



ALAN RAMSHAW from
Northumberland



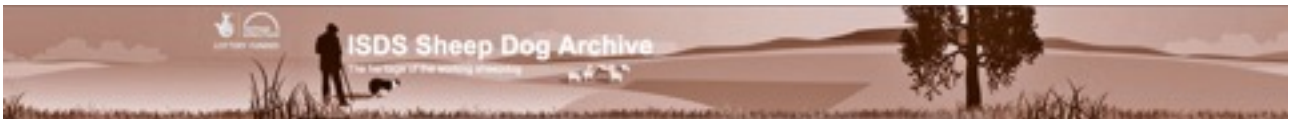
Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed for the ISDS Sheepdog Archive Project. Can you tell us a little about your formative influences and whether you come from an agricultural background?

I am not from an agricultural background but have always lived rurally, and have a love and respect for the countryside and animals that stretches back to my childhood. I spent time on local farms particularly in my school holidays.

I know you are really a big fan of the Texel breed. How long have you kept them and do you always breed pure? If you use dogs to work with them, how do you find they respond to a dog?

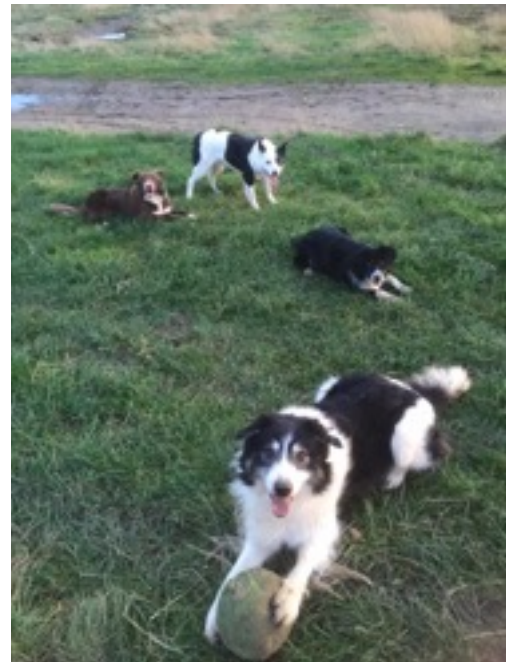
I have always kept working dogs, formerly gun dogs, and obviously working collies. I began keeping sheep, just a handful really, on a local farm as a bit of a hobby and to produce fresh lamb for family and friends. This grew into a commercial enterprise when we moved to Mount Pleasant farm in 2012. We had a commercial flock of two hundred cross bred ewes that we put to Suffolk and Oxford tups producing prime lamb that I sold privately to local restaurants and some were sold commercially. The trend in the market led to our using Texel tups; white faced lambs of good conformation were making a premium. I fell in love with the breed. They are very fit for purpose and great to keep. We soon built up a top quality pedigree foundation flock, and began to show them in our first season. Our tup lamb, Warrior, won every show we attended that year bar one; eight first places in total. Sadly he died of an inguinal hernia when only ten months old. He was a hell of a sheep, and the loss hit me hard, but we continued and have strengthened the Altram Texel flock to what it is now. We only sell as breeding stock privately now. It was a financial and ethical decision, born of my disagreement with halal slaughtering, so no meat lambs are now cropped. The dogs do work the Texels, but it is usually not necessary to use a dog as they are very docile and tame, being show sheep.





Can you tell us a little about your collies and whether you do any trialling? Do you do any judging of Texels at shows?

I have four working collies; two registered and two unregistered. Two bitches and two dogs, they range in age from three to seven. They are all so different. I have taught them all, but I'm not a great trainer, and an even worse competitor so, whilst I love sheepdog trialling, I tend to leave it to those better suited to it and stick to showing sheep. I seem to have a natural eye for selecting quality sheep and have bred some real crackers. I like big bold fit sheep with a sparky head. I have not forayed into judging yet, but hope to do so in the near future.



Do you feel the use of a quad might diminish working ability in the dog?

I used a quad when farming commercially, and found it invaluable as a tool. It, in no way, detracted from the work of the dogs; if anything it improved it really.





From your work with young people do you think there is a lack of connection in young minds with the natural world and how to relate to it? What is the way forward to address this?

I had a young lad called Matt Falla who helped me when starting out. He was a great lad and has gone on to be a successful young shepherd in his own right. My niece and her girlfriend help out on the farm at every opportunity, and show sheep with me as part of team Altram with my wife, Tracy. So my experience of young people has been very positive. My background in teaching [Alan is head of geography at Greenfield Community College] leads me to believe there is interest from young people but very limited opportunity. This must be addressed at government level or we will lose farming. It is that serious.



Finally please feel free to add anything relevant now you are in print?

I feel genuinely privileged to have been asked for my thoughts and comments as I'm a nobody in the world of dogs and sheep really but could not imagine my life without them. For all the hard work and heart ache it is the most joyous and wonderful experience to be part of. Sheep, dogs and the country life - all are as old as time and just as precious!



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Written by Pauline Hall
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