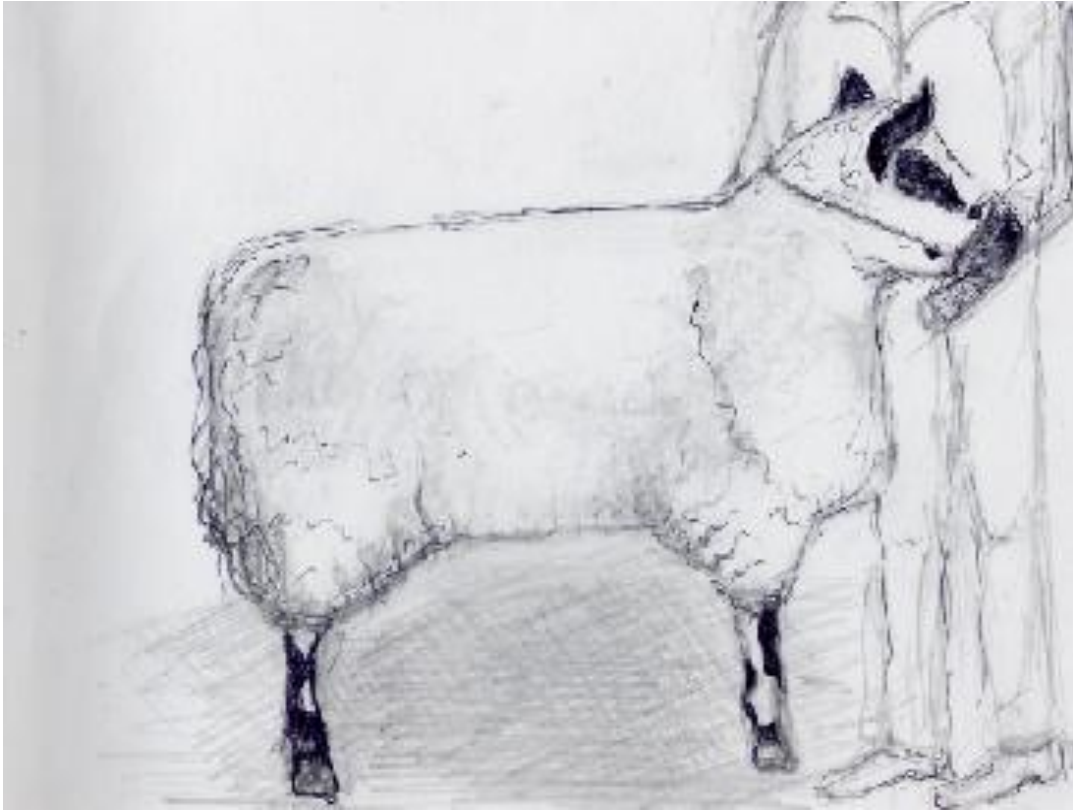


# SHOWING ETIQUETTE



A talk to the Coloured Ryeland Group by John & Suzanne Donovan  
31<sup>st</sup> May 2009

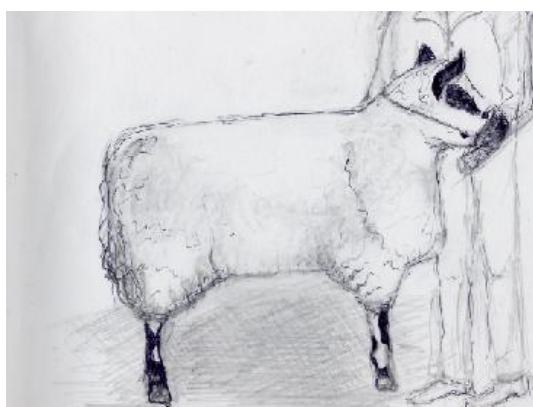
## Showing Etiquette

We have been asked by the Coloured Ryeland Group to give a 'little talk on showing etiquette' so we first consulted the dictionary and found that etiquette relates to manners, protocol and custom. We thought therefore we would cover manners, protocol and custom of both exhibiting and judging and most particularly to give any members present today that have not showed before an idea of what showing is about and what they should expect.

As is normally the case a lot of what we will cover in this article and talk is subjective being open to opinion and there are many members who are very accomplished showmen and women who are far more experienced that may disagree with our thoughts, but they are just that, our thoughts based on our experiences gathered whilst showing and judging and as spectators.

Our interest in showing began almost 15 years ago, at that time we had no idea what was involved and how to get started, let alone the finer points of the 'showing etiquette', but what we found was from the very first show we attended with a small Coloured Ryeland ram lamb was that local Ryeland members were so welcoming and willing to help. We were lucky having experienced showmen and women like Pennie Mee, Neville Morgan, David Lewis and Russell Howell who were all so giving of their time and knowledge and gave us an incite into showing and showing etiquette. Over the years experienced exhibitors from other sheep breeds have also helped, giving their valuable advice and passing on their 'showing tips'. The point being is that we all need help and advice no matter how experienced and there are lots of members who would be willing to help, so don't be afraid to ask, just don't do it as they are about to enter the show ring!

If you are interested in showing, (and you have the time) our suggestion would be to visit a show, local or further afield, it does not need to have a Ryeland class. Have a



good look around the sheep pens and take note of what the exhibitors are doing, especially in the time leading up to the judging. Pick a good vantage point at the ring side and watch the classes being judged, observe the judge as he or she goes about the task, (do you think the judge is doing a good job?) and how well are the exhibitors handling the sheep? At the bigger county shows with a good turn out of exhibitors this can sometimes take up to several hours. After all the individual

sheep breed classes have finished, later in the day for the one day shows, the judging of the Sheep Interbreed will commence; here all the individual breed champions go forward to compete for the interbreed Supreme Champion sheep of the show, possibly taking in another hour or two. Shows vary and can have slightly different and sometimes additional classes, e.g. Best pair of ewes, Wool on the hoof, so consult the

show schedule for the exact details. For junior exhibitors there might be chance to enter the increasing and popular class for the sheep Young Handler.

## Preparation

Showing starts at home with breeding, selection and preparation but this is a topic for another day. That said in terms of etiquette, this also starts at home in the preparation, remember that the judge will handle your sheep so it is important to ensure that they



are clean. The preparation should also include some halter training so that you can successfully show your sheep off to their potential. It helps the judge and you if the sheep can walk well and also stand, then hopefully the exhibitor will not have to drag the sheep around the ring, even so the best trained sheep can have their bad days!

Unfortunately there is paperwork associated with showing, most shows these days publish and make available a schedule that lists the different classes that you may enter, the show rules and entry fees. Normally there will be a closing date typically two to six weeks before show day,

you must return your entries and fees in time or your entry will be rejected. Therefore it is very important to get yourself on the list to receive a schedule for the shows you have selected, it is normal to ring the show office or the show secretary and they will be very willing to help you.

You will need to consider which classes you would like to enter, typically there will be a class for the senior rams being over two years old, yearling rams and ewes, ram and ewe lambs born after 1<sup>st</sup> January, occasionally you will find classes for a breeding ewe - two years or over having raised a lamb that year. There will also be classes for a group of three sheep, typically being a male and two females, occasionally the group must contain a lamb. Over the years we find the most popular group to be a yearling or senior ram, a yearling ewe and ewe lamb or a ram with two shearling ewes, but a group of lambs could also be entered if an older sheep is not a requirement for the class.

Unfortunately, on the morning of the show you must complete a Defra movement license to move your sheep from home to the show and the show must complete and provide you with a license for your return journey home. When planning your attendance at a show, remember that unless you have Defra approved isolation facilities, your holding will be on a standstill for the mandatory six days after the show. Ensure the ear tags are correct and match the movement license, movement licenses accompany the stock, and you have transporters certificates if needed. For more information on animal movements and isolation facilities contact your local authority.

You will need showing essentials to take with you on the day, including buckets for water and feed, feed and hay, white coats for showing, white halters, some wet or hot weather protection for the sheep and you. Take a tarpaulin, we always do, this can be popped over the pens and with a little imagination and creativeness used to provide shelter for the sheep if it rains and shade if it gets too hot.

### **Show day (one day shows)**

The big day arrives, allow plenty of time, it never ceases to surprise us how quickly the time goes in the morning, getting ourselves ready and the sheep loaded to set off up the lane. Remember your movement license, vehicle pass and entry tickets, we always put them in the vehicle the night before.

When you arrive at the showground you will need to book your stock in by handing in your movement license, once you locate your pens which will normally be labelled with your name, unload the sheep. Provide water for the sheep, we tend not to feed until judging is complete so as to avoid hay and feed getting into the fleece, particularly around the head. You may also need some straw for the pens even if the sheep are on grass. Once the sheep are secure in the pens and you have moved your vehicle to the designated parking area you can display any promotional material that you have, although this is not a necessity for your first showing ventures.

### **Showing**

Showing is about subjective assessment against a standard; your sheep will be assessed by the judge against the breed standard and the judge's opinion as to the finer breed points. Before we consider the sheep we do need to say a few words about the exhibitor who in our opinion needs to be sensibly and smartly dressed. Under current Defra rules you will need a clean white coat, do keep it buttoned up. You will also need clean stout shoes or boots possibly wellington boots in wet weather, smart trousers or skirt, shirt and tie is welcome and remember sun hats in hot weather or wet weather coats and hats should you be unfortunate to exhibit in the rain.

Normally the order of judging will start with the ram class, if there are separate classes for senior ram (over two years) and yearling ram, they will usually start judging with the senior ram. The yearling ram class will follow and then the ram lambs. After the ram classes the ewes are judged, the breeding ewe will normally start if there is a class, followed by yearling ewes and then the ewe lambs. Very occasionally the older ewe and yearling class may be mixed and the schedule will say, ewe of any age but must be one year or older, not a favourite class of ours as we prefer the older ewes in a class of their own.



Once the individual classes are over, the judging normally progresses with the group of three, here the judge will be looking for the three most correct animals that match together well and in his opinion make a deserving group.

Following the completion of the above mentioned classes, the breed champion and reserve breed champion will then be selected. The first placed animals from each class, excluding the group of three, will be invited back into the ring and the judge will carefully select the animal that in his or her opinion is the most correct and the best example of the breed; this could be any of the first placed prize winners but typically a ram, sometimes the ewe if she outshines the ram and on rarer occasions a lamb! Once the judge has selected the breed champion the second placed animal from that class will be invited back into the ring, the judge will then also consider this animal when selecting the reserve breed champion.

There will be a steward to help organise and keep you informed about the judging, the steward should come and let you know the judge has arrived and an idea of how much time you have left before the first class is called- frantic last minute, check the sheep looks its best, is the halter on correct!. If you are not sure about anything ask the steward for assistance and help.



The exhibitors will gather outside the show ring with their animals, the judge will be in the ring waiting and watching, very often the judge's eye will be drawn to the animals that walk well into the ring. Typically the judge will ask the exhibitors to walk the sheep around the ring, often the judge will stand in one corner to watch each individual animal walk towards and then away. The judge will be assessing how well the animal moves checking for any obvious problems with the legs

and feet – this is where all of that halter training pays off! Remember to keep your animal between you and the judge, the judge wants a good look at the sheep; it is surprising to see how often experienced exhibitors place themselves between the sheep and the judge especially when turning. Do not walk too fast and never drag your sheep along by its halter, if your sheep is slow to lead or stubborn, drop behind another sheep so it can follow and gently squeeze its tail to make it move along. If you are not confident how well your animal will lead always try to follow on behind one of the other exhibitors.



The judge will ask each exhibitor to line their animal up, if you are new keep an eye on the other exhibitors and take their lead – you don't want to line your animal up with its head facing one way when all of the others are facing in the opposite direction! With the animals in line the judge will normally take a couple of minutes to walk up and down, both from behind and in front, the judge will be closely observing the sheep considering the

merits of one with another, so it is important to make sure you have them standing good and square with a leg set in each corner. You want to avoid the feet being tucked in under the sheep as it will then look hunched, as if the animal has 'wind' or the legs spread wide, resembling the unforgettable 'Bambi on ice'. The aim is to have your sheep standing square with its head held up, looking forward and alert. Keep your eye on the judge so you know where he / she is, because that is where the judge is looking at you from, for us this is the golden rule; avoid letting yourself get between the judge's eye and your sheep, move to the side if you are in the way, so the judge always has a clear view.

The judge will then start the detailed examination of each animal, beginning from one end of the line and systematically working his / her way through. A good judge will always let you and your animal know he is coming – no sudden movements or



unexpected handling of the sheep, especially the lambs, as they can take off like a 'rocket' with you and the judge left spread eagle on the floor and sheep at the furthest point of the ring! Remember you have your part to play by ensuring as the judge approaches that you have a firm but steady grip of the halter and sheep. Some judges will be quite chatty and it is in order to respond but keep it

appropriate and remember it is the animal that counts and not you. Avoid entering into conversations with the exhibitors next to you or spectators outside the show ring; keep your attention on the judge ensuring your animal is presented well.

The judge will normally start with the head of the sheep, inspecting the teeth, some judges will do this by using a thumb in the sheep's mouth gently rubbing the teeth and checking they are correct, not forward or back to the pad, the judge will also be checking the teeth in relation to the animal's age. Some judges will part the lips of the sheep again to visually check the teeth and correctness of the mouth. Some judges may ask you to part the sheep's lips and display the teeth. The judge will inspect the eyes to check that they are healthy, clear and bright with no redness or discharge; this could indicate a contagious condition. The judge will feel the top of the head ensuring with the Ryeland being a polled breed that there is no evidence of horn. Quite often particularly with the ram lambs you will find hard horny buds, these should not be present, so check for them yourself, they are quite easy to remove. The judge will look for a firm straight back and assess the condition of the animal by feeling and handling the animals back, loins, back end and tail. The judge will handle the sheep firmly and therefore particularly with the lambs keep a reasonable hold of the animal, as it is not unusual to see lambs jump into the air. For this reason it is also important that you keep a reasonable distance from your fellow exhibitors as it can be annoying for their sheep to be upset by the lively animal next to it. The judge will inspect the testicles in the males to ensure they are both fully dropped and of even size and with the females the teats, for a breeding ewe the teats and also the udder to check for any sign of hardness or lumps.

The judge, will pay particular attention to the feet so during your preparation at home make sure they are trimmed correctly and also check the animal is not down on its

pasterns. The legs should be straight, certainly below the knee, but we prefer to see a good straight leg, with some width between them.

Ryelands have significant heritage concerning the wool which should be deep in staple, free of coarse kempy fibres especially on the legs and for the Ryeland there should be no black or ginger fibres anywhere in the fleece. The coloured Ryeland fleece can be any natural colour or combination of colours. Some judges will place more emphasis on the wool than others so opinion will vary.

The judge may ask you to walk your animal again from your position in the line and occasionally the judge may also ask two or more exhibitors to do this together.

When the judge has completed his individual assessments he / she will begin to pull the animals forward in order of merit and usually continue to place them all the way down the line, however some will only place the animals to the number of rosettes awarded for the class.

Different judges will have different preferences when it comes to the finer points of the breed and that for us is what makes showing interesting. With the Coloured Ryeland there are few finer breed points just the evidence of a tear drop of lighter fleece in the corner of each eye. Looking at the finer points of the Ryeland sheep requires attention to detail and is occasionally controversial, this includes the ear colour – ranging from dark (coffee colour to blue to almost black) through to pink and sometimes with spots, the nose pigment - brownish to black with some showing a hint of pink, fully fleeced on the head to that of a more clean open faced sheep and the ears - the size, position and shape of the ears with presence or absence of wool on the back. The Ryeland sheep was originally bred for its fine wool as well as for meat; a dual purpose breed, so it is important that the judge also considers the quality of the fleece.



Once the judge has finalised the line up rosettes and cards will be handed out, take time to congratulate the winners of each class, it is custom to shake hands, applaud and to thank the judge for his / her endeavours.

The judge's task is a difficult one, remember it's the judge's own subjective opinion particularly when it comes to the finer breed points, so don't be too disappointed if you don't get a red rosette,

it is quite in order to discuss the judging afterwards, back in the pens but not in the show ring. It is customary for the judge to visit the exhibitors after judging and that is the best place to have an informal chat about the day and it is in order to enquire of the judge how he felt your sheep competed in the class.

Remember that the show ring is the shop window for the breed and your flock and that the show ring and sheep pens are an invaluable place of learning, companionship and enjoyment.

Once judging is over remember to make the sheep comfortable and provide some well earned food before you go off for a look around the show.



A well deserved nap after judging at Carmarthen County Show.

John and Suzanne Donovan

Dolwen Ryelands  
Llanfallteg  
Whitland  
Carmarthenshire  
West Wales

## Key points of showing etiquette

- Remember the judge has to handle your sheep so make sure that they are clean.
- Do ensure that the sheep are halter trained and that you can lead them around the show ring.
- Ensure that the feet are well trimmed and that you know how to present your sheep to its potential.
- Prepare all the show entries well in time for submission to the show.
- Prepare all your movement licenses ensuring ear tags are correct and match your license, remember your vehicle passes and entry tickets before you head off to the show.
- Ensure you have all your buckets and feed for the sheep, they will need and deserve it later in the day.
- Be smartly dressed and wear a white coat keeping it buttoned up in the show ring.
- Take time to ensure you know the order of judging allowing plenty of time to arrive in the show ring, if you have any doubts ask the steward for assistance.
- When in the show ring remember the golden rule keep your eye on the judge and never get between your animal and the judges eye particularly when walking and turning the sheep.
- Always keep a firm secure hold of your animal especially when the judge is carrying out the detailed examination.
- Keep a reasonable distance from your fellow exhibitors so as to prevent your animal knocking into them or their sheep especially when lining up.
- If the judge engages in conversation with you keep your replies polite and limited to the judges lead.
- Do not engage in long conversations with your fellow exhibitors and never talk to spectators around the show ring.
- Congratulate the winners of each class.
- Thank the judge for his / her endeavours.
- Do not question the judge about his / her decisions in the show ring but do ask his / her advice regarding your stock and their placements after the judging back at the show pens.
- Once judging is over remember to make the sheep comfortable and provide some well earned food before you go off for a look around the show.
- Remember that the show ring is the shop window for the breed and your flock and that the show ring and sheep pens are an invaluable place of learning, companionship and enjoyment.
- Above all enjoy the day and your sheep.