

HEFTED! UPLAND FARMING HERITAGE IN THE CHEVIOTS

A conversation about the past, present and future of local hill farming.



Copyright Tony Hopkins, from book 'Northumbria: True to the Land', courtesy of Halsgrove Publishing.

1. Listen to what Bill Elliot has to say about the start of his shepherding career in the 1950s. How does this compare to today's expectations for a rural 15 year old boy ?

“My grandfather and my father were both shepherds before me, and I started when I left the school at 15. In those days, when you started off, you went to live quite often with another shepherd, that looked after about 500 ewes, which was a full, shepherding contract in them days. There was maybe, say, 700 sheep on one farm, so they employed a young boy—well, not many girls in them days, it was all boys—and he went there maybe till he were 19 or 20. And then you left there and when you were old enough to take on a herding yourself.”



To listen to Bill speaking in his own words, scan the QR code.

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The future of hill farming relies on a pipeline of farmers, shepherds and land managers coming through to take on this lifestyle and career.

Image copyright of Pam Brown

2. Listen to Mandy Smith's solution to how farming can engage younger workers. Do you think this is possible given the demands of farming?

“The young people don't want to work the hours any longer. Why would they? Who wants to work seven days a week, 12, 14 hours a day? We're a dying breed. And as long as we accept that and realize that these kids are capable, but they don't want to do it all the time.

... So again, the more you can rota people if you like. So nobody's getting fed up. Everybody's enjoying what they're doing.”



To listen to Mandy speaking in her own words, scan the QR code.

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The Hepple Wilds estate employs a team of people to manage the estate as well as outsourcing various roles to local contractors with traditional farming skills

3. Listen to Walter Riddell talking about the impact that managed wilding at the Hepple Whitefield estate has had on local employment. How does this impact your views on wilding?

“This sort of wilding system tends to get stereotyped as shutting the door, walking away and not employing anyone... We are now employing at Hepple three times as many people under this regime that we did under the old regime ...You still have to keep up a whole load of things like infrastructure, walls, fences; we're planting trees; all things that draw on the local economy beyond the people that we employ here.”



To listen to Walter speaking in his own words, scan the QR code.

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Three generations of Wallers: George, Thomas and Tom Hall of Coquetdale in mid-Northumberland.
Halfway along a drystone wall at Park Hall Farm

Copyright Tony Hopkins, from book 'Northumbria: True to the Land', courtesy of Halsgrove Publishing.

4. Does local farming knowledge handed down over generations still hold value for land management in the future? What do you think of Walter's vision ?

“We try and always use local people to do as much as possible. The reason is that they know more than most people about what this land is like and how it works.

We believe really strongly that you can't achieve big landscape scale nature restoration without farming skills. In fact, some of the things that we do here, and I know we're going to be doing at College Valley, require skills that perhaps have been lost to some farms for some years, and combine both advanced modern farming systems, like no-fence collars or radio tagging, with some of the 'old school', shepherding techniques.”



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Images copyright of Pam Brown.

5. How do you think the roles of women in farming have changed in the last two generations? Pam Brown reflects on the number of female shepherds coming through as well as her mother in law's role on the farm.

"I'm seeing more and more shepherdesses coming through. I mean, we've—well, we've got two girls working the farm today. One's 21, one's 17. Both want to be long term in farming. Not as many boys coming through, I don't think.

...

My mother-in-law, she wouldn't be classed as full time on the farm, and a lot of what she does is the stewardship paperwork and things like that. Going to a lot of meetings and stuff. But at lambing time, she's full time in the shed."



To listen to Pam speaking in her own words, scan the QR code.

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Scanning ewes has been transformational for hill shepherds who can better manage the pregnant ewe and the wider flock according to whether the ewe is having a single lamb, twins or triplets. It may affect where sheep are lambed (upland, lowland or in a shed) and how much nutritional support they are given during their pregnancy.

6. Listen to Stuart Nelson talking about scanning ewes and what his grandfather would have thought of it. Can you think of other innovations and what was their impact?

“It's moved on so much. You could tell my grandfather—not that long ago, in my living memory, that you could do (some of these things) ... and he would just think you'd lost the plot.

I could tell him; “You know, I can tell you how many lambs a ewe’s going to have.”

“Get out.” (He’d say)

You know, they wouldn't believe you. But now they're all scanned.

I would think it'd be quite cool to go back and have a look and see, you know, but I would like to come back again!”

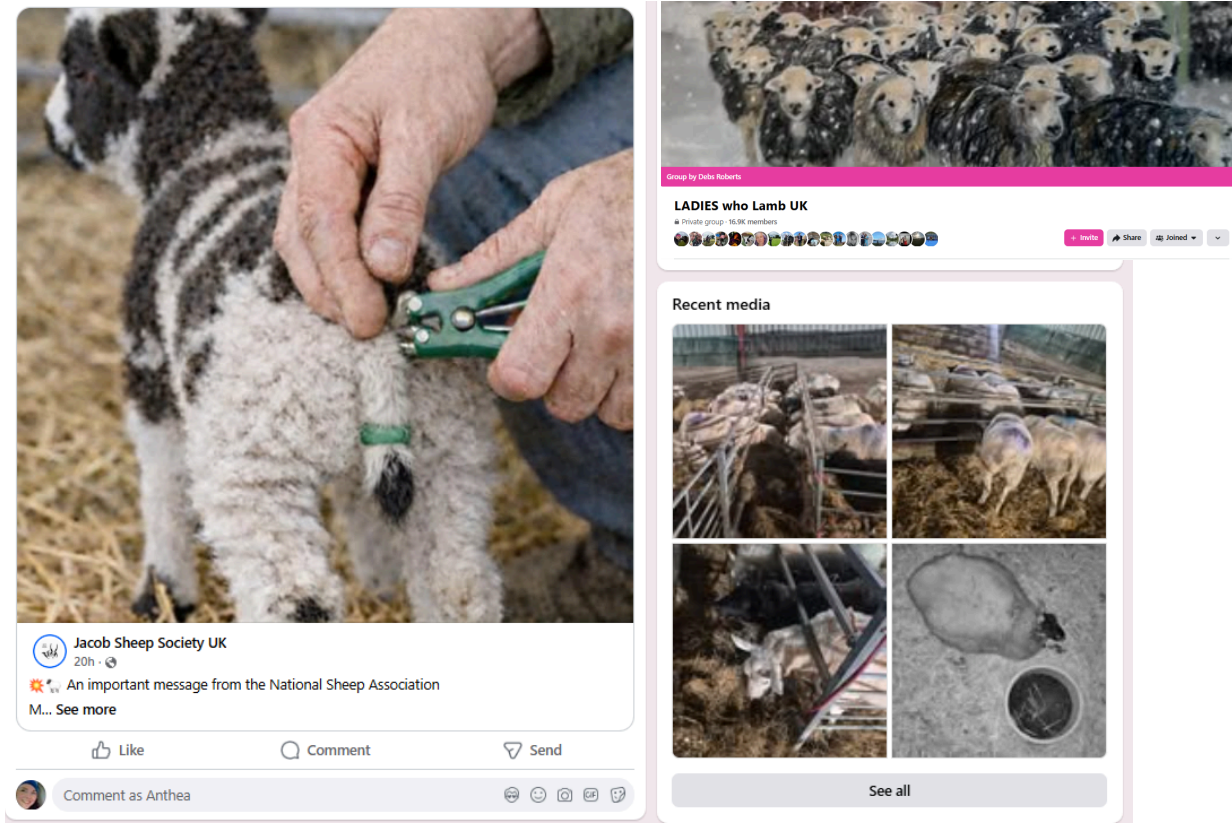


To listen to Stuart speaking in his own words, scan the QR code.

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‘Ladies Who Lamb UK ‘ is a facebook group with 17,000 followers where female shepherds share knowledge, advice and support

7. Listen to Candice Bell talking about an online social media group called ‘Ladies Who Lamb’. How might it have been before social media?

“I think the ‘Ladies Who Lamb’ (group) just shows you, you're not the only one. The lambing shed in the middle of the night is a very lonely place. But you have people on the group saying, *‘Anyone awake, I've got trouble with this. What would you do?’* And people are answering at two o'clock in the morning - because there's not just me sitting in the lambing shed, there's loads of us.

I know it's just for women and people say, ‘oh, well, you know, is, is there a men's one? It's awfully sexist if you can't have men in.’ But actually it's not. It's bigging up that community for women where we are not gonna be judged by men. This community of ‘Ladies Who Lamb’ is so supportive.”



To listen to Candice speaking in her own words, scan the QR code.

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To read an article on Scott's mission to increase biodiversity with livestock, head to ffcc.co.uk

Listen to Scott talking about how farming is linked to a sense of community and identity. Can we encourage positive change while preserving a sense of community identity?

"I became concerned that the way I was managing the sheep was contributing to that (a lack of biodiversity). And I was quite keen to try and develop grazing strategies which would reverse that and develop grazing strategies where the livestock could be used to actually increase biodiversity rather than decrease it.

...

I felt like with the sheep, I was constantly having to use chemical interventions, whereas the cattle, I felt I could keep cattle in this environment without all of that chemical input.

...

I was a little bit worried about how that decision would be seen in the local community because to some extent I think people who are engaged in particularly sheep farming, it can feel like a part of the local identity."



To listen to Scott speaking in his own words, scan the QR code.

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