

2024 AGM WEEKEND - 25th-27th October 2024

The West Country Club welcomed the Society to Somerset, where Lley Sheep Society members from across the British Isles arrived at the Centurion Hotel, Midsomer Norton for the big event of the Society's year. We all enjoyed an informal Friday dinner, getting reacquainted with old friends.

On Saturday morning, we visited North Widcombe Farm at West Harptree, not far from Bath. Dudley Shellard had devised a scenic and historically interesting coach tour through the Mendips, pointing out lead workings dating back from Roman times, as well as the rather surprising sight of a coal slag heap just outside Midsomer Norton.

North Widcombe is a Duchy farm which has been in the same family since at least the 16th Century, and maybe from the 14th. Colston Gay, our host and the current tenant, gave a fascinating account of developments in the last 30 years or so, with massive expansion of their milking herd through land acquisition, the addition of his Lley flock, expansion of the farm buildings (with beautiful stonework built by themselves - much admired by passing walkers and cyclists....and by our members) and construction of impressive anaerobic digesters which power the farm and neighbouring properties. He also explained about the purchase of a nearby farm and the conversion of buildings into a very successful farm shop and cafe through which he sells his farm produce, including his Lley and Charollais X Lley lambs. Members saw the impressive sheep flock (after the mist had cleared!) guessed the weights of pens of lambs and saw and discussed the digesters and how they are used.

Bethan Vaughan thanked Colston and his wife Celia for a really interesting morning and Kathryn Dick presented them with a hamper of Scottish produce. The coach then took us all to the farm Shop/Cafe, where we had a lovely lunch.

Dudley's Mendip tour continued through various Combes on our way to Cheddar. He pointed out the cleft where Augustus Toplady, sheltering from a ferocious storm, was inspired to write the hymn 'Rock of Ages'. Dudley also reminisced about his own childhood experiences during the war, and pointed out the cave where he and his parents and other local folk slept (to avoid German bombing of decoy sites lit up to look like Bristol aircraft factories). The spectacular Cheddar Gorge stole up on us very dramatically.

The group split into two. The first group visited Gough's Cave, where skeletal remains from 15,000 years ago have been found. The cave is over 2 miles long, a quarter of which is designated as the 'Show Cave' and contains beautiful stalactites and stalagmites. The other group walked down to the Cheddar Gorge Cheese Company, where there was a demonstration of traditional hand crafted cheese making. Of particular interest was the Cheddar cheese which is cave-aged in Gough's Cave and is uniquely tasty. Cheddar seemed to be a good place to (variously) have a pint, buy toys for kids, or Somerset cider or gin and walk back to the coach eating local ice creams.

The Society AGM went well. Wynne Davies and John Geldard were re-elected as President and Vice-President respectively. Sian Hughes gave a moving tribute to Meurig Williams,

former Chairman, long term Council member and friend, who died earlier this year. Then followed the presentation of the Society showing cups, the cups for highest priced rams and ewes at Sales and certificates for those who judged the major shows in 2024. The winners were popular, judging by the applause. At the short Council meeting afterwards, Bethan Vaughan and Arfon Hughes were re-elected as Chairman and Vice Chairman and David Knowles as Treasurer.

And so on to the excellent dinner, followed by a popular charity 'heads and tails' game in aid of the hospice which had cared for Sally Gunn's partner. Jack and Tee entertained us all with their excellent folky/country music, appreciated by all. The dancing was a bit variable(!) but was joyful and enthusiastic. The applause for Jack and Tee was well deserved and the evening ended on a high note.

Sunday Morning saw the departure of most of us, but some stayed on to enjoy their Somerset holiday.

Overall, everyone seemed to enjoy the '2024 Experience'.

John and Gill Adams

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