

GRAZINGS **BUILDINGS FOR SHEEP**

Much of upland Scotland was latterly given over to sheep. The Southern Uplands had a long history of sheep farming, whilst in the Highlands the black cattle which had been the wealth of the land up until the 18th century gave way to sheep during the 19th century.

Sheep were not housed in the same way as cattle, spending almost their entire lives outdoors. There is, however, ample evidence of structures in the landscape to document their presence.

The structures can be classified according to the marked seasonal round which characterised sheep farming: **wintering, lambing, washing, shearing and protecting against vermin.**



The medieval border abbeys had both roofed sheep houses and open sheep folds. In later times, and up until the 18th century, most farms kept a few of the native *dun-faced* sheep which were housed at night in *sheep cotes* or *bughts*.

Lambs in Shetland were housed in *lammie-hooses*, such as this one, as were other sheep during winter.

Winter shelter in the Borders, for the hardy Blackface and Cheviot breeds, took the form of unroofed *stells* – circular stone walls which gave some shelter from the worst winter weather.

Stells were also built in the Highlands for the sheep farms which had displaced cattle.

Shelter of this kind might also be provided by *plantation stells* – small blocks of woodland, left unplanted in the centre, with an access route leading into it.



A partially-roofed, rectangular form of winter housing is found in the **Lammermuir and Moorfoot Hills**, dating from the late 18th and early 19th Centuries. During the 20th century, large, general purpose sheds were being used for, amongst other purposes, sheep wintering.



Shelter might also be needed for lambs in springtime. In the Southern Uplands, small *keb houses* were built to house orphaned lambs. Up until the 19th century, ewes were milked, the milk going to make butter and cheese. Stone-walled, open-roofed *ewe bughts* were used to confine the ewes during milking.

Towards summer, sheep needed **protection against parasites**. The old way of doing this was by smearing them with butter and tar. *Smearing houses* were once to be found from the Borders to Sutherland. In the 19th and 20th



centuries, sheep were dipped – immersed in insecticide – instead. This picture shows sheep **dipping** at a farm at **Keenie, Glenesk, Angus**. The related pens (*fanks*) and dipping troughs are to be found most sheep farms.

Occasionally, as here at **Ribigill, Sutherland**, the dipper was housed in a building.



Shearing was hot, summer work, and usually took place outdoors.



This picture shows shorn sheep gathered in a pen at **Glentennet, Glenesk, Angus**. Fleeces were rolled, packed and stored in large sacks or sheets until sold. A few farms had separate wool stores but generally a barn or byre was used.

Apart from the structures used as part of the seasonal round, others were needed the year round: the shepherd's house – often with a small byre for milk cows and stable for a horse or pony– as well as kennels for sheep dogs.

To find out more:

Fenton, A. and Walker, B. *The Rural Architecture of Scotland* Edinburgh, 1981

Questions

Buildings for sheep – THEN and NOW

1. It has always been important that sheep are protected from parasites.

Which of these methods were used *then*? (pre 19th century)

- (a) Smearing the sheep with butter and tar
- (b) Preventing the sheep to stray into long grasses or uncultivated fields

Which of the following methods are used *now*? (In the 19th and 20th centuries)

- (c) Shearing all year round
- (d) Immersion in insecticide (sheep dipping)

2. Look at the picture on page 1. The first image shows a building for housing lambs (and all sheep over winter), in Shetland. The second image shows a construction known as a *stall* – used for sheltering sheep in the Borders over winter.

What do you notice about these two constructions? Why might they be so different? How would you protect sheep during winter where you live?

3. There is a seasonal round in sheep farming: wintering, lambing, washing, shearing and protecting against parasites. With so many sheep, it is necessary to have some kind of construction to control the flocks.

Look at the picture on page 2, showing sheep dipping at a farm at Keenie, Glenesk, Angus. **What is going on in the picture?**

Why do you think the pen on the far left is sloping? What makes this structure appropriate for its purpose? Could you think of a way of improving it?

Answers

1. **Then and now**, sheep were protected from parasites by

(c) *Smearing the sheep with butter and tar*

and

(d) *Immersion in insecticide (sheep dipping)*

2. Picture 1 has a roof of grass, it is small and contained – good, secure shelter for lambs and the other sheep during the harsh Shetland winters. Picture 2 has no roof; its walls protect enclosed sheep from only the worst of the winter weather in the Borders. It shelters the hardy Blackface and Cheviot breeds.

The differences in location and climate of these two sheep enclosures may effect their construction.

3. The picture shows sheep dipping. The sheep are immersed in insecticide to protect them from parasites and vermin. They are pulled through the narrow channel then led to the pen (fank) on the far left of the picture to dry. The slope in the pen allows the dip to drain back into the dipper.