

Who was the first to bring Shropshire sheep to Australia?

Version 2 – June 2019

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These notes were compiled by Don Gordon.
Please send any corrections or suggestions via 'Contact us' on the website.

CLAIMS

There are separate claims that brothers-in-law, Sir Samuel Way and Alexander Gordon were each involved with the first Shropshire sheep:-

- In an article about Sir Samuel in Vol 12 of Australia Dictionary of Biography, JJ Bray stated that *"On his property at Kadlunga he grazed the improved Shropshire sheep which he had introduced into Australia"*.
- In page 8 in the book by the Semmlers it is stated that *"The first Shropshire sheep to be imported into South Australia were bought by Alexander"*.
- The large Captain Charles Sturt monument is on Hindmarsh Island and was built on property owned by William Joseph Maidment who bought it in 1864 from Charles Price (ref: Colin Semmler, email 16th Sept 2018).
- Charles Maidment and Alexander Gordon imported the original Stropshires. And the Gordon brothers sheared Stropshire sheep on Dr WA Verco's Tol-de-Rol Station from 1909 to 1911 (ref: Andy Saltmarsh per Colin Semmler, Lav's biography).

These are big claims which warrant examination.

FACTS

Charles Price of Hindmarsh Island built up a Shropshire flock by importing:-

- First lot: In 1855, Charles Price of Hindmarsh Island brought in a one Shropshire ram and one ewe.
- Second lot: In late 1850s, Charles, with David Randall (of Glenparra, now known as Corryton Park), brought in 14 pure bred – 6 rams and 8 ewes.
- Third lot: In late 1860s, Charles brought in another 3 rams.

In 1907, Charles' son John Price wrote about this third lot: *"... towards the close of the sixties my father brought out three more rams selected by himself,.... but shortly afterwards, the value of sheep having fallen considerably, he decided to dispose of his flock..... The result was that he sold, or rather, gave, his Shropshires to the late Mr. Treloar, of near Watervale, and probably it was then that his honor [Sir Samuel] first became acquainted with this grand breed of sheep and recognised their merits and suitability for the Kadlunga estate. I have written enough to show that the Shropshires were imported, acclimatised, and thoroughly established in South Australia years before the Kadlunga flock ever came into existence."* (Adelaide Chronicle, 5th Oct 1907, p8)



The Special Commissioner for the Adelaide Chronicle (5th Oct 1907, p8) responded with:- *"Mr. John Price, of Narracoorte, is quite right in stating that his father was the first to introduce Shropshires into this State. To have been literally correct when writing of Shropshire sheep at Show time, and of the enterprise of the Chief Justice; I should have explained that Sir Samuel Way was one of the first of the new school — the Shropshire Breeders' Association — to resuscitate, this mutton breed. To what extent the early importations made by Mr. Charles Price, of Hindmarsh Island, guided the movements one cannot say (possibly the manager of Kadlunga can), but a long time must have elapsed between those days and the early nineties, when the modern type of Shropshire began to reach these shores. But for the export lamb trade the breed would certainly not be in such prominence as it is to-day. Few people would recognise the fashionable and prevailing type of Shropshire of the present, day with the approved type of 50 years ago. Wool to the nose and down to the toes is the characteristic now, whereas then it was a case of bare faces and bare points."*

ANALYSIS

John Price said the flock went to Francis Treloar from Watervale “shortly afterwards” Charles had purchased the third lot in the late 1860s – ie possibly in the early 1870s and certainly before the late 1870s.

Sir Samuel’s role:-

- Watervale is only about 30 kms from *Kadlunga*
- In the 1870s *Kadlunga* was owned by John Chewings
- *Kadlunga* was purchased by Sir Samuel in 1881.
- John Chewings, or his manager, might have established a flock of Shropshires and so they might have (we don’t know) already been on *Kadlunga* when Sir Samuel purchased the property up to a decade after Treloar acquired his Shropshires. Or there might not have been any Shropshires on *Kadlunga* until Sir Samuel become interested in them in the late 1880s or even 1890s (again, we are guessing).
- The photo of Shropshire sheep on *Kadlunga* about 1900 was by Terence McCann in the Mintaro collection of SLSA B 16280/3.
- Sir Samuel had another farm, *Seaview*. This was close to Adelaide and much smaller than *Kadlunga* which was a long way north of Adelaide. There are no indications that there were Shropshires at *Seaview*. However, there are some links with Alexander because his brother, Hugh, and also his nephew Archibald, each managed *Seaview* for a while - but this might have been much later – it would have been after their sister/mother Kitty married Sir Samuel in 1898. [research: Check about Hugh & Archibald.]



Alexander Gordon’s role:-

- *“In course of time [Alexander] acquired expert knowledge of cattle and sheep and wool classing.....As a judge of sheep and cattle exhibits at Royal Agricultural Shows and other shows in the country, he earned considerable fame.”* (Obituary, Observer, 25th April 1925, p39)
- *“The first Shropshire sheep to be imported into South Australia were bought by Alexander. They were originally brought in by Charles Price of Hindmarsh Island, but he died the day the sheep arrived at Goolwa wharf. Alexander was a respected sheep judge and for some years did a judging of the Shropshires at the Adelaide Show.”* (Semmler p 8)
- A careful reading of the Semmler quote, reveals that it does not assert that Alexander imported them – but rather, that he purchased them. The quote makes a careful distinction in that Price brought the sheep whereas Alexander bought the sheep. Charles Price imported them and later, Alexander purchased some. The quote also leaves it open to the possibility that he did not buy them directly from Charles Price.
- Alexander Gordon was born in 1852, so he would have been quite young when Treloar acquired his Shropshires from Price. Alexander probably did not first come into contact with Shropshires until at least his late 20s (we can guess that it might have been well after that) so Treloar might have had the Shropshires for a decade or so before Alexander purchased them from Treloar - or purchased from someone else who have developed a flock based on Treloar’s stud.
- The Semmler quote has Charles dying the day the sheep arrived at Goolwa wharf. If we take it (from his son, John) that the sheep arrived in the late 1860s, then Charles in fact died much later, in 1886, when he fell down dead whilst assisting to drive some of his cattle (ie not sheep) to the punt at the crossing place on the Murray (South Australian Advertiser, 30th April 1886, p5 & p6).
- There are few indications when (or if) Alexander had involvement in *Kadlunga* or other properties in that area. We only know of Alexander’s activities well south of that area except, in 1906 he was among many (including D Weston of Kadlunga) who attended a major auction of stock from Werocota. This was about 40 kms south west of Kadlunga. The stock included Shropshire sheep but it not stated whether or not Alexander purchased any stock at this time. (The Advertiser, Adelaide, 7th September 1906 p9)
- Alexander’s sister, Kitty, married Sir Samuel in 1898 and we have no signs that Alexander had substantial interactions with Sir Samuel before this. (Indeed, he might not have had much to do with Kitty and Sir Samuel after their marriage – for example, he did not attend Kitty’s funeral in 1914 even though it was a very public event and his brother Donald was there).

Maidment connections:-

- Charles Maidment was the father of Fanny who married Henry Saltmarsh – and Fanny & Henry's daughter Annie married Alexander jnr.
- Charles was also the father of William who purchased the property on Hindmarsh Island from Charles Price in 1864. – Were there some Shropshires on that property at that time? The first 2 lots were there, but xxxxxx

CONCLUSIONS

- Sir Samuel did not introduce Shropshires but he did boost the breed for mutton with a more suited variety of the breed.
- Alexander was a livestock expert - specifically a breeder and judge of Shropshires. But we do not know when or where. We have nothing to show that Alexander had any dealings with Sir Samuel's sheep. He certainly never managed his flock.
- Sir Samuel and Alexander Gordon became brothers-in-law long after they each separately became advocates for Shropshire sheep. So, the involvement of the brothers-in-law with Shropshires is coincidental – quite an intriguing chance.

Source: website of the Rare Breeds Trust of Australia

Shropshires arrived in Australia in around 1855 and 1856 when Charles Price imported some to South Australia and E.B Boulton exported some to his brothers in New South Wales. Unfortunately, their arrival was a little premature as our meat export industry did not start until the 1880's when it became possible to ship frozen meat to Europe. Although there were several importations of Shropshires to Australia, they were not brought before the public until 1887, when Thomas Burbury exhibited them in Hobart.

Two Shropshire Associations were formed in Australia in the mid 1890's, one in South Australia and the other in Tasmania. They both published Flock Books, but in 1905, they amalgamated to form the Australian Shropshire Sheepbreeder's Association. These were the years of the Shropshire's greatest popularity in Australia.

Source: Adelaide Chronicle - 5th Oct 1907 – page 8

Mr. John Price, 'Eulolo,' Narracoorte, writes: — 'I must take exception to the statement in your report of the Royal Spring Show that Shropshire sheep were first imported into this State by the Chief Justice, Sir Samuel Way. To my late father, Charles Price, of Hindmarsh Island, the credit belongs. As far back as 1855 he imported the first ram and ewe into this State, selected from two of the best flocks in Shropshire, those of Messrs. Hand and Tarte: When the new blood was introduced to Merino ewes so apparent was the success of the enterprise for meat producing purposes that other breeders soon recognised the advantage of adopting the same course, notably the late Captain Rankine, who purchased a twin ram of the first drop from the imported ewe, and ever afterwards continued to breed from Shropshire, Southdowns, and Lincolns in preference to pure Merino. Towards the end of the fifties my father had a fresh importation of three rams and one ewe, and at the same time the late Mr. David Randall, of Glenparra, now known as Corryton Park, who had previously been a purchaser from my father's flock, imported three rams and seven ewes, making a total shipment of 14 pure Shropshires, the whole of which were personally selected by my late uncle, Mr. John Price, from the best flocks of the day throughout the counties of Shropshire and Herefordshire. Again, towards the close of the sixties my father brought out three more rams selected by himself, at the same time as he introduced Hereford cattle; but shortly afterwards, the value of sheep having fallen considerably, he decided to dispose of his flock and devote his attention to the Herefords. The result was that he sold, or rather, gave, his Shropshires to the late Mr. Treloar, of near Watervale, and probably it was then that his honor first became acquainted with this grand breed of sheep and recognised their merits and suitability for the Kadlunga estate. I have written enough to show that the Shropshires were imported, acclimatised, and thoroughly established in South Australia years before the Kadlunga flock ever came into existence.

Our special commissioner writes:- Mr. John Price, of Narracoorte, is quite right in stating that his father was the first to introduce Shropshires into this State. To have been literally correct when writing of Shropshire sheep -at Show time, and of the enterprise of the Chief Justice; I should have explained that Sir Samuel Way was one of the first of the new school — the Shropshire Breeders' Association — to resuscitate, this mutton breed. To what extent the early importations made by Mr. Charles Price, of Hindmarsh Island, guided the movements one cannot say (possibly the manager of Kadlunga can), but a long time must have elapsed between those days and the early nineties, when the modern type of Shropshire began to reach these shores. But for the export lamb trade the breed would certainly not be in such prominence as it is to-day. Few people would recognise the fashionable and prevailing type of Shropshire of the present, day with the approved type of 50 years ago. Wool to the nose and down to the toes is the characteristic now, whereas then it was a case of bare faces and bare points. .

Source: Pastoral Pioneers of South Australia, Vol 2, p35

Mr. Treloar purchased from the late Mr. Charles Price, of Hindmarsh Island, his stud of Shropshires, the first imported to the Colony, and built up a grade flock, which did remarkably well on the rough pasture, and met a ready sale to the Wallaroo butchers.

DRAFT