

## William Owen (W. O.) Watkins from Llangadog

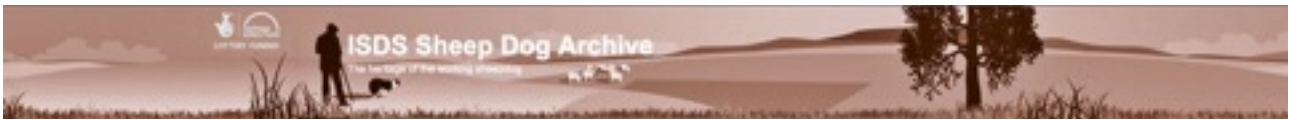
Will Watkins from Llangadog in Carmarthenshire was born into an eminent Welsh farming family in March 1927. The family owned a big sheep farm near Trecastle, where sheep and dogs were a way of life. He had two older brothers, Idwel and Gwynfor, and two sisters Glenys and Gwyneth. Trialling since he was a young boy of about twelve, Will went to trials with his older brothers, all three of them running dogs. The South Wales Association trial was held on the family farm, Aberydfa, for several years. It was to be Will who dedicated a lifetime to sheepdogs and trialling. He married Glenys, a local girl, and they had many happy years together. Great friends with his parents, Ifor and Jenny Owen, Meirion Owen has known Will all his life. With fond memories of childhood visits to their farm, Meirion remembers that the couple could not do enough for them, and they would enjoy every minute of being there. Will and Glenys liked company and nothing was too much trouble for them. A very traditional Welsh couple, typical of a bygone era. Will and Glenys were very close, and it was surprising to those who knew him well, how well he coped, and how he built up a life for himself when Glenys died suddenly in the mid-eighties. Will always missed his wife, her company, and was never too shy to admit as much.



William Owen Watkins  
1927 - 2010 at Aberhydfer, Trecastle  
c1947 with Shags + Nell  
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His passions were his sheepdogs and his sheep, and his animals became a great source of comfort to him. Will continued to be highly successful with his sheepdogs and breeding South Country Cheviot sheep, and gaining a name to be envied in both lines of work. Also a fair hand with a horse in his younger days, Will enjoyed riding, racing and trotting. It was only in the last five years that he did not exercise his sheep rights on the Black Mountain, having always kept a horse to ride up there to gather and inspect his sheep on the mountain. Situated in a pleasant spot on the outskirts of Llangadog, Will's farm can be described as both in and out of the village. He was a regular visitor at the market, and rarely missed a Sunday in the Chapel. A sociable person, Will always welcomed visitors to his farm. The traditional Welsh farmhouse and barns are reminiscent of life of years gone by. Every winter, Will would still salt a pig, hanging the hams from the rafters in the front room, for the rasher of bacon that he had for his breakfast each morning.

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Written by Kim Gibson, with Arwel Price, in 2010  
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A real gentleman, in the true sense of the word, Will had a delightful old-fashioned charm that was very typically Welsh. Polite at all times, Will would make time for a chat, he was always interesting, and interested in others. From a good background, Will had an upbringing in an era where you wore your Sunday best in public. Smart and well-dressed at all times, he would have his waistcoat on, he was out to impress. The bowler hat would come out on special occasions, for judging, funerals, and definitely when showing sheep in the Royal Welsh Show ring. His car would be clean and tidy, Will was always well turned-out. Very sharp and perceptive, Will did not miss much, and though it was quietly, he was also intensely competitive. You had to see them to believe, the number of trophies, rosettes and reminders of all his wins, with both his trial dogs and his show sheep.

A reputable breeder of South Country Cheviots, Will would run several hundreds in his heyday, on two farms. For many years, he went to Lockerbie every October to buy new stock for improving his flock. Harvest festival was the only time that his seat in the Chapel was empty. More often than not, it co-incided with the Lockerbie tup sales. Beforehand, Will would apologise freely to the minister for his lack of attendance that coming week. But it could not be helped. With other local farmers, he would take a minibus up to Scotland, and hire a lorry to bring the rams back. Spending a fair money in the process, as only the best well-bred animals would do. Full of character, Will had his own way of doing things. He liked to encourage the use of his well-bred rams, he did not like to see good Cheviot ewes put to the Texel tup, he would say that it was 'spoiling the ewes'. When it came to charging for the use of his rams, he would not be thinking of the £1500- £1600 that the ram had cost him. But in terms of the value of the lambs that would be born, costing out a fee such as £10 per ewe. Likewise, if you bought a pup off him, it would not be £100, it would be £103. A small expense would have to be accounted for.

Always up early, Will thought nothing of telephoning his friends at 7am,. If he was up, others would be up too. Keeping in touch with his friends was very important to him, visiting regularly to see their young dogs, and to show off his latest young dog. Will had a quiet special way with his sheepdogs, he did not believe in rushing the training of a young dog. They had to have their time. Believing strongly in not running too early at nurseries, as it would spoil a young dog by putting too much pressure on them. 'Pup bach' could be six years old, rather more than a pup to most people. His neighbour, Ifor Hughes, says "Everything was always quiet on the farm, you never heard Will shout at a dog, he had a very gentle way with them. Yet he was an excellent trainer, always getting good results. He loved to show you a young dog coming along, and I was always amazed what he could get them to do. His stories were marvellous, like the one about the sheepdog x greyhound that he used to take to trials as a young man. Stories of his many winnings, he was particularly proud of a couple of silver trays won at the Gilpa Opens".



All through his life, Will was a threat at the post, enjoying both the local trials and trips to the International, as long as they fitted in with farm life. A founder member of the Llangadog sheepdog society, they have lost one of their most committed members. If Will saw a dog that he liked, once he got home, he would be tracing its pedigree right back. He had a tremendous memory, and could remember all the handlers that he had competed against, where they had competed, and with which dogs. Like with his sheep, Will felt very strongly that only the best dogs should be bred from, and prided himself that his dogs went back to J. M. Wilson's dogs. He liked to keep good lines going. Will competed for Wales on One Man and His Dog in the late eighties. He was in the Welsh team at least six times. With Sam 72846 (homebred, by Wally 16347, out of Fly N.R.), he was in twice, in 1973 at Bala and in 1976 at Lockerbie. They were third in the qualifying trial at Lockerbie, running in the Supreme. Will was next in the team in 1980, running Taffy 95613 (by Will's Sam 72846, out of Nell 89430) at Bala. Then he was in the team three times with his most well-known dog Spot 115806 (by I. Sterling's Vic 101886, out of T. Swan's Jan 90674). First in 1983, then in 1988, running Spot at the Blair Atholl International and getting through to the Supreme. The third time was in 1989 at Margam Park. His other national dog at that time was Tweed 144756 (bred by S. Alexander, by Tweed 106263, out of Queen 91305). He also ran a good dog called Hemp.



Angie Driscoll writes of him "Will was near and dear to our hearts although we only knew him for the last three years of his life. I admired him for being fiercely independent and he had a very 'Welsh' sense of fair play. He led a very simple life with his sheep and his dogs meaning everything to him, but there was nothing simple about his handling of a dog. On that score, he was very clever. Over the last two years he impressed many of our international guests as he would come over to our farm and show off his latest young dog in training. Age did not diminish his abilities to start a young dog. During one visit to Will's farm, we had taken some of our ewes to his prized Scottish Cheviot ram, Will gave us a 'tour' of his trophy cabinets - and I use the plural here because he had many trophies and several cabinets. Will regaled us with stories about going to three trials in one day and





coming home with many trophies, and his various trips to the International. Of course, he could tell us about dogs that we know only by name. We have a lasting legacy of Will on our farm - prized tups from his breeding; one tup is affectionately know as W.O.. He is a tremendous ram who has produced some superb lambs for us this year. My lasting memory of Will is from a trial last year where I had made a double fetch final and had no idea how to do an international shed. I made a right fool of myself and Will, god bless him, just smiled and said 'You'll learn'. If I ever do, that moment will be dedicated to Will".

Seriously ill in 2008, Will made a good recovery to regain an enjoyable quality of life. In his eighties, he did have a reduction sale of the Cheviots. But there were some favourites that he just could not bear to part with. Nor could he miss the annual trip to Lockerbie with his friends to buy a tup. Just this last October, he persuaded his brother-in-law Gwyn Price to drive him there, for Will had to go, and he could not possibly drive on a motorway. Always planning forward, he was building his flock back up. Independent, Will was not one to complain, and he found it hard to accept help. He was adamant that he was going to live until he was one hundred years old, still looking after himself and his beloved dogs and sheep. There



was not going to be a time when he had neither. Still trialling at the age of 83, Will ran Maid in the opens, and was placed with Roy in the nurseries and novice classes at the end of last year. Living life the old-fashioned way, Will would only go out to a trial if

all was done at home. Missing a trial last year, he explained that he had to prepare for the winter, he had logs to cut. He was looking forward to the next lambing, right up to the last. His death in December 2010 came as a shock to his friends, as he had been in relatively good health. Found out in the snow, feeding his animals, his last hours were spent with the dogs and sheep that he loved, the animals that he could never give up during his twilight years. This gentleman with his old-fashioned charm leaves a substantial gap in the sheepdog trials in South Wales.

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