

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 shep
- 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.

Lonk tup: a breed of mountain sheep, see: <http://www.lonk-sheep.org>.

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.

Scrag tup: A ram lamb that is not castrated and left on the Forest. Unless ringed and castrated they will serve their own mother.

Scuffed: Gently beaten or roughed over.

Sheep Scab: An acute or chronic form of allergic dermatitis caused by the faeces of the scab mite, *psoroptes ovis*. See: <http://www.scops.org.uk/ectoparasites-sheep-scab.html>

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

