



# POLWARTH

SHEEP BREEDERS ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

## President Wayne Walker — a good sport

Back in December, when I started this newsletter, I contacted Wayne for a Christmas message. What a good sport! At the end of a long working day, Wayne allowed Maxine to take a Christmas sheep themed pic for the newsletter.

This was Wayne's Christmas message to members:

Wayne Walker, President of the Polwarth Sheep Breeders Association of Australia, would like to take the opportunity to wish everyone a merry Christmas and happy new year. Wayne looks forward to catching up with members in the new year and hopes everyone is having a good season.



## Vale — Lynne McArdle

### Taljar Polwarths, Kangaroo Island

On 4th April, 2021 at the age of 65, Lynne lost her 2½ year battle with breast cancer. Wife of David for 40 years, mother to Leanne, Jared and Talisa, and grandmother to seven grandchildren, Lynne lived a full and active life until the advanced stages of her cancer. She was strong willed, no fuss person who believed she could win the battle right to the end.

Lynne was born in 1955 in Riverton, South Australia where her father worked on a sheep property. At the age of three, the family moved to Whittlesea in Victoria which was where Lynne started school. Later they moved to Reservoir, a suburb of Melbourne where Lynne completed her education. The family often holidayed on Kangaroo Island near Cape De Couedic and it was during these visits Lynne developed a love for the island. By the time she was twenty, Lynne had shifted to Kangaroo Island permanently.

David and Lynne first met in 1971 when David was hay contracting at the property Lynne was staying at. While they ran into each other at sport it was several years later before they started to spend more time together. They became engaged in early 1982 and married in July that year.

Lynne was a person who loved the outdoors and would have a go at anything and make a success of it. This was evident in the variety of jobs she took on over the years. Early on it was working at the Flinders Chase National Park and Kelly Hill Caves. She also keenly involved herself on the farm driving tractors and working in shearing sheds. Following the birth of Jared and Talisa, Lynne worked at the Parndana Area School undertaking various roles, however it was the work in the laboratory which she particularly enjoyed. She loved interacting with the students and got on well with other staff members.

When David and Lynne moved from Karatta to Parndana South Lynne worked part time at Kiawarra, which hosted a lot of tourists who came over to Kangaroo Island.



Unfortunately, Lynne's position at the Parndana Area School came to an end. Undeterred, Lynne gained employment with the Parndana Hotel, a position she held and enjoyed for about 8½ years.

While working and bringing up the three children, Lynne also found time to volunteer with the ladies auxiliary, working the bar at Gosse as well as four years on the Parndana School Council. During this time, two school and district reunions were held and Lynne was heavily involved in the production of the school booklets. In 2013, David and Lynne produced their own booklet 'Karatta Memories'. They also worked on David's mum and dad's autobiography plus David's own personal story. Lynne also used her computer skills to maintain the farm books and David recounts getting a decent tongue lashing if he did not bring home receipts and put them in the designated place.



Other interests of Lynne's included a love of reading and spending time in the garden. She also had an interest in making natural cleaners and medicinal products. According to David, Lynne's liniment really did help with arthritic pain. It goes without saying that family was extremely important to Lynne. Her own family was spread around the country however she stayed in regular contact with them. In more recent times the arrival of grandchildren added extra enjoyment.

Lynne and David worked well together and had a good rapport in the sheep yards. At classing time there were very few disagreements because they had a clear direction. David attributes Taljar's success in the show ring in both South Australia and interstate to their shared vision. David recounts the time they were returning from the Bendigo Sheep Show in 2011. They were travelling between Tailem Bend and Coonalpyn when a tarp came loose and began to tear. To make matters worse it had started to rain. Lynne said "Stop", hopped out and scrambled in with the rams. She refused to come back inside the cab and stayed in the back with the rams, holding the tarp until they reached Coonalpyn. On arrival there, Ike Ashby, our judge for that year, walked out of the bakery. He was most surprised when a "Hello Ike" came from the back of the ute and out popped Lynne's head.

David believes that the devastating fires they lived through in January 2020 contributed to Lynne's death. The loss of their home full of treasured belongings, the loss of animals, machinery, shedding and fencing was overwhelming. They spent six months in temporary accommodation on the farm before purchasing a house in Parndana which was so much warmer and more comfortable for Lynne.

On a last trip to Adelaide Lynne, picked the colours, fittings and floor coverings for their new house. Sadly, Lynne passed away before the house was started. According to David, Lynne lived a busy and fruitful life. They made a good team and David dearly misses his friend and partner of 43 years.

## **ADVANCED NOTICE**

### **2023 - Royal Adelaide Show**

### **Feature Breeds: Polwarth & Corriedale**

Dates to be confirmed (usually early September)

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## South Australia Get Together

Who doesn't enjoy looking at Polwarth's when you get a group of Polwarth enthusiasts together!

In September 2021, a group of eight South Australian breeders, as well as, an enthusiastic Birdwood High School student and his parents spent a day together, visiting the Woollyana Birdwood and Mt Crawford Polwarth studs.

According to Talisa McArdle the sheep were an absolute credit to both breeders.

In the absence of the Adelaide Show, due to Covid-19 it was fantastic to catch up.

Special thanks to Lauren, Kate and Dave for hosting the day and to Kate and Dave for providing a lovely lunch at Mt Crawford.



Above: Pics from Woollyana Birdwood, our SA school stud.

Left: Sheila Gordon with Toby and Leo Kerr.

Right and below: Pics from Mt Crawford.





## Flock No. 1 – Tarndwarncoort

By Kaye Potter

### Fifth Generation

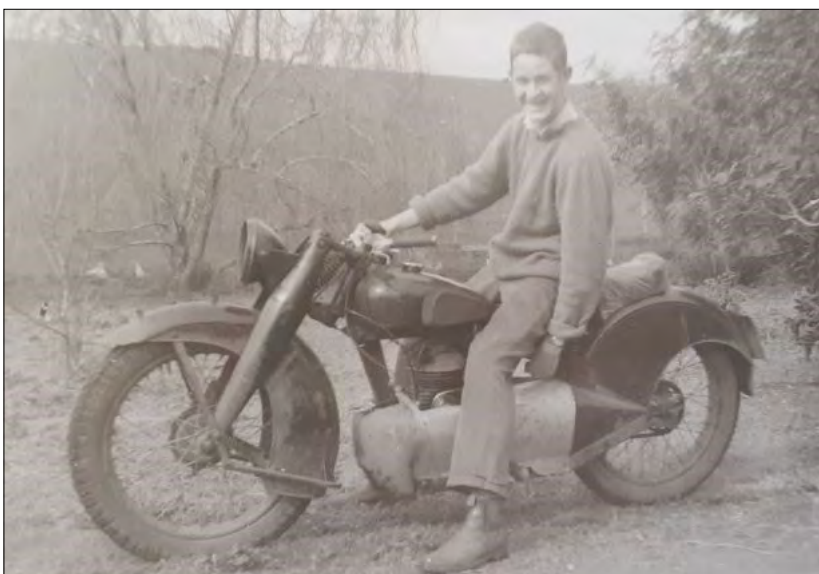
David A. J. Dennis is the fifth generation Dennis to farm the property known as Tarndwarncoort. It was David's great-great grandfather Alexander William Dennis and his two brothers who purchased Tarndwarncoort in 1841 as a 15,000-acre station. The early history of the Dennis brother's emigration to Australia, their acquisition of Tarndwarncoort and other properties, Eeyeuk and Carr's Plains and the subsequent development of the Polwarth breed, can be found in Noel C. R. Dennis' book titled, Polwarth Sheep 1880-1980.\*

### David Dennis – Early years

David was born in 1944, the oldest of five children: three boys and two girls. Growing up, David recalls working the sheep with his father, attending the Melbourne Show and holding rams for judging. While slightly unsure, he thinks Tarndwarncoort ran about 2000-2500 sheep. It was always Polwarths according to David. At times they used fat lamb rams and found the Southdown worked well with their ewes.

As well as the sheep David recalls his father cropping, growing Linseed and Sunflowers which at the time paid very well and provided the farm with another source of income. The Sunflower crops were stunning when in full flower and David remembers returning home from town one day to see a smartly dressed couple in the sunflower crop taking pictures. David's annoyance is still evident as he recounts the year the cockatoos moved in and stripped the crop bare.

A mantra of David's father was, "look after your pastures and the pastures will look after the sheep." This was why David's father also ran Angus cattle to help with pasture maintenance. David recalls they were good fertile



cattle, however the wet winters made it hard to turn off decent steers. David loved the cattle and fondly remembers being more interested in them and the machinery than the sheep.

At 19, a visit by a Canadian couple to Tarndwarncoort prompted David to ask if there was any work for kids in Canada. A phone call later, he found himself on a plane to Canada where he spent two years working on properties between 1963-1964. David worked a full season on a grain farm in Saskatchewan. From there he moved to a dairy farm in Ontario where he worked the winter, learning a lot about cattle and pigs. He returned to the grain farm for another half season before heading to South Carolina to work on a tobacco farm for the spring and early summer. David recalls learning a lot about cattle and machinery during this time overseas.

While in South Carolina, David contacted the manager of the Wellman Combing Company. This was the place where the first ever consignment of Polwarths to the USA were delivered in 1954. The 100 stud ewes and 5 rams, from Lariggan and Eeyeuk studs, were accompanied on the voyage by Noel C. R. Dennis which took 82 days to reach their destination. The small flock were set up as a 'show piece' on the farm surrounding the mill with the view to increasing farmer interest in sheep farming in the dominant cotton and tobacco growing area. When David visited the farm a decade later, the Polwarths were still there, were in very good condition although they had been joined to Hampshire rams. David felt the humid and subtropical climate of South Carolina was not the ideal climate for the Polwarth breed.

David's return home to Australia was prompted by the offer of a place at Marcus Oldham College in Geelong where he subsequently completed a Farm Management course in 1965-66. David recalls the course was very good in terms of technical knowledge and reinforcing farm management processes. However, he grins when remembering the social scene was even better!

Footnote: \* Dennis, Noel CR, 'Polwarth Sheep 1880-1980', Waller and Chester, Ballarat VIC 1982

### Wendy Greenfield – Early years

In 1968, David met Wendy through good friends. Wendy Greenfield was born in Shepparton and spent her early years on a farm near the Goulburn River where her father had a Border Leicester stud. Wendy recalls dressing up pet lambs and going with her father to the yards and down the paddock. After leaving Shepparton at the age of 8, the family moved to Woolsthorpe near Warrnambool where Wendy's father managed a sheep station known as The Union and owned by Misses G. and E. Jones (now Midfields). Wendy attended the local primary school and loved riding horses, rearing pet lambs and loved shearing time. At 11 years of age, Wendy was packed off to boarding school, attending



The Hermitage in Geelong. While completing secondary school, Wendy's father bought a property at Mininera, near Willaura where he ran sheep.

Following school Wendy trained as nurse, completing a year at the Eye & Ear Hospital and then her general training at the Alfred Hospital in Melbourne. While working at the Beaufort and Willaura Bush Nursing Hospitals, Wendy saved up enough money to go overseas. Sailing to London, Wendy joined a private nursing agency where she requested country residential jobs, looking after sick family members in their homes. During her two years in the United Kingdom Wendy nursed a bit and travelled a bit, remembering with a fond chuckle, a trip over to Europe in her little Morris 1000 convertible.

Eventually Wendy and a school friend flew home on an open dated air ticket which back then allowed them to stop as many times as they liked, providing they were moving forward to Australia. They took three months to come home, travelling to Italy, Turkey, Jordan, Syria, Iran, Afghanistan and India. Back in Australia, Wendy returned to nursing in Melbourne however, the ho-hum of life enticed her to look for another overseas destination. Deciding that Africa would be a good place to work and travel, Wendy booked a 12 month return passage to South Africa.

It was just prior to leaving for South Africa in 1968 when Wendy and David Dennis were introduced. While there was a mutual spark of interest, Wendy was focussed on her imminent departure for South Africa. (Wendy tells an hilarious story about missing the boat in Fremantle). On arriving in Durban, she found private nursing work around Natal. As in the United Kingdom, Wendy nursed a bit and travelled a bit, going as far as Kenya and Rhodesia, now known as Zimbabwe. During her 12 months in Africa Wendy would send an occasional postcard to David; however, it was David who surprised Wendy when he met her at the wharf on her return to Australia.

### David and Wendy Dennis

As David and Wendy's relationship blossomed, Wendy recalls 'her boyfriend' did not object when she wanted to save a couple of black Polwarth ram lambs from being marked and some black Polwarth ewes from the 'killer paddock'. In fact, the black sheep also played an important role in terms of pasture management because their wool would fade and go white if there was a copper deficiency in the soil. Around this time, Wendy was aware that more spinning wheels were starting to appear and home spinning was gathering momentum. "Times were tough in the country then. People didn't go out and buy a new jumper, they spun the wool, knitted it and wore it."

David and Wendy married in 1971. During the next decade their family grew with the birth of four children, Michael, Georgina, Alastair, and Tom M. between 1972 and 1981. In 1975 David's father retired, handing Tarndwarncoort to the next generation. David and Wendy bought 500 acres around the homestead plus one paddock across the Princes Highway from his father. David's brother Tom bought the remaining 800 acres on the north side of the Princes Highway. David's other brother Ned was not interested in the farm.





## Building the Coloured Sheep Enterprise

It was a deliberate decision by Wendy and David to build the number of coloured sheep. Wool prices across the board had taken a dive. David recalls Merinos being referred to as 'ground lice', "you couldn't give them away." With their own flock of Polwarths not making money, David and Wendy had to make a choice. According to David they could quit sheep altogether, although that would be difficult given the family history. Alternatively, Wendy could see potential and opportunity for the coloured sheep to 'value add' to their income through the burgeoning handcraft market.

As their number of coloured Polwarths increased Wendy introduced a black Border Leicester ram whose wool had extra length, lustre and shine. This was twofold; firstly, to bring in some outside genetics to avoid inbreeding and secondly, Border Leicester wool was easier for beginner spinners to use rather than the shorter finer wool of the Polwarth. Also, the Border Leicester's tended to go grey earlier than the Polwarths providing some gorgeous shades of light grey wool to spin with. In the meantime, Wendy and David continued their hunt for black Polwarth ram lambs.



While they were around, they were readily culled by breeders as undesirable. Eventually, they found a breeder who was happy to supply black ram lambs once he realised, they were serious about breeding coloured Polwarths. The injection of outside genetics also allowed Wendy and David to rear their own-coloured rams and occasionally, they used a white Polwarth ram in the coloured flock to maintain a wider genetic base.

## The first Coloured Sheep Congress

In 1979, Wendy was invited to present a paper at the National Congress on Breeding Coloured Sheep and Using Coloured Wool held in Adelaide, South Australia.\*\* This congress was the very first of its kind put together by a group of coloured sheep breeders. With the help of Australian geneticist, Scott Dolling, geneticists from around the world were invited to speak. Breeders of coloured woolly sheep such as Tarndwarncourt were also invited. At the time, Wendy and David's third child Alastair was only 9 weeks old. Wendy tells the story of David driving them over to Adelaide, leaving them there and then returning to Victoria. During the congress sessions, Wendy left Alastair near the kitchen to sleep and when he woke kitchen staff would ring Wendy to let her know the baby needed feeding.

According to Wendy, the wonderful part about the congress was meeting and networking with so many people. As a result of the congress, French geneticist Dr J. J. Lauvergne conducted an interesting experiment at Tarndwarncourt in 1981 entitled, 'Fading with light and greying with age in the fleece of black Australian Polwarth sheep'. The experiment involved taking wool samples from coated and uncoated sheep at 3-month intervals for 12 months. In his findings, Dr Lauvergne concluded that the coats prevented oxidation or fading of the tip of coloured wool but did not prevent greying of wool which occurs naturally as the sheep age.



During this time, Wendy and David learnt a lot about genetics. Pure white sheep have no black genes. Pure black sheep have no white genes. Heterozygote sheep have some white and some black genes. White to white always produces white offspring. Black to black always produces black offspring. With pure white to pure black you get white heterozygote offspring. With a heterozygote and pure black you get 25% pure black, 25% pure white and 50% heterozygote.

Footnote: \*\* National Congress on Breeding Coloured Sheep and Using Coloured Wool, Peacock Publications, SA 1979.

## Sheep Coats

In the mid 1970's, Wendy was driving past CSIRO in Geelong and noticed sheep with coats grazing in the paddocks.

After enquiring about this curious sight, Wendy and David developed a partnership with CSIRO testing the coats on their black and coloured Polwarth sheep.

The coats, which by then were made from polythene fibre, were tested over a five-year period on 50-100 sheep.



The following results were evident:

1. Fleeces were clean and easy to spin.
2. Fleeces were no more greasy than unrugged fleeces.
3. Wool was not crossfibred or matted.
4. Fleeces were even coloured with no faded tips.
5. There was no loss of yield from wasty tip, so the staple was longer.
6. Ewes were mated in the coats.
7. There were no problems with lambing.
8. Mothering of lambs went on as usual.
9. Sheep were healthy because the skin temperature was the same all year round.
10. Moisture did not collect on the inside of the coat because the women fabric 'breathes'.
11. There was no skin disease or fleece rot.
12. There were no cases of death from thermal shock after shearing.
13. The white coats reflect the summer heat so black sheep in coats absorbed less heat than usual and were seen grazing on hot summer days.
14. The coats lasted for 18 months.

The sheep coats became an integral part of David and Wendy's operation. At the height of operations, they coated 1100 ewes, half of which were coloured. Coats were changed up to three times a year, particularly on young growing sheep. Following shearing in March, the sheep were fitted with standard, non-gusset coats. These were changed to a larger gusset coat without ties when the sheep had 8 months of wool; this changeover also coincided with crutching.





## Harvesting Handspinning Wool and Processing Wool into Yarn

At shearing time, the coated fleeces were a bit more difficult to throw as they did not have the normal weathered tip to hold the wool together. Fleeces were skirted twice: once to remove shorter, discoloured wool and heavily conditioned wool and frib and then again, to remove fleece not covered by the coat. Once tested for soundness, the fleeces were classed for quality, sorted into colours and carefully rolled up before being stored on wooden racks.



Wendy had three handspinning wool categories:

- Elite Export – 120mm + staple length, minimum tip loss, very soft and clean. Absolute best.
- Quality Export – 110-120mm staple length, very soft and clean, good crimp.
- Standard Quality – 75-110mm staple, slightly uneven micron and crimp, some dust in tip.

In terms of colour description, the fleeces were simply labelled as silver grey, mid-dark grey, black and brown.

Wendy explained, the handcraft market was divided into two segments; hand-spinners requiring a soft handling, long stapled, raw, or greasy wool with minimal dust and impurities, and hand-knitters requiring hanks or balls of white both naturally coloured or dyed. Wendy and David geared their enterprise to both markets. The hand-spinners preferred very even fleece of 110-120mm. David estimated that 2.5kg of a 5.5kg fleece was selected for the hand-spinning market.

The remainder of the wool was classed into processing batches, baled up and sent for processing into yarn. In the early days, processing the wool into yarn was done locally in Geelong. Unfortunately, as local mills closed Wendy and David were forced to look further afield. Today, their wool continues to be scoured in Geelong; however, scoured wool is now shipped to New Zealand to be spun into yarn. Tops are processed in Victoria at Bacchus Marsh.



## Markets

**International Markets** - Wendy and David sold their wool privately to both local and international buyers. Wendy advertised in selected local and overseas magazines in the United Kingdom and America. Their best handspinning wools sold for \$40+ per kilogram. There was big demand from India, America, Canada (1989) and Japan (1994). Clients came from cold weather climates and through necessity had to stay inside. They were people who had money and liked to use their hands by spinning. Eventually, Wendy and David appointed agents in the UK and Canada to streamline their overseas operations.

**Local Markets** - It was in the late 1970's when Wendy and David first had a stall at the Melbourne Sheep Show. Wendy employed a mothercraft nurse to look after the children at home so that they could concentrate on the show. According to Wendy it was the perfect place to access Melbourne and interstate spinners. Wendy and David described their three days at the show as like working in the shearing shed; they were busy, busy, flat out all day weighing and selling wool. They would take the old truck loaded with some 20 bales of wool to Melbourne and by the end of the show had sold the lot. Over the years, demand for their wool grew and grew and to this day (pandemic aside), the Australian Sheep and Wool Show has been the single most successful event for their enterprise.



## Value Adding

**Agents for Sheep Coats** - Once the use of sheep coats was established at Tarndwarncoort, Wendy recognised they were in a good position to promote the coats to other breeders. They subsequently became agents for the coats which were made in Sydney, then later Korea and eventually China. Wendy and David sold hundreds of coats to super-fine wool breeders in New South Wales who housed their sheep. The coats provided good protection for the wool where sheep were multi-penned. Farmers located in the notoriously cold Monaro region in New South Wales also bought coats for off shears sheep and cold winters. They also exported coats to America.

**Spinning Wheels** - In the late 1970's, Wendy started selling spinning wheels. To begin with, she sold the German Sickinger brand before switching to the Majacraft spinning wheel made in New Zealand. Wendy sold spinning wheels through the home-based shop for the next four decades and these are still available from the on-line shop today.

**Home Based Shop** - In the late 1980's, David and Wendy turned what was the old Apple Cider room (another part of the Tarndwarncoort history) into a home-based shop. It was quite a task relocating the superphosphate and old machinery parts which had found a home there. They freshened it up with a coat of paint and moved the wooden racks from upstairs in the homestead to the new shop where Wendy displayed the fleeces in their colours and sold the wool by weight.

A bit later, Wendy and David learnt about the Moorit or brown gene in the sheep. Wool from these sheep would vary from chocolate brown to fawny colours. With this knowledge they expanded the range of colours available for sale.

Later again, Wendy started dyeing the white wool, using Kraftkolour dyes developed in Melbourne for use on natural fibres. Wendy found an old steamer, previously used for soap making, and had it converted by putting an element and racks in it. According to Wendy, she could dye approximately 2kg at a time and remembers doing an awful lot of dyeing.

**Workshops** - To strengthen sales of tops and yarn, Wendy also started running wool craft workshops to increase interest and craft knowledge. The Melbourne Guild regularly bought overseas tutors to Australia. While they were in the country, Wendy would hijack them, bringing them to Tarndwarncoort to run a workshop on their area of interest or expertise. Wendy catered for the days, providing tasty home cooked morning and afternoon teas, as well as, lunch with wine. Wendy chuckles, "the afternoon sessions were always more rowdy following the wine." Sometimes the tutors stayed overnight and at times Wendy took them for a drive along the iconic Great Ocean Road. Wendy found the interaction with the international tutors very helpful for making new connections and keeping up with what was going on overseas.

**Sheepskins** - In the late 1980's and 1990's, David and Wendy also produced soft tanned skins with interesting natural colour patterns from large-framed cast-for-age wethers. With a tannery in Geelong, they would have some 100 skins tanned at a time. These were mostly sold from the home-based shop or taken to selected sheep shows and field days. The pie-bald skins were especially popular, although David recalled, people buying skins took much longer to decide than people buying wool who knew exactly what they wanted. Once the local tannery closed, it was no longer viable for David and Wendy to continue this part of their enterprise.



## World Congresses on Coloured Sheep

The first congress held in Adelaide in 1979 was so successful, it became the World Congress on Coloured Sheep and was subsequently held every five years. Over the years, Wendy attended congresses in New Zealand, USA, UK, Australia and Brazil, then David joined her in France and Italy. In 1989, Wendy was invited to present a paper at The World Congress on Coloured Sheep in USA, titled 'Sheepcoats....A Wrap Up for Clean Wool'. \*\*\* Wendy's paper explored the early origins of coating, details of trials conducted in Australia and overseas, management of coated sheep, advantages, disadvantages, coat designs, materials, and availability.



Wendy played a major role in the organisation of the 5th World Congress held in Australia in 1999 at Deakin University, Geelong. This event led to further world-wide exports for Wendy and David as the Polwarth wool name spread and became the breed of choice for world-wide handspinning. Interestingly, people in the hand-spinning world did not know about Polwarth wool. Spinners were mostly using Corriedale and Merino wool. It was Wendy who brought Polwarth wool to the attention of spinners, particularly overseas.

At the 6<sup>th</sup> World Congress on Coloured Sheep held in New Zealand in 2004, Wendy was once again invited to present a paper, titled Polwarth – Coloured.\*\*\*\* Her paper included the origin of the breed, distribution, breed characteristics and handcraft use, as well as a section, 'Adding Value to Polwarth Wool in Australia.'

## Promoting Wool

**Wool Pages** - In 1993, Wendy's passion for promoting wool led to the formation of the Australian Wool Showcase. With Wendy as secretary and co-ordinator for many years, the voluntary group of wool enthusiasts produced 'Wool Pages - a Directory of the Wool Industry'. The annual directory included details of the entire wool industry pipeline from sheep breed associations to wool products. Wool Pages was circulated Australia wide and internationally, to promote and assist the Australian wool industry. Eventually, Wool Pages was continued by Australian Wool Innovation Limited (AWI). During her time as co-ordinator, Wendy appreciated the opportunity to 'speak' to the whole wool industry annually. According to Wendy, each edition of Wool Pages reflected the rise and fall of the wool industry from year to year.

## International Back-to-Back Wool Challenge

In 1994, prior to the world congress in the United Kingdom, participants visited the Scottish Wool Centre at Aberfoyle. During the visit, Wendy learned of a keen young Scottish spinner with thyroid cancer who wanted to raise funds for cancer research.

The Back-to-Back Challenge was born, where a team of hand spinners and knitters had to blade shear a sheep, spin and knit the wool into an adult size jumper in one day. Following a similar contest held in Australia, a combined international competition was developed with the aim of promoting wool world-wide while raising funds for cancer research. Since the 1995 inaugural challenge, some 224 teams from Scotland, England, Ireland, Wales, the Shetland Isles, Canada, USA, Japan, New Zealand and five states in Australia have competed. Now in its 26<sup>th</sup> year, with Wendy as the International Coordinator, the challenge is listed in the Guinness World Records.



Footnote: \*\*\*Erskine, Kent, 'Colored Sheep and Wool, Exploring Their Beauty and Function', Black Sheep Press, USA 1989.

Footnote: \*\*\*\*Lundie, Roger S., and Wilkinson, Elspeth J., 'The World of Coloured Sheep', Pope Print, NZ 2004.



## Sixth Generation

**Help from the Kids** – Throughout their childhood Michael, Georgina, Alastair and Tom helped David and Wendy at various times, feeding pet lambs, lamb marking, crutching, sweeping, working in the shed at shearing time and coating sheep. According to David, Tom is a good shed hand, throwing a decent fleece and is quite good at crutching. Georgina learnt to shear and shore quite a lot of sheep. Alastair did his bit although had a reputation for disappearing and Michael loved rounding up the sheep on the motorbike.

Late in 2010, Tom returned to Tarndwarncoort following a university education in Japan and extensive overseas work and travel. While working alongside David and Wendy, Tom slowly began the process of restoring the two-storey bluestone homestead with the view to opening it up for accommodation and tourism. The enterprising and value-adding genes kicked in once again with Tom also extending the handcraft wool business by opening an on-line shop. In recent times, the development and addition of a new range of coloured yarns proved to be extremely popular with wool buying customers. From time to time, Tom cranks Wendy's old steamer into action, experimenting with various wool dyeing materials. "Who would have thought," said Wendy with surprise and pride. In the last two years, Covid-19 has significantly impacted the accommodation and tourism side of the business, leaving the on-line shop to carry them through. Tom responded, expanding the range of products available to make it an attractive on-line shopping experience (<https://www.tarndie.com/>).

After spending a number of years working in Tanzania with brother Michael, Alastair returned to Tarndwarncoort in 2017, taking over the sheep operation. With limited capacity to expand, Alastair and partner Jemma value-added to their enterprise by purchasing a free-range egg business. Chooks are housed in fully automated sheds with access to free grazing. The sheds are rotated around the paddocks, providing Alastair with a natural fertiliser source.

**Time to Step Back** - With the sixth generation taking responsibility for their respective enterprises David and Wendy stepped back, purchasing a home in Birregurra some 10 minutes from Tarndwarncoort. There are no plans for retirement. They like not having the day-to-day responsibility and enjoy more flexibility to come to work later, go home earlier or have a day off if they want to. They are still keen to make a meaningful contribution to Tarndwarncoort, although David says with a smirk, he hopes they realise when they become more of a hindrance than a help.

Fifty years ago, newly married David and Wendy Dennis recognised that Tarndwarncoort, home of Australia's first breed of sheep was a priceless marketing tool. As such, they took on the responsibility of continuing the work of their forebears, who developed the Polwarth breed through a need to adapt to their environment. Similarly, low wool prices forced David and Wendy to seek other opportunities. Wendy believes her early enjoyment as a child, living on a farm and dressing up pet lambs was pivotal, as they adapted their Polwarth flock to meet an expanding handcraft market.

Through the decades, Wendy has channelled unbridled energy, enthusiasm, passion and sharp business acumen into Tarndwarncoort, often finding new inspiration under the morning shower. In the background, like chalk and cheese, David played a subtle, solid, and supportive role. Their partnership has endured with hard work, commitment, flexibility and being prepared to try something new. According to Wendy and David, "Everything came together and fell into place. It's been an exciting journey where doors opened and closed along the way. We've been lucky to meet so many wonderful people from all walks of life."

Most mornings, the fifth, sixth and very young seventh generations meet for a morning cuppa under the pergola outside the wool shop. It is clear, the intrinsic responsibility of Tarndwarncoort has passed from the fifth to the sixth generation who indeed, have the skill set to successfully continue this historic family journey. ■





## Thank-you & farewell for now, Lauren Smith (Woolyana Birdwood stud, SA)

I can remember Lauren first arriving as a teacher at Birdwood High. I was in Year 10 at the time and there were a lot of shifts in teacher movement. We, as a stud, decided that the high school were in need of a ram to continue their crossbred program and donated an older stud ram, who still had some good breeding years ahead of him but was surplus to our needs at the time. What started from that first donation soon turned into another ram and a ewe to get the school started, breeding Polwarths to show the students the difference between a cross-bred and a pure-bred animal.

I never imagined that Lauren would continue once I left high school in 2014. New ideas come and go. However, Lauren continued to advocate for the breed within her classroom and by the end of 2015 the school had purchased a flock of 15 breeding ewes and ram to start a stud, replacing the majority of their crossbreeding flock, with the exception of a Polwarth/White Suffolk cross ewe, aptly named Nibbles who was a bottle baby from 2013.

It was from these humble beginnings that Lauren has grown the school stud to what it is today. The infusion of additional genetics from other studs has shown Lauren's keen eye for selecting quality sheep and teaching students the importance of picking the best sheep for the purpose. The school has seen many accolades and presence at events like Mount Pleasant Show, Mount Barker Show Murray Bridge Show, Royal Adelaide Show and the Yorke Peninsula Field Days with either sheep or fleeces. Lauren has continued her advocacy for the breed and was never too shy to ask for advice if there was something she was unsure of.

Her determination and passion for the breed is evident in the legacy that she is leaving as she ventures to new adventures. Thank you Lauren, for all of your hard work over the last few years and promoting our wonderful breed to students, families and community members. We wish you well with your future endeavours, including the safe arrival of baby! This isn't goodbye, as I'm sure we will see you around the traps!

We also wish the incoming Ag teacher at Birdwood all the best and know that we are only a phone call away to offer help and advice, if needed.

Kayla Starkey

Bel-Antha



Top: First pure Polwarth ewe lamb born onsite, June 2015 Second top: Starting flock of Woolyana Birdwood stud, back in November 2015. Third: Kayla, the first Polwarth ewe born at the school with her twin lambs, May 2021 Above: At the School Open Day in 2021, showcasing some of the stud rams and ribbon they school has won. Above left: Lauren with one of her students, showing at Mount Pleasant Show in 2018. (Photos credit: Birdwood High School Agriculture, SA)