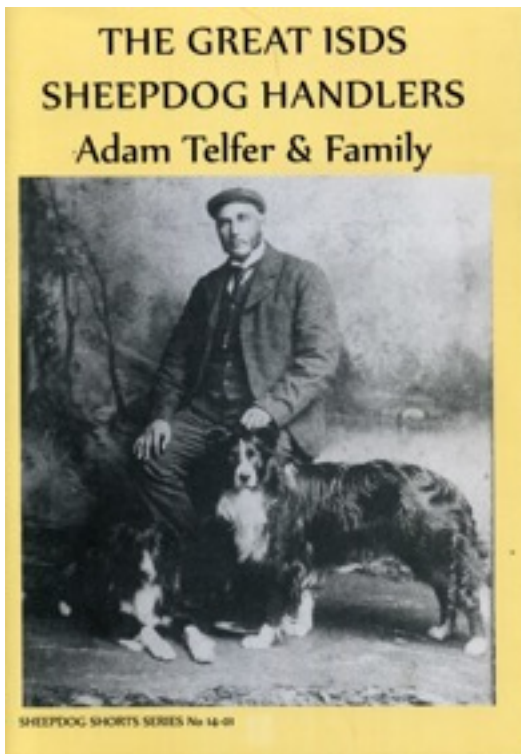




Peter Telfer from Northumberland

There has been a lot of press coverage of the Telfer family from Northumberland over the years, and these articles and photographs are being made available on the ISDS Sheepdog Archive website. Adam Telfer owned Old Hemp, and is pictured here with Old Hemp and Brigg Moss (this booklet was produced by Pauline Hall, and is a collection of memorabilia on the Telfer Family).



There is also a website dedicated to the Telfer Family (www.adamandhemp.co.uk), and a memorial cairn and plaque in the village of West Woodburn, in Northumberland which was the birthplace of Old Hemp.



It is interesting to catch up with Peter Telfer, a Northumbrian triallist who is also an ISDS Director and is a member of the Telfer family.

Peter, thank you for agreeing to talk to the ISDS Sheepdog Archive project. Coming from an illustrious family in sheepdog circles, can you talk about your early memories and family connections?

I think I have always been aware that the Telfer family were some of the best sheep dog handlers and breeders of border collies in the early 1900's. Walter Bell Telfer, who reportedly won the first sheep dog trial in England in 1876, was my great great grandfather's brother, so Adam Telfer who bred Hemp was my great grandfather's cousin. There are a lot of Telfers still farming in Northern England but I am the only one who is running in trials now.

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Can you tell us a little about the terrain your sheep run on?

I farm 180 acres at Haydon Bridge, and another 100 acres five miles along the valley. All the land is in fields up to 20 acres, and most of the fields have road access, so I do quite a lot of moving sheep down roads. There is an old drove road that I use to move sheep from home to the land five miles away taking up to 250 sheep with three or four dogs.

Adam Telfer's Hemp was rightly admired and regarded as a very potent force in the early breeding of collies. How do you rate the influence of those early pioneers of breeding?

I think that when the pioneers of the breed first started trialling, it increased the availability of the good dogs to more people over a wider area, and that had the effect of speeding up the progress of the breed. I think that now with more people trialling dogs but not working with them on a daily basis, we need to be careful that the stamina and working traits aren't lost in the quest for biddable gentle dogs that can take three wild sheep around a course on a weekend.



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Do you pursue your own breeding programme or do you prefer to buy dogs for your use? If the latter, are there any particular lines you favour?

I have my own prefix (Telf) and have bred the same family for seven generations, I normally breed one litter of pups a year and keep a bitch with the aim of training it to work at home. I then try to get it good enough to get to the nursery trials but always the aim is to have as good a work dog as possible. My present nursery dog is by Emma Gray's Jamie out of a McVicar Spot bitch. I am a great believer in the power of the maternal line in breeding which I think is possibly around 70% of what the puppies inherit. Far too many people breed puppies from bitches that aren't good enough to breed from. When training the young dogs, I like to get them started in a controlled situation and let them learn without putting any pressure on them. I let them develop as naturally as possible but this is only achievable if the dog has the right attributes in the breeding.

When Walter and Queen took their English National titles, points were still awarded for Style and Command. Do you think these were valid criteria by which to judge a trial?

The modern methods for judging trials is an improvement over the old system where style points were awarded, as style is in the eye of the beholder and dogs should be judged on what they do although I do like a dog to look focused and well balanced with a good tail carriage.

There is a photo in the book my husband and I produced on the Telfer family of Adam on his Dales cob. Was the horse much used in Northumberland shepherding at that time?

In the north of England with large areas of open land, quad bikes and ATVs are widely used where horses or ponies would have been used in the past but the need for a good dog or team of dogs is still as great as ever.

