

BEYOND THE FARM GATE

A lifelong love affair with the sheepdog world inspired renowned trialler, breeder and competitor Mary Meaton to collect more than 50 years of memorabilia showcasing the unique community. **Danusia Osiowy** finds out more.

Sheep dog enthusiasts to benefit from a 60-year collection of memorabilia

Riding pillion on the back of a motorbike was how Mary Meaton arrived at her first ever sheepdog trial in 1949.

Held in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, she attended the day with her then boyfriend Allan (who she later married) and marked the start of an extraordinary interest which saw her make history as the first woman to judge the English National Sheepdog Trial at the age of 71.

Initially it was Allan who competed at trials and Mary would bring their daughter and two young sons, Andrew and Mark, to watch. Trialling fitted in between morning and evening milking on the at family farm at Knayton, near Thirsk, Brandsby, and it always involved all the family when possible. But in 1965 Mary decided to have a go and found she had a talent for working a sheep dog.

The couple became a force to be reckoned with, training many sheepdogs over the years, travelling to local shows to compete and becoming widely admired as long-standing enthusiasts for Border Collies and sheep dog training.

Previously joint presidents of the Ryedale Sheepdog Society, the couple have also sold sheepdogs around the world and travelled to countries including America, Sweden, South Africa and New Zealand to judge.

Mary became the first woman to judge an English Sheepdog Trial in 2000, having been on the official list of judges for 10 years.

"I was beginning to think I would never be called up to judge," she said at the time. "I have been com-

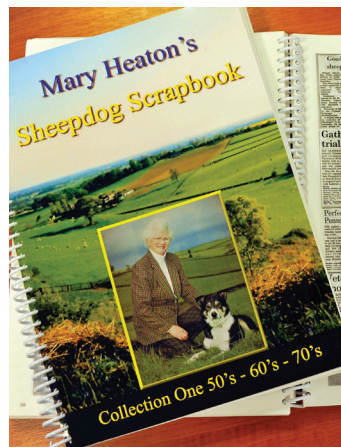


For the older generation, they can reminisce. For the youngsters, they can gain an insight into the past

ANDREW HEATON

peting since 1965 and I have always maintained if you get something from the sport you should give something back."

The formidable couple, who were jointly awarded the Wilkinson Sword in 2007, for their outstanding contribution to the industry, were also always keen to encourage



youngsters into the sport.

She said: "Young people seem more interested in using quad bikes to tend to their sheep these days which is a real shame as they are missing out on such a great hobby that offers real opportunities for meeting new people and travel.

"Farming can be all worry and



work these days, it's so important to get a break from it and nurture friendships that become particularly important during times of farming crisis."

Andrew attended his first trial with his parents in 1951 at just four months old. Growing up in the sheepdog trialling community, he began documenting his travels from the age of nine in little notebooks detailing the family's activities.

From her first involvement with sheepdog trialling, Mary collected all things to do with sheepdog trial memorabilia spanning more than 50 years.

Following her passing in February last year, Andrew was inspired to share her collection with the wider rural community and began bringing to life her 10 scrapbooks.

Her collection also includes a full set of ISDS Stud books, countless journals, programmes and brochures and a library of sheepdog



I have been very lucky to have enjoyed my chosen hobby for so long, and have met some wonderful people from all over the world with whom to share our common interest

MARY HEATON



and gain an insight into the past. “It’s my mother’s lifetime collection and it would have been wrong I just left all this memorabilia in a box and not shared it. Her collection spans 60 years and I can’t imagine anybody else has that level of information about the sheepdog community documented.

“It is a competitive community but it is also incredibly friendly. The competitiveness doesn’t lie between competitors but in the challenge of coordinating handler and sheepdog to achieve a task where perfection is rarely achievable and both success and disappointment is felt by all.”

“We enjoyed success as a family but soon thought of excuses if we didn’t win – poor weather, bad sheep, and biased judges. It’s like when football managers give their excuses when they lose a match. We are no different.”

related books, trophies and notebooks.

“I was determined the scrapbooks should be made available to the sheepdog fraternity as they have so much to offer. For the older generation they can reminisce. For the youngsters they can put faces to those well know handlers’ names

