'

I asked John how he improved his trialling skills, and asked how he refined his technique. He replied that he picked it up from it up from Harry, and then from John Thomas. He had started alongside a couple of the 'Greats'! 'At that time there was a strong Cornwall presence. I think Harry told me that at one time there would be 8 or 10 that would go to the National. Most of these have either retired from trialling or have sadly passed away.'

The Cornwall Sheepdog Society was founded back in the '40's' or early '50's. 'Harry Thomas and Victor Bellringer were founder members. I already knew Victor because he lived not far from me when I was a school kid. Victor used to come up to the farm on Sundays, as he only had half a dozen 'tame' sheep at home and he needed his dogs to practice on the 'wild' Carter sheep – real sheep.'

CW: You go off to sales sometimes to pick up dogs, don't you? What are you looking for from a dog you buy in a sale? Apart from it being a cute price?

John: Keeness, mainly. You see that he is keen to work. No good if he's half-hearted. If he is half-hearted with the handler in the sale ring, you could go the wrong way if you buy the dog. Little bitch I have now is the last one I bought from Sennybridge, keen as mustard – bit too keen really.



CW: For what reason do you buy from sales rather than from one of your friends or a known breeder?

John: Always got somebody looking for a dog, a neighbour a couple of years ago wanted one that was very keen, didn't mind if it pulled a bit of wool. And it is a day out!

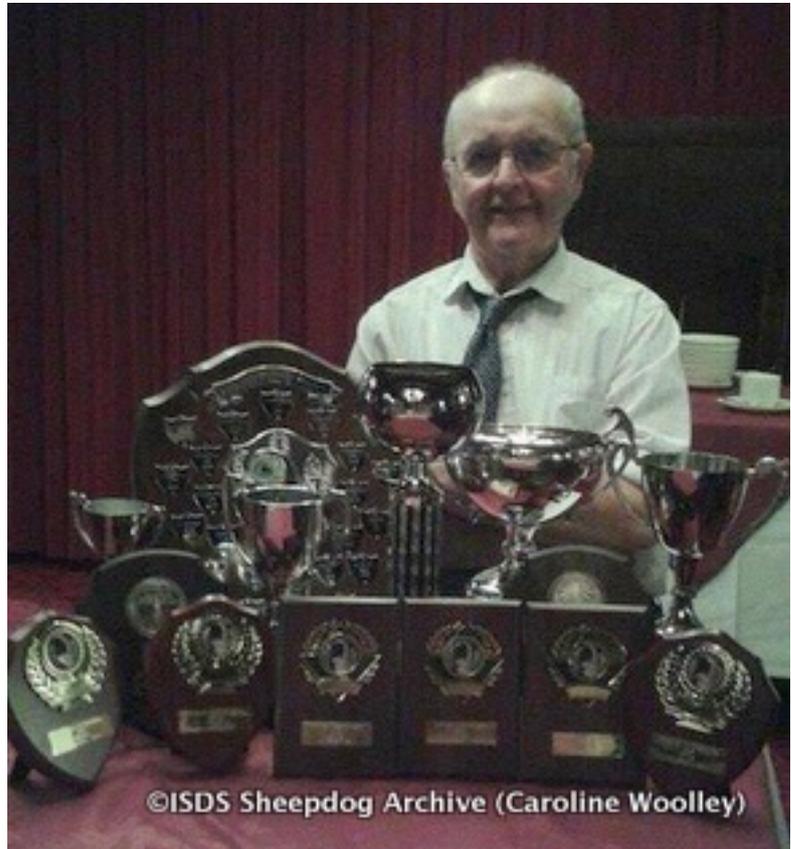
CW: So you buy to order then?

John: Yes

CW: But you breed as well don't you.

John: Yes, I have my own line. Young Jake is my stud dog. My old dog, Matt, now retired, is from Andy Jackman. I had him from Helen Aughton, and she had him from Carol Worgan. Helen had found him a bit rough around the edges, so I had him. I had him here for a bit, and then kept him.

CW: Thing is, I do hear of people who have got a John Carter dog and my ears prick up and I think, "oh, a dog that's half tidy then." You have got a bit of a reputation for bringing dogs on. What do you consider to be your secret of success?



John: Being honest, I reckon. I have never sold a dog and said to the man – you've bought 'un so that's that. If they can't get on with 'un, then I'll have 'un back. The main thing is the practical working of the dog. That is their background.

CW: Their heritage if you like? So here you are breeding practical working dogs, and if their handlers want to take them trialling then they can. As they are registered, they can be taken to the next rung if required, to the English National. You also trial your own dogs, and keep the flag flying for the Cornwall Sheepdog society. You have been President for how long now?

John: About 18 years.

CW: Mr. Cornwall Sheepdogs then!

John: There's only me and Norman Delgarno left!

CW: And occasionally Trevor Hopper?

John: Trevor is the Society's mainstay – he keeps the whole thing together, we would be in a pickle without him. Bill Muggeridge is also in Cornwall.



CW: John, you are a fountain of stories, can you tell us one.

John: One of the many stories as I could tell you is the one about the birthday present for a big business man. It was about six years ago. The birthday boy was presented with a dog from Wales, and had television cameras to record dog and owner being presented with a cup as part of the celebrations. As well as this, he had to be filmed penning the sheep (with a lot of help from me!). I had only answered a newspaper advertisement to a request for some help in this birthday scheme. But it was all great fun!

John: 2002 saw me taking part in the One Man and His Dog programme filmed at Longleat House. Getting my head around all the camera instructions was mystifying. Couldn't do the job properly at all!

CW: What of the present, John. What are your thoughts about the future of trialling?

John: Trialling is becoming so much more expensive now – cost of fuel, cost of bed and breakfast – not everyone can manage a tent or a caravan – cost of registration with ISDS – the list could go on! One thing that remains constant, is that the cost of entering a trial is still reasonable. That is a good sign.



John Carter has a strong reputation nationally, and is a figurehead on the south west trialling scene. He is essentially a modest family man, and these traditional values feature in his style of management of trials and in his Presidency of the Cornwall Sheepdog Society. John Thomas says of John that his Trials in Cornwall "are relaxed, have brought enjoyment to many, and are where people are always made to feel welcome". John is nearing his eightieth birthday, and rejoices in his grandson Will working the dogs. Maybe brother Matt will join him again in the future and there will be two of the next generation of Carter men working the Moor.

In 2017, John is to be presented with the ISDS's most prestigious award for 'an outstanding contribution to the Society, to Sheep Dogs, or to Sheep Dog Trialling'. We can understand why, and look forward to hearing more about John, his accomplishments and his dogs.