John Thomas

John Thomas has been a shepherd for sixty-five years. He was taught to common by his father when he was aged 10 years. He managed large flocks in various ‘runs’ across the Forest and combined this with work in the building trade. His wife Shirley played an important part in the enterprise. He has three sons, one of whom keeps sheep. He now (2016) lives on a smallholding in Ruspidge.

00.26 Learning from his father aged 10 years
01.05 Two brothers only one interested
01.38 Roman Straights, Roman Road, Mosley Green, Speech House Hill, Broadwell, Lydbrook, Joys Green, Cinderford
02.14 Breeds, Welsh ewes
02.40 Married aged 19 years, struggle to raise family
03.00 Career as builder working for Keith Bell
03.51 Clearing sheep from villages
04.30 Phone calls re. sheep, police
04.50 Three sons, one helping
05.18 Haunting/hefting sheep, feeding practices
05.50 Cinderford Green
06.30 Dipping sheep, twice a year
07.08 Lambing, turning ram out 15th October, to lamb in middle March
07.39 Rams
08.00 Lambs to Ensors
09.00 Lambing at Crump, distributing cake
09.50 Dogs to work sheep
10.46 Age, current flock
11.11 Missing working the dogs
11.30 Problems of traffic
11.52 Sheep killed at Speech House, Brierley Road
12.10 Sheep theft
12.30 Poachers, shooting sheep
13.18 Foot and Mouth, 1967
13.50 Foot and mouth 2001, loss of 800 sheep
14.24 Working for MAFF
15.18 End of commoning in 2001
15.51 Too busy on the road, complaints of sheep straying
16.50 Trading Standards
17.09 Impounding sheep at Ruardean
17.50 Son won’t return to commoning
18.25 Cinderford problems
19.10 Reasons not to common, problems with dogs
20.20 Hard work, lack of profit
20.53 Shepherding in blood
21.30 Sons keeping sheep
22.36 Rams outside house
23.20 Problems lambing texel sheep
24.06 Losses
24.58 Rather keep sheep than go to the pub

Glossary

Draw a lamb: Help a lamb be delivered by pulling it out in a measured way.
Eaning - the act of giving birth in sheep, alternative to *lambing*.
Farmers lung: a type of pneumonitis caused by an allergic reaction to spores in mouldy hay.
Fly Strike: Fly strike or myiasis – infestation of the wool, skin and eventually flesh with blowfly or botfly maggots.
Haunting: Old term meaning to settle sheep in a particular location where they would generally stay. There is an instinct in some breeds to stay with a certain *heft* (a small local area) throughout their lives. This allows commoners to graze their sheep without the need for fences. Lambs learn their heft from their mothers. Continuity of generations of sheep is therefore extremely important.
Hefting: Modern equivalent of above.
Heafing: As above.
Grancher: Grandfather.
Mark: A mark, usually an initial or large letter that indicates the owner of the sheep. This was preceded years before by the practice of cutting marks in the ear. *Earmark* – a distinctive mark clipped in the lobe of the ear.
Pit: A Colliery.
Scruffed: Gently beaten or roughed over.
Silicosis: Lung fibrosis caused by the inhalation of dust containing silica
Tag or Ear tag – plastic or metal tag clipped to ear, with identification number, name or electronic chip.
Tats: Welsh sheep.
Tup: A ram.
Tupping: Ram mating with a ewe.
Wool on the wire: Wool left by sheep accidentally or when scratching that can be contaminated with sheep scab. Scab sometimes causes the itching and it is therefore considered good practice to burn or remove the wool in case it is a contaminant.
Worming drench: Drench – a veterinary medicine administered orally and usually an anthelmintic or *wormer*.
OP dip: Organo-phosphate sheep dip (chemical) used to prevent fly-strike and scab.

Abbreviations

NFU: National Farmers Union
MAFF: Ministry of Agriculture Fisheries and Food
DEFRA: Department for Environment, Farming and Rural Affairs
FC: Forestry Commission