

New Sheep for Old—Changes in Sheep Farming in Hampshire, 1792–1879*

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DURING the period 1792–1879 an intensive system of sheep husbandry was developed on the chalk downlands of Wessex. This involved the extinction of most of the traditional sheep breeds which no longer suited the system of husbandry and the creation, through selective breeding, of a completely new sheep, the Hampshire Down. The narrative concentrates on changes in Hampshire because the county had been regarded as a major 'breeding country of sheep' since at least the late seventeenth century.¹ The date 1792 is significant as the probable date of the introduction of the first Southdown flock in Hampshire, and 1879 as a year when the cereal harvest failed, there was a severe outbreak of sheep liver fluke, and the sheep-corn 'mixed farming' system began to break down with the contraction of arable cultivation and in the acreage under roots.²

The main reason for the improvements in sheep farming was an increasing demand for meat, and mutton in particular. In 1813 Thomas Davis stated that in Wiltshire 'some years ago' sheep had not been considered eatable till 4–6 years old, but that now three-quarters were killed before 2 years old to meet the supply 'for the increasing demand for mutton'.³ James Caird emphasized the increasing consumption of meat in England in 1852. 'The consumption of bread in a farmer's family is not half so

large an item, in the annual expenditure of his household, as butcher's meat; and milk and vegetables . . . If he looks back for thirty years he will find that this difference has been gradually increasing. With the great mass of consumers, bread still forms the chief article of consumption. But in the manufacturing districts where wages are good, the use of butcher's meat and cheese is enormously on the increase.'⁴ In 1878 it was stated that the price of beef had increased 32 per cent between 1853 and 1873, and mutton 43 per cent in the same period.⁵ Indeed it has been suggested that this latter 'Golden Age' in English farming was not so much underpinned by a 'favourable trend in prices for wheat' as by a 'rising trend of livestock prices'.⁶

I

The traditional sheep breeds found on the chalk downs were sturdy and active. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Old Hampshire was described as horned, tall, light and narrow in the carcase, with white face and shanks;⁷ the Old Wiltshire was said to be tall, Roman-nosed, with long curly horns,⁸ and the Berkshire Nott had a similar conformation but was hornless and generally dark faced.⁹ These breeds were

* I am grateful to E J T Collins, M A Havinden, B Afton, M L Ryder for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

¹ Edward Lisle, *Observations in Husbandry*, II, 1757, p 158.

² E L Jones, 'Eighteenth Century Changes in Hampshire Chalkland Farming', *Ag Hist Rev*, VIII, 1960, p 16; 'The Development of English Agriculture, 1815–73', *Studies in Economic History*, 1968, p 21.

³ Thomas Davis, *General View of the Agriculture of Wiltshire*, 1813, p 207.

⁴ J Caird, *English Agriculture in 1850–51*, 1852, p 484.

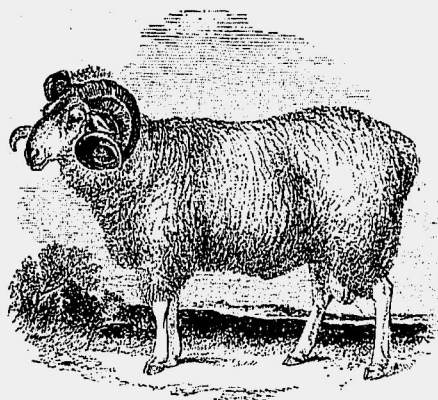
⁵ J A Clarke, 'Practical Agriculture', *JRASE*, ser 2, XIV, 1878, p 476; E L Jones, 'The Changing Basis of Agricultural Prosperity, 1853–73', *Ag Hist Rev*, X, 1962, p 105.

⁶ Jones, 1968, *loc cit*, p 19.

⁷ A & Wm Driver, *General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire*, 1794, p 23.

⁸ C Vancouver, *General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire*, 1810, p 366; W C Spooner, 'On Cross Breeding', *JRASE*, XX, 1859, p 299.

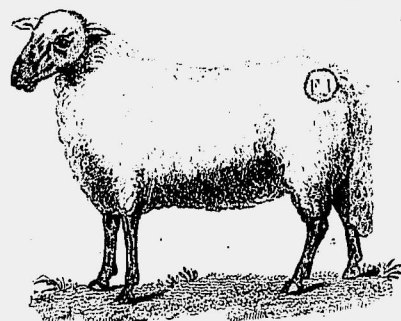
⁹ Wm Mavor, *General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire*, 1809, p 381; Wm Youatt, *Sheep, Their Breeds, Management and Diseases*, 1837, p 241.



Berks.

Berkshire Nott Wether.

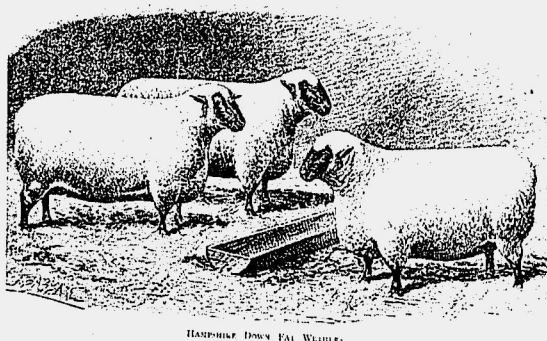
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PLATES I AND 2

Two of the traditional sheep of the Chalk Downlands, the Old Wiltshire with its long curly horns; and the hornless Berkshire Nott.

Sources: 1 William Youatt, *The Complete Grazier*, 14th ed, 1900, fig 119; 2 William Mavor, *General View . . . Berkshire*, 1809, facing p 381.



HAMPSHIRE DOWN FAT WETHERS.

PLATE 3

Hampshire Down Fat Wethers

Source: J Wrightson, *Sheep Breeds & Management*, 1895, facing p 62.



PLATE 4

A Hampshire Down flock feeding on trefolium, 1920s
(Museum of English Rural Life)

noted for their 'hardihood of constitution', folded well, possessed 'early maturity of growth' and were excellent as droving animals.¹⁰ The Dorset Horn breed was said to be superior to the Old Wiltshire and Hampshire sheep, being 'shorter in the legs, with a more compact frame and a rounder barrel'.¹¹ In 1860 they are described as 'horned, both in male and female, the horns of the male are especially twisted – the faces and legs are white, limbs long, shoulders low, and the loins deep and broad . . . The

animal is docile, hardy, suited to folding, and capable of living on scanty pastures.'¹² The distinctive features of the breed were the ewes' ability to take the ram at any time of the year, their excellence as mothers, their propensity to have twin lambs and their fitness for droving.¹³ Their drawback was said to be the somewhat 'inferior character both of the mutton and wool'.¹⁴ Amongst the first of the 'improved' breeds was the Southdown or Sussex Down, pure flocks of

¹⁰ Clarke, *loc cit*, pp 562–3.

¹¹ Spooner, *loc cit*, p 307.

¹² J Donaldson, *British Agriculture*, 1860, p 462.

¹³ L H Ruegg, 'Farming of Dorsetshire', *JRASE*, XV, 1854, p 431.

¹⁴ Spooner, *loc cit*.

which were established in Hampshire in the first few years of the nineteenth century. From the beginning, owning a flock of Southdowns implied a certain social status, and the breed was 'in favour with gentlemen farming their own estates, for the finer quality of the mutton'.¹⁵ There were other considerations which favoured the Southdown. It was an economical feeder, and one-third more could be stocked on a given acreage than was possible with the 'old breeds'. Some extravagant claims were made in this respect, and in 1792 William Pawlett of Kings Somborne was said to have changed from keeping less than 600 Old Wiltshires to 1200 Southdowns on his 800 acres.¹⁶

The main objections to the Southdown in the early nineteenth century, its relatively slow growth and small size at maturity, caused the more adventurous farmers and flockmasters to experiment with cross-breeding. They were, 'with varying results according to the different flocks crossed, and the judgement exercised in selection and matching', united with the size, early maturity of growth and hardihood of constitution of the old Hampshire and Wiltshire breeds.¹⁷ Contemporary writers were uncertain about what was happening in this respect in the first thirty years of the nineteenth century. One writer said, 'It will be difficult to trace the crossing which could produce the short-legged, round-barrelled animal that is now found, content with short pasture and easily fattened,' and another contented himself with saying that the old flocks were bred out as a result of crossing 'again and again with Southdowns'.¹⁸ The last flock of the Old Wiltshire breed is said to have disappeared in about 1819, whilst the

Old Hampshire and the Berkshire Nott were certainly extinct by 1837.¹⁹ The Dorset Horn breed, because it has characteristics which have been useful to the sheep farmer over the years, remains today. A type of sheep known as the Hampshire West Country or West Down was being bred by 1830. They were something like the later Hampshire Down, but smaller, narrower at the fore-end and lighter in colour.²⁰ The Hampshire Down name appears to have been first used in print in 1844, but the breed was not recognized by the Royal Agricultural Society until 1861.²¹ The breed was 'fixed' from diverse foundation stock, although exactly how is not clear for two related reasons. First, many breeders were secretive about their experiments because of a natural desire to be one ahead of competitors and rivals, and second, because there were so many farmers and breeders in Hampshire and surrounding counties who were trying to improve the breed at this time.²²

Nevertheless, three particularly influential breeders may be recognized. John Twynam of Manor Farm, near Whitchurch, Hampshire, began crossing his Hampshire flock, already improved by Southdown blood, with Cotswold rams in about 1829. The resulting half-bred rams were compact and 'blocky' with something of the Cotswold fleece. From 1835–36 they were sold 'not only into Hampshire Down flocks generally, but into those of six or eight of our first ram breeders'.²³ William Humfrey of Cold Ash near Newbury in Berkshire was said to be largely responsible for 'fixing' the characteristics of the Hampshire Down. He formed his flock in 1834 by buying the best West Down sheep that he could find. In 1842 he began to hire Southdown rams from Mr Jonas Webb of Babraham, Cambridgeshire,

¹⁵ J Wilkinson, 'The Farming of Hampshire', *JRASE*, XXII, 1861, p 296.

¹⁶ Vancouver, *op cit*, p 367; Jones, 1960, *loc cit*, p 16.

¹⁷ Clarke, *loc cit*, pp 562–3; see also J B Lawes, 'Report of Experiments on the Comparative Fattening Qualities of Different Breeds of Sheep', *JRASE*, XII, 1851, p 415; these sources are at variance with R Trow-Smith, *A History of British Livestock Husbandry, 1700–1900*, 1959, p 276.

¹⁸ Youatt, *op cit*; Spooner, *loc cit*, p 300.

¹⁹ Youatt, *op cit*.

²⁰ J Wrightson, *Sheep Breeds and Management, Livestock Handbook No. 1*, 1895, pp 54–5.

²¹ W H R Curtler, 'Agriculture', *Victoria County History: Hampshire, V*, Wm Page, ed, 1912, p 507.

²² Spooner, *loc cit*, pp 300–01.

²³ Clarke, *loc cit*, p 564; Trow-Smith, *op cit*, p 279.

the leading Southdown breeder at the time. During the next few years he bred in the most masculine and robust of his own cross-bred rams 'with the largest Hampshire Down ewes I could meet with that suited my fancy'.²⁴ Writing in 1859 William Humfrey continues, 'It has succeeded hitherto beyond what I could have expected. My object has been to produce a Down sheep of large size with good quality of flesh, and possessing sufficient strength and hardiness to retain its condition while exposed in rough and bad weather to consume the root crops on our cold, dirty hills.'²⁵ William Humfrey's work was continued by James Rawlence who farmed at Bulbridge near Salisbury in Wiltshire. Rawlence provided the foundation stock for many famous pedigree flocks of Hampshire Downs as well as helping to establish a flock book in 1890.²⁶ By this period the Hampshire Down was the 'heaviest of all the Down breeds', and was noted for its 'extreme earliness of maturity'.²⁷ It was short legged and 'blocky' with a good level back, and the shoulder, top and breast were wide. It had a big head with a Roman nose, the snout was brownish black with dark flashing to the eyes, and the ears were dark and long, gradually sloping away from the head.²⁸ The breed has retained these characteristics to the present day.

II

Sheep flocks were the 'pivot of Chalkland husbandry' in the eighteenth century.²⁹ The greater part of the chalk downland soils of Hampshire, Wiltshire, Dorset and Berkshire were poor in their natural state and were dependent upon sheep dung for their fertility. Without sheep the downland soils would have become rapidly exhausted and almost useless for arable farming. The usual

practice was to keep the sheep almost wholly on hill pastures during the daytime throughout the greater part of the year, and at night to fold them on the fallow land where, during the winter, they were given an allowance of hay. These sheep were regarded as the best manure carriers for light lands, 'which were by this means alone kept in a state of fertility'.³⁰

Watermeadows, a feature of these chalk downlands since the early seventeenth century, were closely linked with sheep husbandry.³¹ Their construction may be said to represent the first effort actually to grow food for sheep, and as such they were regarded as an 'invaluable adjunct to every down farm'. Sheep were the link between watermeadows and arable farming, and flocks were generally folded on them from about Lady Day, 25 March, some six weeks before grass was available for pasture on ordinary dry meadows.³² Flocks spent the daytime on the watermeadows, and were folded on the fallowed arable land at night. They were kept on the watermeadows for only 6-7 weeks - if longer the sheep risked becoming infected with liver rot. This was not a long period, but it was a critical time for the stockbreeder, and Arthur Young extols 'this spring eatage, which is often of such vast importance to flockmasters, supplying them with plenty of food at the most pinching season of the year'.³³ The meadows were then repaired and again watered in order to provide a hay crop in June/July. John Wilkinson effectively summed up the advantages of watermeadows when he wrote: 'if it be spring the sheep are on the watermeadows by day and on the arable . . . by night; if it be winter they are served with watermeadow hay night and morning'.³⁴

²⁴ Trow-Smith, *op cit*, p 305; Wrightson, *op cit*, p 54.

²⁵ Spooner, *loc cit*, p 305.

²⁶ *The Hampshire Down Flock Book, I*, E P Squarey & J E Rawlence (eds), 1890, pp xii-xv.

²⁷ Wrightson, *op cit*, p 61.

²⁸ Wm Youatt, *The Complete Grazier*, Wm Fream, ed, 14th ed, 1900, p 490.

²⁹ Jones, 1960, *loc cit*, p 5.

³⁰ Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 295.

³¹ J H Bettey, 'The Development of Water Meadows in Dorset During the Seventeenth Century', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXV, pt 1, 1977, p 43; E Kerridge, 'The Flooding of the Wiltshire Water Meadows', *Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Magazine*, LV, no 199, 1953, p 111; Wilkinson, *loc cit*, pp 288-9.

³² Vancouver, *op cit*, pp 269-70.

³³ A Young, *Annals of Agriculture*, XXIII, 1795, p 266.

³⁴ Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 290.

The introduction and gradual general acceptance of new fodder crops was also important. One of these improvements provided better, more succulent, grass in the spring than hitherto, and the option of grazing or cropping into late summer. This was the idea of 'temporary grasses' or short-term leys which were introduced into Hampshire in the late seventeenth century, and for these the seeds of cultivated grasses such as sheep's fescue, 'ray grass', and various clovers, including hop trefoil and 'saintfoin', were sown and nurtured like an ordinary cereal crop.³⁵ Such short-term leys were either grazed by livestock or cut for hay, and after between one and about ten years the land was returned to the general rotation. A clover ley appreciably improved the fertility of the soil by increasing the amount of nitrogen in it and so benefiting the succeeding crop. Within this group the perennial sainfoin was particularly able to thrive on chalk downland soils, and by the mid-nineteenth century its cultivation was regarded as a 'leading feature in chalk farming'. Indeed 'out of the reach of watermeadows, no flockmaster could dispense with it'. It was said to be more reliable for hay and summer feed than other clovers, and give a better yield. It was generally sown under barley, was good for up to four years, and was then followed by a wheat crop. A seventh or eighth part of the arable land was laid down to sainfoin, and it was brought 'round again' in 8-15 years.³⁶

A wide range of fodder crops came into general use during this time. The 'common white' turnip was tried as a field crop in Hampshire in the early eighteenth century, and was seen to be very useful for feed during the late autumn and early winter.³⁷ It was not sufficiently 'winter hardy' or frost resistant,

however, to provide feed for long after Christmas, and during February and March feeding had to be based on an expensive hay diet.³⁸ This hindered an increased stocking rate until Swedish turnips were tried in about 1800. Swedes mature during late winter, have a greater food value than ordinary turnips, and have been linked with the spread of Southdown flocks in Hampshire at that time. Mangolds were grown from about 1810 in Hampshire, and were suited to loams and heavy clay soils. They had to be matured in clamps before being suitable for sheep feed, but formed a welcome addition to the ewes' diet in early spring. The problem of the shortage of sheep food between November and April was gradually being solved. This was reflected in the decline during the eighteen-thirties and forties in the practice of overwintering downland sheep on good lowland pasture, a practice akin to transhumance. Such overwintering involved the 'great flockmasters in the down districts' in sending their ewe lambs 'for six months keep, from the beginning of October to the beginning of April' to areas such as the Hampshire/Dorset Avon vale. Thereafter the 'increase . . . on the downs of winter feed, by means of increased turnip cultivation', encouraged the flockmasters to keep their sheep at home.³⁹

There was an improvement in crop rotations as the old summer and winter fallows were gradually replaced. In 1810 Charles Vancouver described the 'old husbandry' of winter and summer fallow for wheat, then barley or oats, followed with grass for two years, as 'annually giving way' to a short summer fallow for wheat followed by 'turnips, barley and seeds, with wheat again upon the clover lay'.⁴⁰ This development was closely related to the enclosure of the open downland, and between 1800 and 1820 over 50,000 acres of land was enclosed

³⁵ C. Lane, 'The Development of Pastures and Meadows during the 16th and 17th Centuries', *Ag Hist Rev*, XXVIII, 1980, pp 26-7.

³⁶ Lisle, *op cit*, I, 1757, pp 208-9; Thomas Hale, *A Complete Body of Husbandry*, 1756, p 445; Lane, *loc cit*, pp 27-8; Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 294.

³⁷ Lisle, *op cit*, II, p 35.

³⁸ J. M. Wilson, *Farmers' Dictionary*, II, nd, p 539.

³⁹ Jones, 1960, *loc cit*, pp 16-17; Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 286.

⁴⁰ Vancouver, *op cit*, p 139.

in Hampshire through Acts of Parliament.⁴¹ Enclosure encouraged improvement by allowing selective breeding which was difficult with common flocks on common fields. 'The sturdy horned wether' of the old breeds 'was thoroughly competent to take care of himself when the system of feeding in common prevailed, but when each farmer could keep his flock separate, an animal of superior quality was preferred'.⁴²

James Caird describes the chief characteristics of this type of farming as 'the breeding of sheep and the folding of them to enrich the ground for the production of corn . . . The points chiefly considered are the production of wheat and barley, and to promote these the breeding and management of sheep, and the other operations of the farm, are subordinate'.⁴³ Another aspect of this was that landlords often specified in leases and tenancy agreements that a sheep flock be kept on the farm to ensure that the tenant maintained the fertility of the arable land. Leases could be quite detailed and specific. In 1841 Sir William Heathcote required that the incoming tenant on 923 acres near Twyford, Winchester 'shall and will . . . at all times during the said term . . . keep a good full and sufficient stock of sheep to consist of 940 exclusive of lambs in the Summer months . . . from the first day of May to the first day of November . . . and 790 during the Winter months exclusive of lambs'.⁴⁴

III

Between about 1830 and 1860 there was a change of emphasis in sheep husbandry in Hampshire which may be regarded as an expression of High Farming and High Feeding. Sheep were still looked upon primarily as 'manure carriers' necessary to

fertilize arable lands for cereal crops, but also became increasingly important as producers of lamb and mutton. 'The mixed agriculture of the early eighteen-seventies was quite different in aim from that of thirty or forty years earlier. Then, the livestock side had been considered supportive of the arable enterprises. . . Now . . . receipts from their stock were already much valued by many arable men'.⁴⁵ One of the triggers for the increased price was the severe outbreak of liver fluke during the winter of 1830-1, and the subsequent shortage of mutton. Farmers in the Whitchurch area of Hampshire were said to have made 'great improvements' during the period 1830-5 because of the encouragement given to breeding sheep, and were stocking their land 'harder on account of the great prices sheep bring'.⁴⁶ Some years later John Twynam expressed his 'conviction that our improved system of arable farming requires, and from its altered character will support, an improved breed of sheep, a breed which in a shorter space of time on a given quantity of food will produce more pounds of mutton'.⁴⁷

Two other related factors led to increased returns on the chalk downlands. The first was the introduction of oilcake feed during this period, where the justification for feeding it to stock was held to be 'in the greatly increased value of cake-based dung over ordinary dung . . . If cake paid for itself in manure rather than the greater weight of meat raised, it followed that the returns were seen in the succeeding cereal crops'.⁴⁸ The second factor was the introduction of 'artificial' fertilizers. John Wilkinson remarked in 1861 that farmers in the Hampshire Avon Vale country used super-

⁴⁵ Jones, 1968, *loc cit*, p 22.

⁴⁶ British Sessional Papers, House of Commons (BSP), Agricultural Distress, 1837, V, f 36; G E Fussell, 'Four Centuries of Farming Systems in Hampshire, 1500-1900', *Proceedings of the Hampshire Field Club & Archaeological Society*, XVIII, pt 3, 1952, p 283.

⁴⁷ J Twynam, 'Mr Twynam's new breed of sheep - a challenge', *The Farmer's Magazine*, ser 2, no 1, vol 1, January 1841.

⁴⁸ F L M Thompson, 'The Second Agricultural Revolution, 1850-80', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXI, 1, 1968, p 68.

⁴¹ Vancouver, *op cit*, p 374; W E Tate, *A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards*, M E Turner (ed), Reading 1978, pp 125-8.

⁴² Spooner, *loc cit*, p 300.

⁴³ Caird, *op cit*, p 59.

⁴⁴ Hampshire Record Office (HRO) 18M54, Cof. 11, Box R, Heathcote Estate Papers.

phosphates, bones and ashes which were 'drilled at the time of sowing' the root crops, which provided higher yields than hitherto.⁴⁹ The effect of this was to provide a better quality of root crops for sheep feed, and oilcake feed, indirectly administered, greatly enhanced the quantity of the succeeding cereal crop.

James Rawlence observed in 1869 that 'the chief object of his system of farming was to obtain as large a quantity and as continuous a succession of sheep food as possible'.⁵⁰ Frequent changes of diet were considered necessary to encourage the sheep to eat continuously and put on weight, and some very intensive feeding systems were developed during this period. William Fream describes the 'enviable day' of a Hampshire Down wether lamb in July which involved a number of changes of food beginning with night and early morning which were spent on a fold of vetches. Breakfast consisted of a trough full of sliced mangolds and a concoction of linseed cake mixed with split beans, peas and malt. 'The shepherd's voice is next heard calling the wether to cabbage, and perchance as the day declines he rests amidst the grateful and cooling shade of rape leaves towering above his recumbent form, while ever and anon he nibbles playfully at the tenderest and youngest shoots.' The lambs might be run over a clover aftermath before being returned to their fold of vetches for the night. Fream ends with the comment that 'under such treatment it is no matter for surprise that the young creatures should grow rapidly'.⁵¹

Most feeding regimes were nothing like as intensive as this, but the Hampshire Down wether certainly improved as a rapid converter of sheep food into meat. In 1810 the weight of one of its forebears, the Old Wiltshire, was said to average 22 lb a quarter

at 30 months old.⁵² In 1853 the Hampshire Down wether averaged 15 lb at only 13-15 months, in 1869 16 lb at 9 months, and in 1878 20-25 lb a quarter at 12 months.⁵³ These fattening rates compared very well with other sheep breeds. The average for sheep in Britain in 1878 was 18 lb a quarter at 21 months, and for the Southdown wether 18-20 lb at 13-15 months.⁵⁴ Some other breeds, such as the improved Leicester and the Cotswold, fattened more rapidly, and on less keep, but the quality of their mutton was inferior to that of the Hampshire Down.⁵⁵

Wool was undoubtedly a useful and sometimes valuable crop during this period, and breeders made determined efforts over the years to improve the quality and weight of fleece. However the downward trend of prices was hardly likely to encourage radical change. Shortwool prices declined 1820-32, rose until 1836 and then gradually fell away again to 1845.⁵⁶ The quality may have been improved, but the weight of the Old Hampshire and the Hampshire Down wether fleece remained fairly constant between 1810 and 1878 at 4-5 lb.⁵⁷

IV

The advances in the technique of arable farming, and the continuing efforts to improve the Hampshire Down breed, allowed the sheep farmer a range of options in rearing and marketing his breeding flock, all of which had a quick turnover and offered the possibility of high profit margins. He could concentrate on the production of lamb, killing at about fifteen weeks, on the rearing of fat wether lambs, selling them in the summer or autumn of the year in which

⁴⁹ Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 284.

⁵⁰ James Rawlence, 'Farm Reports: 7-Bulbridge and Ugford nr. Salisbury', *JRASE*, ser 2, V, 1869, p 505.

⁵¹ Youatt, 1900, *op cit*, pp 510-12.

⁵² Vancouver, *op cit*, p 366.

⁵³ S Druce, 'On the comparative profit realised with different breeds of sheep', *JRASE*, XIV, 1853, p 212; Rawlence, *loc cit*, p 506; Clarke, *loc cit*, p 564.

⁵⁴ Clarke, *loc cit*, pp 478 & 562.

⁵⁵ J Wilson, 'On the Various Breeds of Sheep in Great Britain', *JRASE*, XVI, 1856, p 225; Clarke, *loc cit*, p 560.

⁵⁶ B R Mitchell & P Deane, *Abstract of British Historical Statistics*, 1962, p 495.

⁵⁷ Vancouver, *op cit*; Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 297; Clarke, *loc cit*, p 564.

they were born, or on the breeding of pedigree rams.

Lamb rearing has an interesting history in southern Hampshire during the first half of the nineteenth century when the area had the reputation of rearing the 'earliest lambs for the London market'.⁵⁸ This trade was based on Dorset Horn ewes which were tupped in their native pastures in Dorset and Somerset in May or June. The in-lamb ewes were driven on the hoof to the autumn sheep fairs in Wiltshire and Hampshire, the largest and best known being at Weyhill near Andover on 10 October each year. To give an idea of the scale of this activity, 100,000 sheep were said to be penned per year at Appleshaw Fair, three-quarters of which were Dorset Horn ewes 'heavy in lamb'.⁵⁹ Hampshire farmers were amongst the buyers of these ewes, which were driven south and lambed down in November. The system depended on the relatively mild climate of southern Hampshire, and the 'normal custom' was to fatten the ewe and lamb together and sell them both the following spring. The fat lambs were generally sold for the Easter lamb trade, and the ewes sheared and sold by the beginning of May.⁶⁰ In the early nineteenth century the profit, including the money for the fleece, was said to be 'double the first cost of the ewe'.⁶¹ Sometimes the ewes were put to a Southdown ram on their native pasture 'which improved the quality and fatting predisposition of the lamb'.⁶² James Caird suggested that the trade was in decline in 1852. This was probably linked with the fact that the Hampshire Down, bred on the arable downlands rather than the mixed clay, loam and sand soils on which the Dorset Horns were fattened, was being lambed about Christmas and provided a better quality Easter lamb with fewer weeks of feeding.⁶³

⁵⁸ Caird, *op cit*, p 90.

⁵⁹ *Cyclopedia of Agriculture, Practical and Scientific*, II, J C Morton, ed., p 836; Wilkinson, *loc cit*.

⁶⁰ Wilkinson, *loc cit*, pp 273-7.

⁶¹ Vancouver, *op cit*, p 370.

⁶² Spooner, *loc cit*, p 307.

⁶³ Wilson, *loc cit*, p 235; Squarey, *op cit*, p xiv.

Another option was the rearing of fat wethers. 'The management of Hampshire Down lambs offers one of the very best examples of judicious feeding that can be found. The primary object being to get the lambs to the market in autumn, no expense is spared to provide frequent changes of food.'⁶⁴ A Hampshire custom spread in the eighteen-thirties whereby breeders in surrounding areas also began to sell their wether lambs in the late summer or early autumn instead of overwintering them, which meant significant savings in pasture and feed.⁶⁵ Normally these wethers were bought and 'finished' by farmers from outside the chalk districts. For example, in Essex in the eighteen-forties, Hampshire Down wether lambs were purchased in the autumn and kept 'either in the yards or pastures during the winter, and in the ensuing summer either folded upon the fallows or fattened upon the clover; in the former case they were sold in the ensuing autumn or winter-fed upon turnips, oil-cake or beans'.⁶⁶

Ram breeding could also be lucrative, and because first crosses often inherited the best qualities of their parents, both Hampshire Downs and Southdowns were favoured for crossing with other breeds throughout the country. The resulting cross-bred lambs generally matured rapidly and provided good quality mutton, and the main advantage of the Hampshire was that it had a greater hardiness of constitution than the Southdown ram.⁶⁷ A feature of breeding Hampshire Down rams was that they were heavy and robust enough for service in the summer of the year in which they were born. These 7-8 month old prodigies were lambed early in January and subjected to an extraordinarily intensive feeding regime in order to reach over 20 lb a quarter in August.⁶⁸ Again, Hampshire Down

⁶⁴ Clarke, *loc cit*, p 521.

⁶⁵ Squarey, *op cit*.

⁶⁶ R Baker, 'On the Farming of Essex', *JRASE*, V, 1845, p 15.

⁶⁷ Wilson, *loc cit*; Squarey, *op cit*.

⁶⁸ Wilkinson, *loc cit*, p 297; Rawlence, *loc cit*, pp 505-6.

breeders enjoyed a rapid turnover, whilst the ram lambs of other breeds had to be overwintered before they were fit for service.⁶⁹ John Wrightson summed up this achievement when he wrote 'I have often declared a Hampshire Down ram lamb, as he appears in the sale-ring . . . late in July or in early August, to be one of the wonders of the world.'⁷⁰

V

Considerable thought and effort was put into flock management, and a 'sheep to the acre all round' was considered to be essential for good farming. Few other animals were kept except milch cows, the workhorses and a few pigs, and the farmer therefore depended 'chiefly on his sheep stock for manure and profit'.⁷¹ The size of flocks varied, but three to four hundred ewes was considered to be sufficient for one shepherd. The aim of many farmers was to avoid overwintering any stock except the ewe flock, and so reserve most of the feed for the breeding ewes and early lambs. Hence of about 400 lambs born January-February 'some of the best wethers (say 100), the farmer picks out for the lamb-fairs at Stockbridge or Overton in July; the remainder he sells from time to time according to his supply of food or requirements for money, at different fairs up to Weyhill, 10 October, or Andover on 17 November, reserving always 140 chilver [ewe] lambs to replace the one-third of his ewes, which, being full-mouthed, he drafts out of his breeding flock year by year'.⁷²

The various parts of the flock were generally kept separate throughout the year as each had different feeding requirements. The flock was even further divided after the lambs were weaned in early May. The ram and wether lambs received a daily ration of corn and cake, and were the first to be fed off

any newly formed fold. Meanwhile the ewe lambs, breeding ewes and draft ewes only required a maintenance diet, and consequently received no corn or cake allowance and followed the ram and wether lambs by clearing up what remained in the fold. The full-mouthed draft ewes were sold at the July sales or the autumn fairs. Good breeding ewes were sometimes kept on after this age, but generally they were worn out and beginning to lose their teeth through the hard work involved in gnawing the root crops in the fold. The ewe lambs were not regarded as mature enough to breed until they were 18 months old.⁷³

There were various methods by which the fodder crops could be supplied to sheep. Some farmers were said to turn the sheep promiscuously into a large fenced-off section of field, which were then allowed to 'eat the roots at pleasure'. Another practice was to enclose the sheep in as much space as they could clear in one day, 'advancing progressively through the field until it was cleared'.⁷⁴ The latter was better farming as the sheep distributed their droppings and urine more evenly over the area being manured, and meant that 'staking and setting the field hurdles' were part of the shepherd's daily business. The light wooden hurdles, usually made of hazel in Hampshire, had to be set and fixed in such a way as to keep the whole row steady 'against the action of strong winds and the abrasion of sheep'.⁷⁵

Flocks were afflicted by a range of diseases, but the worst was sheep rot, caused by the liver fluke parasite. The cause of the disease, involving a freshwater snail at one stage and the complex life cycle of the fluke parasite, was not finally understood until the end of the period, in about 1880.⁷⁶ Nevertheless farmers and agricultural commentators had a fairly clear idea about

⁶⁹ Youatt, 1900, *op cit*, pp 489-90.

⁷⁰ Wrightson, *op cit*, p 142.

⁷¹ Caird, *op cit*, p 93.

⁷² Wilkinson, *loc cit*, pp 296-7.

⁷³ Rawlence, *loc cit*; Wrightson, *op cit*, pp 142-5.

⁷⁴ Youatt, *op cit*, p 521.

⁷⁵ Wilson, *op cit*, I, p 741.

⁷⁶ A P Thomas, 'Report of Experiments on the Development of the Liver Fluke', *JRASE*, ser 2, XVII, 1881, pp 1-29.

the conditions most likely to produce rot in sheep. In the early nineteenth century it was said to be caused by 'the low grounds, subject to autumnal floods'.⁷⁷ In 1862 the point was made that 'it has long been ascertained that during a certain period of the year sheep are sure to take the rot if placed on irrigated meadows, this being from about June to October'.⁷⁸ Some farmers and flockmasters actually took advantage of this, as sheep 'when first touched with the rot thrive mightily in fattening for ten weeks . . . before falling away to nothing but skin and bone'.⁷⁹ Success therefore depended on killing the sheep in time, and apparently the mutton was quite edible. During the nineteenth century there were two major outbreaks of sheep rot which decimated flocks in Hampshire and the surrounding area, one during the winter of 1830-31 and

the other in 1879-80, as well as innumerable minor outbreaks.⁸⁰

The intensive system of sheep husbandry that has been described made many and varied demands not only on the downland farmer but also on the farm shepherd. He was normally responsible for moving and setting the fold each day, getting the cake and corn rations for the feed troughs, providing veterinary care and keeping the sheep's feet sound and their bodies free from dirt. He was also responsible for lambing in January and February, weaning the lambs in early May, ensuring that the fat wethers were in the peak of condition when the farmer wanted to sell them, and for organizing tuppings in August and September.⁸¹ Between 1792 and 1879 the farm shepherd became a highly skilled worker who led a life so very different from his forebears who, not so many years before, had moved their flocks slowly over the sparse heath and open downs.

⁷⁷ Vancouver, *op cit*, p 374.

⁷⁸ J B Simonds, 'The Rot in Sheep: Its Nature', *JRASE*, XXIII, 1862, p 83.

⁷⁹ Lisle, *op cit*, II, p 208.

⁸⁰ Thomas, *loc cit*, p 141.

⁸¹ Youatt, *op cit*, pp 512-14.