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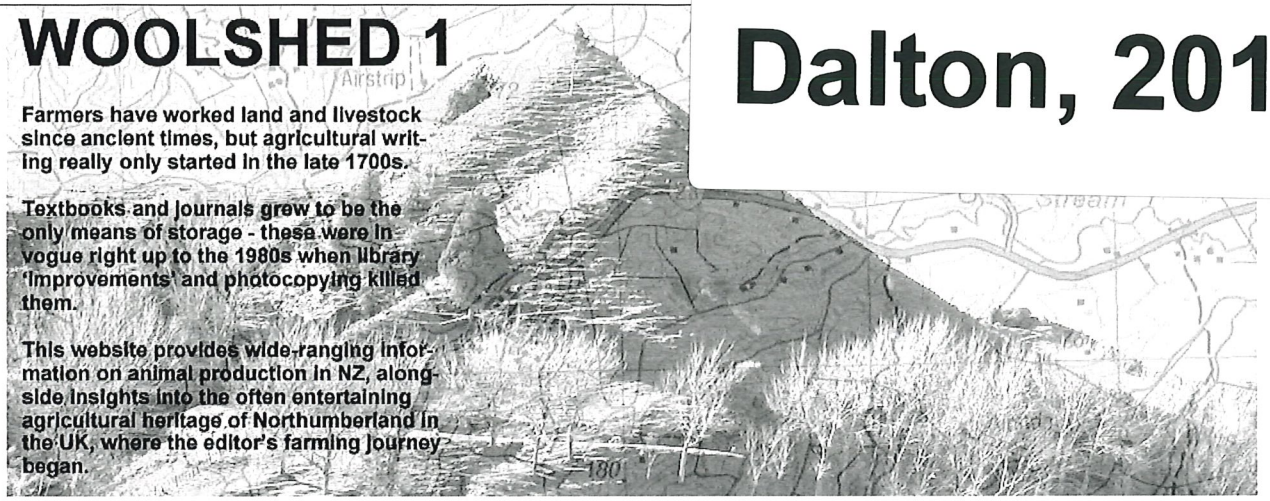

Farmers have worked land and livestock since ancient times, but agricultural writing really only started in the late 1700s.

Textbooks and journals grew to be the only means of storage - these were in vogue right up to the 1980s when library 'improvements' and photocopying killed them.

This website provides wide-ranging information on animal production in NZ, alongside insights into the often entertaining agricultural heritage of Northumberland in the UK, where the editor's farming journey began.

Dalton, 2010

March 28, 2010

Sheep breeds in New Zealand

By Dr Clive Dalton

Early arrivals in NZ
On 22 May 1773, Captain James Cook dropped off a couple of Merino sheep in Sheep's Cove in the Marlborough Sounds. He had picked them up during his stopover at the Cape of Good Hope, and had great hopes for them in their new home. But they didn't last 24 hours and probably died of eating tutu.

It was Samuel Marsden who really got the New Zealand sheep industry going by introducing Merinos from Australia, to his mission station at Waimate North in 1814. The first Merinos arrived in Australia (13 of them) in 1797 from the flock of King George III ('Farmer George').

Governor Hobson brought in another importation from Australia in 1838.

The Merino has the most amazing history of any sheep in the world. These Merino hoggets are on Havelah Station in NSW, Australia

Mana island
The first major shipment of Merinos were landed on Mana Island in 1834 and later transferred to the Wairarapa. Importations increased from Australia as more land was taken up for grazing after 1840. Farmers soon found that Merinos were ideally a dry-country sheep thriving better in the South Island high country whereas the wetter North Island hills caused wool faults, footrot, internal parasites and dags.

Later British immigrants brought sheep with them, and for a number of years just about every British breed of sheep came to New Zealand, many of them like the Scottish Blackface failing to survive for a variety of reasons.

Dual purpose breeds – meat & wool
Later in the 19th Century demand for meat increased, first locally but with refrigeration after 1882, meat became a major export to Britain. So 'dual-purpose' (meat and wool) breeds became popular, and the Merino retreated into the role of a specialist fine-wood breed for the drier South Island high country.

The Romney Marsh from Kent in UK was imported in the late 1800s and early 1900s as a classical dual-purpose breed, and adapted well to become New Zealand's most important sheep breed, making an enormous contribution to the nation's wealth.

Meat breeds
As part of this development, specialist meat breeds from Britain became more popular, originally

About The Editor

Dr Clive Dalton

Dr Clive Dalton studied agriculture in UK before teaching animal production at Leeds University. He came to New Zealand to do hill country animal research and then extension/promotion at the Ruakura Research Centre.

Before retirement he taught agriculture at the Waikato Polytechnic. He was awarded the Landcorp Communicator of the Year Award, the Sir Arthur Ward Award for Agricultural Communication, and is an Honorary Life Member of the NZ Guild of Agricultural Journalists & Communicators.

He is currently an agricultural journalist and technical editor for the website www.lifestyleblock.co.nz, and can be contacted on clive.dalton@gmail.com

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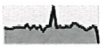

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Northumberland on the Web

The Heritage Centre AT BELLINGHAM NORTHUMBERLAND

Station Yard, Woodburn Road, BELLINGHAM, Northumberland NE48 2DF
Tel: 01434 22 00 50
Opening Hours:
Check their website, they vary in Winter and Summer

Blog Topics: click on your subject of interest

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