



Ifor Page from Llangadog

In an era of sheepdog trialling in Wales where the characters were larger than life, two individuals that were instantly recognisable were Ifor Page and his brother Mel. Ifor, with his tartan berets, Mel with his deerstalkers, together with their prowess on the trials field, opinions and solid commitment to the dogs. Raised in a big family at Bryncafel, a smallholding opposite the church in Gwynfe near Llangadog, there were ten children of which eight were boys. Ifor and Mel took similar paths in life, with many years devoted to shepherding, and working dogs. Nothing was ever too much trouble for Ifor, from nursery trials to open trials, the Nationals and the World Trial. Particularly pleased to see the World Trial come to Llandeilo, Ifor would do anything to help, always down at the field during the preparations and clean-up operations. He was a Timekeeper on Field One throughout the four days, a task he thoroughly enjoyed.

Out of the two brothers, Ifor was the first to run at an International, qualifying at his first Welsh National at Beaumaris in 1955 where he won the Welsh Shepherds Trophy with Meg 11144 (by L. Evans' Jig 6937, bred by Ifor out of Polly). At this time, the Shepherds class was held separately from the Farmers class. Ifor was sufficiently pointed so ran for the Welsh team as well. That year, Ifor and Meg also won the Welsh Driving Trophy and represented Wales in the International Driving competition. They put up a great performance gaining third in the International

Shepherds Class and winning the Welsh Shepherds Aggregate Cup at the 1955 Edinburgh International. "There was a large contingent of supporters in the Scottish capital for the three-day event. A chill wind and frequent rain squalls kept the attendance down. But those who did attend saw some fine trialling despite the conditions". The wind was said to be blowing so strongly into the faces of the competitors that it was difficult to get signals out to the dogs working 800 yards away.



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The trip to the 1955 Edinburgh International was much enjoyed, the dogs enjoying the ferry ride over the river with their owners. Ifor is shown here with Dai Daniels.

Their success in 1955 led to an invitation to compete at the Daily Express trials at Hyde Park held at Whitsun the following year (1956), winning second prize, to Tom Bonella from Scotland. It was reported that 25,000 people watched the trials. A Scottish Daily Express Trial was also held in Edinburgh on June 23rd, 1956. The Daily Express trials would consist of two



singles classes and two doubles, Ifor was listed as one of the eleven handlers that included names such as T. Longton and J. Gilchrist.

In 1957, Ifor and Meg repeated their success, winning the Welsh Shepherds Trophy again, this time on a mountain course at Criccieth. It was quite a remarkable achievement, for Meg was feeding three week old pups, four of them. Speaking at the time, Ifor said “I had to bring the pups up as well. When Meg was at the second gates she went off course with the sheep. But my, she made up for it”. Immediately after her run was completed, Meg ran ahead of her master to the car to settle down with her offspring. Ifor was accompanied to Criccieth by his elder brother Danny, he had taken the weekend off from his work as a colliery engineer, to help out with six year old Meg and the puppies. There were seven competitors in the Shepherds Class, the main contender at the time being Herbert Worthington from Abergavenny. Herbert had already won the Welsh Shepherds Trophy seven times [He won it eight times in total, before competing in the Farmers Class for more titles]. Ifor beat Herbert by just one point, putting him into second and third place with Fly and Jaff. All three qualified for the Hired Shepherds’ Class at the International in Loughborough that year where Ifor and Meg won the Welsh Shepherds Aggregate Cup for the second time.



Ifor competed in the Daily Express trials at Hyde Park again, in 1957, with the likes of James Gilchrist, Tot Longton, Andrew Beatty, Eric Elliott, and Jack Suttill. It was chats about our mutual friend Jack Suttill, that led to substantial information-gathering about the Hyde Park Trials which are an important part of trialling heritage. It was a source of great pride and satisfaction to have been involved in the prestigious trials in Hyde Park, and to have won a couple of second prizes. These trips down to London were greatly enjoyed, a few would go together, including his brother Danny.



Shepherding since he was seventeen, Ifor worked in several places around Llangadog. At the age of twenty six years old in 1955, he was tending eight hundred sheep on the Black Mountain range which divides the Tywi Valley from the coal districts of West Glamorgan. When Ifor married Mary, he left shepherding to work in the local cement works in Llangadog, following a similar path to his brother Mel. Ifor was also a gravedigger in several local churches, as is his brother Cyril, and a nephew. They moved to a smallholding at Capel Hendre near Ammanford, both Ifor and Mary working very hard. The next move was to a small dairy farm called Banc Sych at Llanddarog on the main A48 just outside Carmarthen. Milking Jersey cows, they continued their hard work here and built the business up. From what can be gathered, Ifor liked to drive fast, for he was prone to the odd accident, one time breaking his leg and being laid up for a time. The new extension road to the M4 took their land so Ifor and Mary sold up and retired to a bungalow in Llangadog with a few fields.



A sought after judge for local trials, Ifor did a fair amount of judging over the years. He could always be relied on for an honest opinion, to give an account of how handlers and dogs were performing. Mistakes were pounced on, missing gates with walking sheep would elucidate comments such as ‘You threw it away, bach. It was there for the taking’. Ifor always enjoyed the Welsh National and if he could get away, the Scottish National, and the English too. And, of course, the Internationals. Ifor would book holidays for the Scottish Nursery finals, he was fairly taken with Scotland. Always on the look out for a good dog to put a bitch to, this rarely left his mind. A wonderfully supportive wife, Mary always went with Ifor in his trips, towing a caravan or sharing a cottage. In more recent years, enjoying their well-earned retirement, Ifor and Mary put much younger people to shame in their ability to get to as many Nationals as possible. In 2007, at the English National in North Yorkshire, we were discussing whether I could make it up to the Scottish National, as well as the Welsh. It turned out that Ifor and Mary had towed their caravan back to South Wales before heading up to the north of Scotland for the Scottish National. It goes without saying that they also went to the Welsh National and the International in southern Ireland the same year.



The Reverend Roger Hughes was a young boy in the late fifties when he first met Ifor, it was at a Welsh National or a South Wales Sheepdog Association Open. “We never lost touch. I officiated at both his and Mel’s funerals. From a strong church-going family, they are both buried at Gwynfe in view of the smallholding where they were brought up. It is sad but a great privilege when you have known someone for that length of time. I met Ifor in his hey day, when he was running Meg. He ran her until about 1960, winning many opens with her, he was a ‘dangerous’ man on the trials field. Ifor always put his family and work first, not the trials. He went to them, as and when they fitted in. He always kept good dogs, he particularly liked bitches, and he bred many good ones. Ifor had a terrific eye for detail, watching every run at a

trial. He was an inventive man, he could turn his ideas into something useful, and put his hand to most things. A different temperament to Mel, they both had their firm ideas about what they liked, what they wanted to see in a run, and would not change their ideas easily. Both colourful characters, as well as able competitors”.



Glyn Jones (Llanddeusant) comments “Ifor and I were neighbours for six years and I have known him all my life. He was working on a farm near here and there was a black bitch, about a year old. He worked with her and trained her to trial standard, and one day, his employer said ‘why don’t you take her to the local trial. That’s how Ifor got started in trialling, and that dog was Meg”. Another lifelong friend, Mike Hemmings was five years old when he first met Ifor “He was working on a farm nearby, I have many good memories from when I was a child. Ifor would often drive me to school, and we would play draughts together at home. Meg was in her heyday then. We went to many Internationals together over the years”. Ifor and Mary were regular visitors at Mike and Nora’s farm, spending many evenings together over the years. Known for their friendly banter, Mike and Ifor would tease each other incessantly, say if either had good sheep at a trial or Ifor would point out jobs that needed doing on Mike’s farm. One story is that about fifteen years ago, Ifor had a bitch that he felt he might have to put to sleep as she was fairly uncontrollable, and he did not wish to leave her in someone else’s care when he was away, afraid of the consequences. So Mike said that he would have her. “She was a real handful but I got her trained. She won just a third place in the Carmarthen nurseries, but qualified for the nursery final. She really was too much, but she managed to win the nursery final that year. The following day, Ifor was coming to visit so I tied a blue ribbon around her neck and tied her on the doorstep for him to see. Well, there was hell let loose that night. You never heard anything like it. It was very rowdy. We were always like that with each other, he was like that with me, and I was like that with him”. Wynford Japp “Ifor had a dry sense of humour. At his peak, I would say that he was as good a handler as anywhere. Meg was a useful bitch. He also had a good dog called Glen, I would say he was the best dog he had. No one could say that they had won until Ifor had run Glen”. Ifor enjoyed sheepdog trials and a chat, scrutinising the dogs with an eye for detail.



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