



Tavistock Market

Russell Woolcock, of Ward Chowen, which owns the market, has also been involved, since its inception in 1956, with the voluntary commoners. He became the secretary of the statutory Commoners' Association in 1986.

An integral part of farming life on Dartmoor, Tavistock market was set up in the 1850's by, Daniel Ward, surveyor to the then Duke of Bedford. Daniel Ward was instructed to run the market from that date. The descendants of Mr. Ward ran the Market until 1969 with Russell Woolcock as partner. Recently Neil Woolcock, son of Russell, has run the operation. Neil's father started with the company in 1944 and still takes an active interest in the market proceedings.

In March of 2017, Ward & Chowen became part of the auctioneer group, Stags, who also operate at the South Molton and Honiton markets. The commercial section of the business remains under the leadership of Neil Woolcock.

Moving from the middle of Tavistock in the 1850's, when the Great Western Railway was constructed, the market was built here because the railway was just the other side of the wall so that livestock could be taken away by rail. This was one of two lines that went through Tavistock. The GWR closed in the bad winter of 62/63, when trains were snowed in, and the Southern line closed in 1968.

Originally the market concentrated on the sale of sheep, cattle and pigs. There was also the sale of poultry, eggs, butter and cheese at the Pannier Market held in the buildings that were erected in 1856 when the Duke of Bedford completely modernised the town.

In the early days, farmers walked their stock to market, frequently through the town. Tavistock has always been a conduit for livestock. The towns' green grocers would avoid putting out their wares until after the cattle and/or sheep had gone through! There used to be pony sales at Princetown until the railway closed. They were then held at the Market until recently when outlets became scarce.





At one time there was a sheep sale at Dousland, just beyond Yelverton, and a breeding sale of ewes and lambs for farmers in the area on the first Tuesday in September with a Princetown sale on the first Wednesday. All those farms have now been built on. St John's Fair was in September. There were 119 pens of sheep all except 4 pens were filled with the Greyface Dartmoor sheep. Nowadays you would have a job to fill five pens,

Russell Woolcock made the following observations: "We conducted ram sales for the Scottish Blackface Society since it formed in 1927. Sales were in the Pannier Market in the town but the Council objected. It was in the 1880's that the Blackface (also known as 'the Blackie') arrived in the West Country via Plymouth, when they were walked to Tor Royal at Princetown; a distance of some 15 miles. Mr. Lamb of Prince's Hall was the instigator of this initiative".

Russell is proud of over 150 years involvement of his firm with Tavistock market and is pleased that it is still an important part of Devon's farming life.

