

The Suffolk, though originally bred for East Anglian arable farms, is now more widely scattered through Britain than any other Down breed because of its great popularity for cross-breeding. It is a striking sheep with its black face and legs, and in contrast to the Shropshire the wool does not extend below the knees and hocks or on to the head. It is more prolific than most Down breeds.

Hampshire Down and Dorset Down

There are now many more Hampshire Downs in Wiltshire than in Hampshire, but their ancestors were the old scraggy Wiltshire Horns and Berkshire Knots. About 1840 a Mr. Humphrey experimented with the use of Southdown rams on this stock, finally buying rams from Jonas Webb—in fact, one of them was a son of Webb's great sire Babraham. The rams were mated to the biggest of the ewes and left some good progeny which founded the breed. Humphrey was later able to exchange rams with one Saunders from about Dorchester, who had been breeding along the same lines, but Saunders's type in time became not Hampshires but Dorset Downs.

The Dorset Down is a type similar to the Hampshire Down, though slightly smaller in size and lighter in face and leg colour. In its home district of the counties of Dorset and Somerset it is quite a valuable commercial type.

Like the Dorset Down, the Hampshire is a breed peculiarly suited to the arable-land sheep farming of the southern chalk uplands. It is a large breed with brownish-black face and leg colour, woolled down the legs, over the poll, and on the cheeks. Its most important feature is its capacity to make very rapid liveweight gains when heavily fed.

Oxford Down

The origin of the Oxford Down is interesting. In 1829 John Twynam, who had a flock of Hampshire ewes at Whitechurch in Hampshire, was visiting a farm with a neighbour. They came on a flock of Hampshires like his own, but half the lambs were by Cotswold sires, the other half being purebred. He was so struck with the increased size and condition of the crossbreds that eventually he carried on the cross-breeding on a large scale. Many other breeders followed suit, some buying his crossbred rams while others bred their own, and eventually they were able to fix the new type. The Oxford Down replaced the Cotswold in its own district.

It is the largest of the Down breeds and has a longer fleece. Compared with the Hampshire Down, it is more hardy and better suited to cold, wet, arable land. Like the Suffolk, the Oxford Down now has a scattered distribution because of the demand for rams for cross-breeding in the Midlands and the border counties.

Long-wooled Breeds

As purebreds the long-wooled breeds are much less in demand than 50 years ago and therefore are less important. The importance of wool in relation to early maturity and fleshing properties has declined except in breeds like the Romney Marsh, for which there is still an export trade to the wool-growing countries. Mutton now must be small and lean, for consumers' tastes have changed.

DISTRIBUTION OF SHEEP BREEDS IN BRITAIN



[From "British Pure-bred Sheep" (National Sheep Breeders' Association of Great Britain).]

The long-wools produce fleeces of 10 to 15lb., long in the staple, lustrous, and large in fibre diameter. The demand and price for this type of wool have fallen in comparison with other types, so there has been a trend away from long-wooled sheep, and among those that remain cross-breeding has become increasingly prevalent. On the rich lowlands, however, the long-wools still hold their own.

Children hear a spate of praise for great poets, great engineers, great soldiers and sailors, but the fame and honour that are due to great farmers are not so loudly sung. That appears strange in view of the work of such men as Robert Bakewell of Dishley and John Ellman of Glynde—"by their patience and determination they showed the world how to establish improved types of sheep."

Professor Scott Watson in 1936 put the position concisely: "The indirect influence of Bakewell's sheep is still very great, for many of our modern breeds owe a great deal to Dishley blood. It was a belated honour to Bakewell's memory when a few years ago his grave in the little ruined

chapel at Dishley Grange was restored and a tablet was erected to his memory."

New Leicester

Dishley Grange, in Leicestershire, was the home of Robert Bakewell, who developed the modern sheep. During the latter half of the 18th century the population of Britain increased rapidly and improved methods of farming allowed sheep to be fattened throughout the winter and spring, when previously they had barely subsisted, leading to the great change in breeding policy and the increased importance of meat over wool. For about 30 years before 1790 Bakewell developed the first improved long-wool from the old Leicester type, changing the old coarse-boned, slow-feeding animal into the symmetrical, fine-boned New Leicester.

Bakewell's Leicesters in time became very famous, and rams which he bred were used to improve existing localised long-wooled types. His methods of breeding and the example he set in the results he achieved were even more important than the type he produced. He was the great pioneer of inbreeding, careful selection, and the