

John Bathgate from Peebles

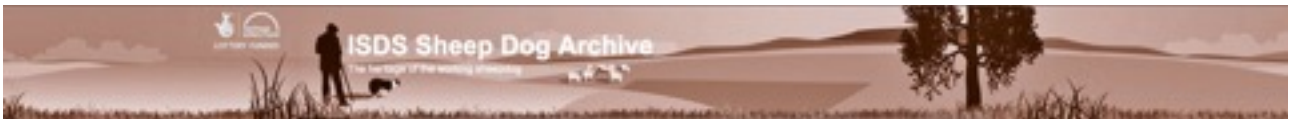
Feeling privileged to have made the acquaintance of John and Betty Bathgate, it soon became apparent that many other people felt the same way. John is a very modest man, not wanting to appear boastful in any way about any of his life achievements. His reputation, the respectful way in which fellow triallers refer to him, and his impressive array of silver trophies speak volumes. In pride of place in his living room is a Certificate awarded from the Royal Highland and Agricultural



Society for long service, thirty years. Betty is his devoted wife, and nods in agreement when John states that he has loved his life as a shepherd and stockman. Now in their eighties, this good-natured couple have lived a contented life in the Scottish Borders and, over the years, have made many friends around the globe through their passion for working dogs. Now living in the town of Peebles, they regard it as a lovely town in which to spend their retirement years. Their garden looks out onto the River Tweed, the Queen of the Scottish salmon rivers, and is a lovely place to sit and reflect on times gone by.

John with Rock, Jen, Fly & Ben over fifty years ago

John's great grandfather was also called John Bathgate, he managed an arable farm with a shepherd working under him. John's grandfather, Adam Bathgate, was a farm manager in Whittinghame in East Lothian for most of his life, managing the sheep as well as the arable side. Adam Bathgate used to train dogs for a sheepdog trialling man from East Linton in East Lothian, who so happened to be Thomas Gilholm, one of the founders of the I.S.D.S. John has vague recollections of his grandfather, of him working dogs. Adam Bathgate was not a trial man, that was destined to be the line of work that his future grandson would excel in. So John's father, John Hall Bathgate, was the son of a shepherd, and he himself worked as a shepherd before the First World War. He joined the Royal Scots and was stationed at the Glencourse barracks at Penicuik. Travelling abroad, mainly to France, John Hall Bathgate remained a soldier for most of the war. When he came back from the war, he became a travelling shepherd, taking sheep from one farm to another, to eat turnips in the turnip fields.



So it is not surprising that John made the decision to work with sheep and dogs from a young age, for shepherding is in his blood on both sides of his parentage. His mother Mary had a brother John who ran dogs in trials, they were Telfords, which is where John gets his other name, John Hall Telford Bathgate. He was born in East Lothian in 1924, his first home being Hedderwick farm at Dunbar. His earliest memory of sheepdog trials was at Gifford, three miles south of Haddington where the I.S.D.S. was founded in July 1906. John saw J. M. Wilson run, and David Murray from Peebles. They gave a demonstration together in the interval, with four dogs, and it was something that stuck in John's mind for a long time. He left school at thirteen and became the shepherd boy at Tollishill, near the Carfraemill Hotel at Lauder. The shepherd that he went to help was a well-known sheepdog trainer called Walter Amos. He was not a trial man, but trained and exported a lot of dogs abroad. It is written in the first I.S.D.S. stud book that he registered some of the early dogs and transferred several dogs to the U.S.A., in particular to S. S. Stoddart. Walter was very friendly with J. M. Wilson who had friends all over who ran dogs on for him. At that young age, John was very keen and interested in working the dogs, one piece of advice that Walter Amos gave him being "I can't tell you anything but keep your eyes and ears open". John worked there for two years "I learnt a lot about sheep from Walter Amos, particularly about hill sheep, Blackfaced sheep. Before then, it was half bred 'inbye' sheep that I was accustomed to. I watched him, and learnt a lot about the dogs as well as the sheep. He was particularly good at stopping them. He was always friendly with the dogs, they were never afraid of him." Walter's wife was Agnes Renwick, her nephews were Willy and Jimmy Renwick from Alston, well-known sheepdog triallers in Cumbria who won a lot at that time. John's next job was at the Birks at Traquair, again as a shepherd boy, where he was responsible for fifteen score of Blackfaced ewes on the hill. There was no quad bikes in those days, the steep heathered ground involving a lot of walking. He stayed with the farmer, George Scott. John got his first dog from Walter, a half beardie bitch called Queen "She wasn't registered, and looked like a beardie. She was a very good worker, with a nice nature, an ideal dog for a boy, easy to handle. She seldom went down, she had no eye, but had good balance. She was steel grey in colour. There were a fair few of those sort about then. Walter trained the odd beardie, though he trained mostly border collies, registered ones. They were getting going with registrations in the 1930's".



John with Vic I, Ben & Rock



At Traquair for a year, John then went to work as the shepherd at Kingside farm at Ledburn in Peeblesshire. Here, John was in charge of the hill sheep, twenty four score of Blackfaced ewes, bringing on tups to sell. Around this time, John bought another dog, a registered bitch called Nan from John Telford at Tanderlane in East Lothian (he later moved to Berwickshire). Already trained, “Nan was a black, rough-skinned bitch, with a wee white nose and white paws. She taught me quite a lot”. At Kingside, John worked for the Cockburn brothers, Halbert and Adam, who were also related to the Renwicks at Alston, they were cousins. Adam was very keen on breeding sheepdogs, for work and for triallers. In later years, he bred John’s Rock 27425. At Kingside, John lived in a bothy, getting his food in the farmhouse. There was no electricity, but there was running water. The bothy is still there, the three cottages having been made into two now. Sons of the Cockburn brothers still run the farm today. It was during his time at Kingside that John started trialling occasionally. The first prize that he won was with Nan and it was ‘confined’ to Peeblesshire. He started to train and sell dogs in his free time, not that there was a lot of that, John would bring out eighty tups each year. They were sold at Lanark, Stirling and Hawick, taking them the night before the sale in a lorry. It was at Kingside when John first made the acquaintance of J. M. Wilson,



through the sheep, and it was the start of a friendship that was to last many years. They had a lot in common, and agreed that “distance was no object when there was a sheepdog trial at the end”. John was at Kingside for nine years, until he got married “It was a very happy time at Kingside. I enjoyed it. We got on very well. I met Betty while I was there, at a dance at Penycuik. Her father was an inspector in the police, he was brought up in the same area as my father so I felt we had something in common”. Betty and John were married in 1950, moving to Castlehill in the Manor valley near Peebles, a Scottish Blackfaced tup breeding place, for two and a half years, before moving to West Lock at Eddleston, another tup breeding place, for a further three years. From there, John worked for the Dawyck estates for forty eight years, starting in May 1955, twenty four years at Hallmanor moving to Easter Dawyck for the same number of years when Hallmanor was sold to forestry. Hallmanor is all

hill ground, it is situated at Stobo, six miles from Peebles. At Easter Dawyck, John ran 200 Blackfaced sheep on the hill and 400 half bred ewes inbye (Border Leicester/Cheviot). He also looked after Wester Dawyck too, the farms all belonging to one estate. Asked about his time shepherding there “I would not have changed it for anything. My employer never interfered, he left everything to me. It was up to me to keep everything right. It was a good job. Being my own boss, I was free to go anywhere, providing everything was okay at home with the sheep and cattle. At Easter Dawyck, we also ran eighty blue gray suckler cows (White Shorthorn bull x Galloway cow). My dogs all worked cows. They weren’t kept for trialling, they had to do everything”. Asked what makes a good cattle dog “ones that can nose and heel, hardy types”.

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Written by Kim Gibson in 2010

Photos courtesy of John & Betty Bathgate

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Over the years, John has taken great pride in producing good stock, showing the sheep regularly. In 1959, John bred a pup that was to win the English National in 1965, Snip 16879, under the guidance of Tim Longton of Rooten Brook in Lancashire. Two bitch pups went down to Lancashire, to William Jolly in Goosnargh. Tim liked to buy youngsters that he liked the look of, and Snip must have fitted the bill. Snip and Nip were out of John's Meg 12848, who he put to J. M. Wilson's Whitehope Corrie 13706 before the dog was sold to Ireland where he became a prominent breeding dog.



It was during the time at Hallmanor that John had Rock, one of several names of renowned dogs permanently associated with the name Bathgate, due to their being successful breeding dogs. Their names crop up extensively on countless pedigrees of dogs today, the other names are J.H.T. Bathgate's Vic and J.H.T. Bathgate's Drift, there was Vic I and Vic II. Rock 27425 was line bred to J. M. Wilson's Cap 3036 and Mirk 4438 (1950 International Supreme Champion), and John Gilchrist's Spot 3624 (1947

Int. Sup. Ch.) with a number of other popular International dogs of the time in his pedigree. Rock left his mark in his own right, with outstanding progeny such as Jim Cropper's Fleet 38813 (1972 IntQ 2nd & IntSu 4th, and 1969 IntSu 5th) and Clyde 49960 (1973 IntSu 2nd, 1971 IntSu 4th, and 1970 IntSu 3rd). Jim won the International Brace title with Fleet and Clyde in 1973. Rock's grandchildren included Albert Keeling's Ben 57465 (1973 IntSu 3rd) and J. J. Patterson's Lyn 63322 (1979 S.Nat 2nd). His great grandchildren include: Merion Jones (Ruthin)'s Moss 56535 (1974 IntQ 1st) and Craig 67343 (1979 W.Nat 1st and 1979 IntBr 1st); Capt. A.G. Jones's 1974 Welsh National Champion Tos 61152; H. Glyn Jones (Bodfari)'s Gel 63023 (1973 IntSu 1st, and 1975 IntSu 2nd); Evan Hopkins's Lyn 84443 (1981 IntSu 6th); Matthew Graham's 1976 Irish National Champion Gay 69947; E. Wyn Edwards's Bill 78263 (twice Int. Sup. Ch. 1982 & 1981); Alasdair Mundell's Barflat Cap (1981 IntSu 4th); and Jim Cropper's 1986 English National Champion Cap 142018. In the fourth generation, the International dogs are Gwilym Jones's Queen 84363, A. Munro's Cap 105046, E. Wyn Edwards's Nip 120032 and Don 141536, E. E. Owen's Tudur Sion 132616 and Jess 72952, J. R. Griffith's Mirk 70402, Alan Jones's Craig 72737, Jim Dyson's Glen 76918, Evan Hopkin's Fly 105962, W. R. J. Jones's Cap 119308, and Paul Turnbull's Nap 188631. That is quite a list of winning progeny, making Rock a significant breeding sire, as well as winning many open trials himself. A memorable win with Rock for John was at Otterburn trials in Northumberland.



John ran two litter brothers Vic I 36235 and Nim 36232 bred by J. Gilchrist, grandsons of J. M. Wilson's Whitehope Corrie 13706 and line bred to Whitehope Nap 8685 and Mirk 4438. David McTeir owned and ran Vic I first, winning the 1967 Scottish Shepherds Cups at the National and the International, before the dog went to John. With John at the helm, they gained the Reserve Scottish National title at Lockerbie in 1972, second to his friend Davy McTeir from Peebles who won it with Ben.56646. John also remembers winning Oxton sheepdog trials on full points with Vic I. R. E. Pritchard's 1980 Reserve Welsh National Champion Scot 101887 was a great grandson of Vic I, as was Sydney Price's 1987 Int. Sup. Ch. Davy 131049. In 1970, John won the Scottish Shepherds Aggregate Cup for the first time with Nim, just missing out on the International Shepherd's title to Mike Perrins with Kyle 47050 at Kilmartin.



John with Rock & Nim on the North Circuit

For anyone who reads pedigrees, another name indelibly associated with John Bathgate is Drift 68728. John had Drift while he was still at Hallmanor, he bought him as a young dog from Tom Liddle, a shepherd in Berwickshire. He remembers winning Stirling sheepdog trial on full points with Drift, who was by Tom Watson's Craig 47703. Norman Darrell's Pat 96895 was a daughter of Drift, she was one of his 1981 International Brace Chs. Bobby Dalziel's Nell 118049, who was sixth in the Supreme in 1985, was a granddaughter. Great grandchildren of Drift were Sidney Price's 1987 Int. Sup. Ch. Davy 131049, Norman Davies's Spot 134541 (1984 IntSu 5th) and John Templeton's Spot 182249 (1998 IntSu 4th, 1996 IntSu 6th, and 1992 IntSu 3rd). In the fourth generation, there is John Lightfoot's 1991 Welsh Nat. Ch. Black 144068, John Chamberlain's 1998 English Nat. Ch. Highgate Nell 196407 (1996 IntSu 4th), George Gardner's Moss 186376 (1996 IntBr 1st), and Alasdair MacRae's 1993 Int. Sup. Ch. Nan 186565 (1994 IntQ 1st & IntSu 5th, and 1993 IntQ 1st). John ran Drift on 'One Man and His Dog' at Giggleswick.





Then came Vic II 128240, a dog that many handlers remember. In the 1984 Scottish National at Bellahouston Park in Glasgow, a city venue with “towering blocks of flats as a backdrop”, it is written in the I.S.D.S. newsletter that “after a host of retirals” “then came two runs, one after the other, right at the other end of the scale, and two runs of such quality that everyone was up to the rope. The first was John Bathgate, with the tri- colour Vic, by John Templeton’s Roy out of John Barr’s Jen, so here the best of breeding showed. Vic really took command of his sheep, and managed always to be one move ahead of them”. “Then came David Guild with the nine year old Tweed. David showed what a lifetime of experience can achieve, and Tweed demonstrated that he was nowhere near ready for retirement yet”. Vic gained a half a point per judge over Tweed, to gain the Reserve Scottish National title, just behind a young shepherd who ran on the first day to win the Scottish National, Alasdair MacRae with Mirk 96612. The judges, Bill Merchant and Bobby Wood chose John and Vic to represent Scotland in the Driving Championship. John won the Scottish Shepherds Aggregate Cup at the International that year, for the second time, with Vic II 128240 at York. They were third in the Scottish National in 1986, and fourth in the Supreme the same year at Beaumaris “We were having a great run when he jumped a dyke on the second outrun, I couldn’t believe it”. As the Scottish Reserve, John and Vic II represented Scotland in the Champion of Champions when Alasdair could not compete as he was working in Holland, winning three out of the four competitions. John Bathgate, John Templeton, and Johnny Wilson travelled down to Wales together to take part in a Welsh T.V. programme. John Templeton’s Roy was competing against two of his sons, Vic II and Eifion Owen’s Morgan. John (Bathgate) also ran Vic II in the Grampian T.V. Sheepdog trials at Castle Forbes. Vic II was the sire of Merion Owen’s 1989 Welsh Nat. Ch. Rock 162204 and Geordie Turnbull’s 1994 Reserve English Nat. Ch. Nicky 164898. Arwyn Organ’s 1994 Welsh Nat. Ch. Cap 186945 was a grandson. Johnny Wilson’s Glen 188534 (1993 S.Nat 2nd and IntSu 3rd), Thomas Longton’s Reserve Eng. Nat. Ch. Kep 212055, and Jock Welsh’s Res. Scottish Nat. Ch. Flash 231492 are great grandsons. Julie Hill’s Tess 239591 is a great great granddaughter (2006 IntSu 2nd & IntQ 1st and S.Nat 2nd). John ran Vic II on ‘One Man and his Dog’ in the Lake District at Ullswater.



John with Vic II at One Man and His Dog



When asked what his preferences are in a dog, John replied that he liked his dogs to have a broad forehead and a pleasant expression. Straightforward words, but the latter says a great deal about a dog's temperament. There is a good reason why most of his dogs are line bred to J. M. Wilson's 1950 Int. Sup. Ch. Mirk 4438, John considers him to be the best dog he has ever seen "He had beautiful method, he kept on his feet and he had tremendous balance. He had power for ever more". Asked about J. M.'s other dogs "Cap 3036 was maybe the best dog that J. M. ever had, but he had him through the war years. He qualified him for the team in 1939, the year the war broke out and the International was cancelled. The dog was trained by a shepherd called Jackie Robertson from Stottencleugh in Berwickshire, he got in the Scottish team with a dog called Mirk. The dog was about three years old when he got him from Jackie and he kept him right through the war years too. Cap had a half white face, I saw him run a lot, he was very responsive on commands. He kept on his feet and he was a great out runner". J. M. worked a lot with John Kirk, a shepherd at Shoestanes in Heriot, he was a great breeder of dogs". When asked what he learnt from J.M., John replied "Always pay attention to the other handlers when they are running. To study the sheep, to see how the sheep are running. Not to make the same mistakes as them". He laughs as he says the latter. "J. M. could handle sheep, he was a great sheep man too. He had bred them for many generations back, all Blackfaced sheep. His brother was a great sheep man too, and their father before them. J. M. was brought up at Troloss farm at Elvanfoot where his father was the shepherd". Rising in the Lowther Hills of South Lanarkshire, Elvan Water flows east for seven miles before joining the River Clyde one kilometre north of Elvanfoot. "J. M. started work as a shepherd, farming at Homeshaw at Moffat when he got married, before moving to Whitehope near Innerleithen. His brother Ben took the tenancy of Troloss until he retired to Thornhill".



Rock at 10 years old



Asked if any other handler measures up to J.M., “I think Johnny Wilson got the nearest to him. Bobby Dalziel is not far from the mark too. J. M. had great command over his dogs. He took them on after they had been started by various folk. He liked powerful dogs, with not too much eye, and the ones that kept on their feet. Golspie was his favourite trial, it’s held on a different course now. He liked the people, the course, and well-handled North Country Cheviot sheep. He won a lot of silverware, which is now with a relative, but he gave the first cup that he won, the Beattock cup, to Golspie. It has a dog on top, and he was so pleased when I won it one time. That cup is still going. J. M. won three International shields outright, he gave the first one to Golspie for the Northern counties, the second one went back to the I.S.D.S. for the Scottish National, and the third one is still given to the winner of the Supreme”. Latterly, John would drive J. M. to trials when he had stopped competing, as he still liked to go to them “He could be critical but he was a great companion to travel with. He had a list of stories from older days, including many about dogs”. On the 15th July 1975, J. M. asked John to take him to his farm in Ayrshire to arrange the shearing. “I had known him for such a long time, he had confidence in me to drive his Mercedes, an automatic. It was a lovely day to drive”. John’s father joined them, he was staying with the Bathgates for a holiday. On the way home, a car was on the wrong side of the road and collided with their vehicle. The driver of the car, an Irishman on holiday with his family, admitted to reading a map whilst driving. All passengers were injured, John had fractured ribs, and his father hit his head badly. J. M. sustained injuries, punctured lungs, that were eventually to lead to his death two days later, he was seventy two years old.



John with Vic II at the Grampian sheepdog trials at Castle Forbes

In addition to his successful stud dogs, John has also bred quite a few dogs himself “Mist 14246 was a very good breeding bitch”. He had a dog called Rex, by J. M. Wilson’s Bill, that was sold to Lionel Pennefather who took the dog out to South Africa with him to perform demonstrations, leaving the dog there when he returned to Ireland. The dog was used for breeding there and as a



result, John was made an honorary member of the South African sheepdog society. The bitches that he remembers in particular are Trust 54874 who was exported to America, she was by Rock. At Hallmanor, he had a exceptional team of dogs in Rock, Fly, Ben and Jen. John has trialled on the North Circuit many times, winning all of the trials at least once, except Nethybridge, that one evaded him over the years. John is proud to have been in the Scottish team nine times. His favourite trial is Newtonmore, a hill trial run on the open hillside, he won it with Vic II. He liked Oxton sheepdog trials too “it had a nice slope and the Blackfaced sheep were always good”. John has done many demonstrations over the years, many at Traquair, which is the oldest continuously inhabited house in Scotland. It is a big mansion house situated near to Innerleithen, open to visitors, where they had regular sheep and wool days. In 1738, the Bear Gates were installed at the top of an avenue, only in use for six years, when according to legend, they were closed following a visit of Prince Charles Edward Stuart (*Bonnie Prince Charlie*). The then Earl of Traquair vowed they would never be opened again until a Stuart king was crowned in London. John relays this information for he is proud of his Scottish heritage. One time, both Bobby Dalziel and Johnny Wilson came to work the dogs with John in a demonstration at Traquair. Bobby used Dot to move the sheep around a line of children, and there was a trailer at the end of the grassed area that the sheep went straight into, by accident really, but the crowd believed in Bobby’s great skills as a handler and loved it. John’s last dog, he informs, was a rough-skinned black, white & tan dog called Clyde, a son of Vic II. To put a long trialling vocation into perspective, it has to be mentioned that John remembers Raymond MacPherson coming down to a trial near Peebles on the train, when Raymond was ‘in shorts’. That is surely an expression to put across Raymond’s tender age, not what he was wearing.

Too reserved to draw attention to himself, another source of information close to him revealed that he had had surgery for cancer of the oesophagus in 1987. Whilst in the hospital in Edinburgh, John imagined running his dogs and it gave him the will to live, “the dogs pulled him through”. It took



two weeks for him to recover and then he ran at the Peebles sheepdog trials. Four weeks later, he won the Tweedhope sheepdog trials. To have overcome so much, confirms the character of this unassuming down-to-earth handler, of whom we have heard so much about. Many thanks to John and Betty Bathgate for all their co-operation, nothing was too much trouble, and for undergoing several visits from us, with two little girls playing dangerously close to their treasured ornaments.