

## The Rationalisation of Rural Sport: British Sheepdog Trials, 1873–1946

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**Abstract** The article analyses the evolution in both the forms and changing social content of British Sheepdog trials, from the first recorded event at Bala, Wales in 1873 to the advent of their revival following the Second World War (during which they had been suspended). Contrary to popular myth, early trials were gentry sponsored and therefore heavily freighted with elite values concerning the nature of the shepherds' craft. Early trials accented speed, agility and obedience in the dog, as well as sheer entertainment value, arising often from debacles that might ensue in any given run. The trials, too, remained adjuncts to elite, Kennel-club style dog-shows, with their focus on conformation and the physical beauty of the animal. As the social prominence of the aristocracy and gentry receded after 1880, so too did their role in defining the nature of the sheepdog trial. With the founding of the International Sheepdog Society in 1906 by shepherds and farmers, the rules for such trials became transformed, reflecting more the actual work of the shepherd, and indirectly the larger shift within agriculture toward more specialised sheep production. These new rules gave the trial a rigorous aspect at once more modern than earlier prototypes, yet rooted in the craft traditions of rural artisans. At the same time, the shepherds and farmers, who made practical use of sheepdogs, assumed direction of the sport. The founding of the ISDS thus coincided with the new self-assertiveness of labour occurring nationally, reflected in the founding of the Labour party the very same year. Elements of the elite show-ring, however, would linger residually in ISDS trials, reflecting a degree of continuity, but these would gradually atrophy. ISDS trials would accent both the independent work of the dog and its ability to function as a working partner to the shepherd. The article thus deconstructs the complicated social evolution in the nature of a rural sport, which reflected in turn changes in the larger socio-economic environment, through a detailed analysis of the changing patterns of the trials themselves.

I have just to say, and I say it as one with a real desire to benefit the flock-masters, that sheep farmers should, whenever they find it possible, attend dog trials, and there see the advantage of having good dogs.<sup>1</sup>

It has become commonplace among enthusiasts of sheepdog trials today that the sport of sheep herding with border collies must have originated with British shepherds wagering who among them owned the better working dog. As one local historian recently observed, 'I suspect that shepherds, though leading isolated lives, still found chances to prove the clever working abilities of their dogs to one another in local matches'.<sup>2</sup> The 'trial' thus became in popular imagination not only a pure 'test' of canine working ability, but a sport initiated by working men for their own pleasure, independently of their 'betters', a pure artifact of plebeian culture.<sup>3</sup> Evidence for shepherds' matches remains scant, however,

while the first recorded trial held at Bala, Wales in 1873, offered a contrary model for such competitions, rooted in the long tradition of gentry patronage, which soon became widely emulated. The Bala trial reproduced the traditional social hierarchy as a cultural event, and by doing so gave it a quality freighted with elite values and notions of what properly constituted the shepherds' craft. But as the social prominence of the aristocracy and gentry receded after 1880,<sup>4</sup> so too would their role in defining the nature of the sheepdog trial. With the founding of the International Sheep Dog Society [ISDS] in 1906, the rules for such trials would become transformed, reflecting more the actual work of the shepherd, and indirectly the larger shift within the agricultural sector of the economy toward more specialised sheep production. These new rules gave the trial a rigorous aspect at once more modern than earlier prototypes, yet rooted in the craft traditions of rural artisans; at the same time, the men who used sheepdogs in practical work, the farmers and shepherds themselves, assumed direction of the sport. In this sense, the founding of the ISDS coincided with the new self-assertiveness of labour taking place nationally and reflected in the founding of the Labour Party the very same year. The new trial format would spread gradually, however, as localities and regions came to adopt it independently; and in Wales it would finally prevail by the end of the 1920s, though in some ways incompletely, since important continuities with past forms would persist.

Both in its composition and assumptions about the nature of the shepherd's craft, the first trial at Bala diverged notably from the characteristics and standards later adopted in ISDS trials. Bala was no mere local trial, but a regional event with 'some colleys hailing even from the far north putting in an appearance'.<sup>5</sup> Initiated by J. Lloyd Price, Esq., of Rhiwlas estate, it took place under the direct patronage of such worthies as the Viscount Combermere, the Marquis of Exeter, and Viscount Down of Yarmouth, to name but a few members of the trial's organising committee.<sup>6</sup> 'Ladies [too] were present on the ground', while some two hundred farmers and shepherds, comprising two-thirds of the unpredictably large crowd of spectators, took their places as well. Such social mingling mirrored the persistence of 'face-to-face' relations characteristic of customary society; yet the hierarchical features of that society clearly revealed themselves with each stratum represented in its expected order: gentry-landlords, their farmers, and the shepherds the farmers employed as agricultural workers. The trial, too, was organised idiosyncratically, with only two elements of the shepherd's work tested, and in a manner allowing a ramshackle quality to the event, even if due deference was paid to the idea of the dog's virtuosity. Judges valued highly the speed and agility with which the dog negotiated obstacles, as if it were engaged in a race, and its obedience to commands in performing complex tasks, especially when runs went awry.

The trial was structured in two parts: a preliminary round with nine handler-dog teams selected to test their penning abilities, followed by a final round of the top four placings to test the gathering abilities of the dogs. The winner of the final round would be declared the overall winner of the trial. But curiously these series of tests began with a 'beauty contest', in which a show ring was formed and the competing dogs judged both for their good looks and how well they seemed 'put together' physically. James Thompson's Tweed, 'a small black and tan dog, with a white forefoot, very compactly built, with an

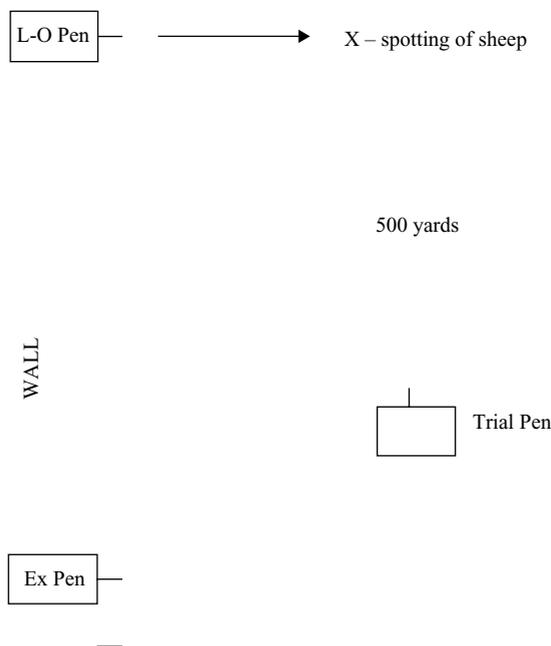


Figure 1. Bala Sheepdog Trial, 1873: Preliminary, Penning Round.

intelligent foxy head and fair coat', won both the beauty contest and the working trial, seeming to vindicate the view of gentry stock-breeders and middle class dog fanciers that the quality of the animal's utility for which it was bred should flow naturally from its physical conformation and appearance. 'The old saw of Handsome is as Handsome does was here fully exemplified', the trial chronicler exulted. With the adoption of ISDS rules, the show element would first be transformed, by the work-ethic of the shepherd, into a display of 'working-conformation', and then eventually disappear from working trials altogether. But until the advent of the ISDS, there remained a significant overlap between the Kennel Club type show-ring and working trials.<sup>7</sup> The adoption of ISDS rules would signal the rising ascendancy of the farmers' and shepherds' common view that breeding for working ability alone was all that mattered.<sup>8</sup>

In the preliminary round of the trial, aimed at testing the penning ability of dog and handler, three flighty welsh mountain sheep were released from a holding pen at a distance of 500 yards from the pen in which they needed to be placed. The handler could leave the post to aid his dog in moving the sheep. The handler and dog having either penned them or run out time, the sheep would then retire to a nearby exhaust pen, which remained in view of each lot of sheep subsequently set out for succeeding handler-dog teams. Each lot of sheep to be penned had also been set closely to the holding pen from which they had been initially let out.

This course design heightened the difficulty of moving the sheep, as they tended to break toward both the holding and exhaust pens, in order to flock with their brethren, particularly as they felt the pressure of the approaching dog. On the one hand, such

breaking compromised the penning exercise and gave to it a certain wildness; on the other hand, the dog's ability to peel the sheep from the holding or exhaust pen, following his handler's commands, gave the exercise great entertainment value and became indirectly part of the test of its working ability. Indeed, the judges seemed to value a certain amount of disorder as a means of judging the dogs. In one case, a dog named Black had been moving his sheep 'so quietly and quickly in the desired direction that the judges had to order [his handler] to disperse them a bit, in order to show what his dog could do. A bolt as usual uphill soon followed, and the shouting and fun commenced', observed the trial chronicler. That a dog should move its stock calmly and at a brisk yet orderly pace, in order to minimise stress on the sheep while efficiently accomplishing the task at hand, and that the design of a course should similarly minimise disorder, while posing only natural challenges to the work of the dog, would be concepts embraced fully only later with the broad acceptance of ISDS rules. Indeed, this preliminary round of the Bala trial had something of a circus-like atmosphere, reminiscent of the rough and tumble of traditional popular sports.<sup>9</sup>

Yet it was possible for some dogs to overcome these handicaps to a degree and to put in relatively smooth runs that in part anticipated future ISDS standards. Tweed, the eventual winner of the final round, who came in second at this preliminary stage, began 'leisurely, without frightening his charges, and swinging easily outside of and well away from the three sheep [and] with very little human aid, got them right up to the pen', a standard of work that future ISDS shepherds would have applauded. But the sheep then rushed past the pen and off course behind a wall where the dog had to be placed physically by his handler in order for it to retrieve them; returning to course, they then flew 'up the rocks and into the crowd' before the dog got them down without having them disperse, 'displaying great pace [i.e. speed] and wonderful obedience', before successfully penning them in fourteen minutes. Tweed was one of two dogs finishing the course, which proved enough to assure him second place in the preliminary round.

The winner of the preliminary round, Sam, a black and white, smooth coated, prick-eared dog, 'being most elegant in its attitudes', and who, 'ferreting [the sheep] with his eye', displayed more than the other competitors the classic appearance and working style of the border collie. By using his 'collie eye', a stare which mesmerised the sheep and is still reckoned a distinctive attribute of this breed, he prevented the sheep from dispersing upon initial contact and was able to extricate them from the surrounding wall and to stop them from clinging to the exhaust pen; and in what appeared to be a measured pace, he got them to the mouth of the pen without their breaking past it. Sam covered his side of the pen before they could do so, reading their pressure and anticipating their intention, and so assisted the handler in what was clearly a team effort at penning the sheep. He completed the course in eleven minutes, the shortest time. Perhaps the secret of Sam's success was that the penning exercise replicated his day-to-day working experience, as 'the flock over which he presides is much infected with maggots and requires constant gathering for dipping purposes'.

Sam was not quite so fortunate in the final round of the trial which tested the gathering abilities of the dogs and at a large distance of 800 yards from the handler. In the gather, the handler remained stationary with the dog being sent to collect the sheep and return

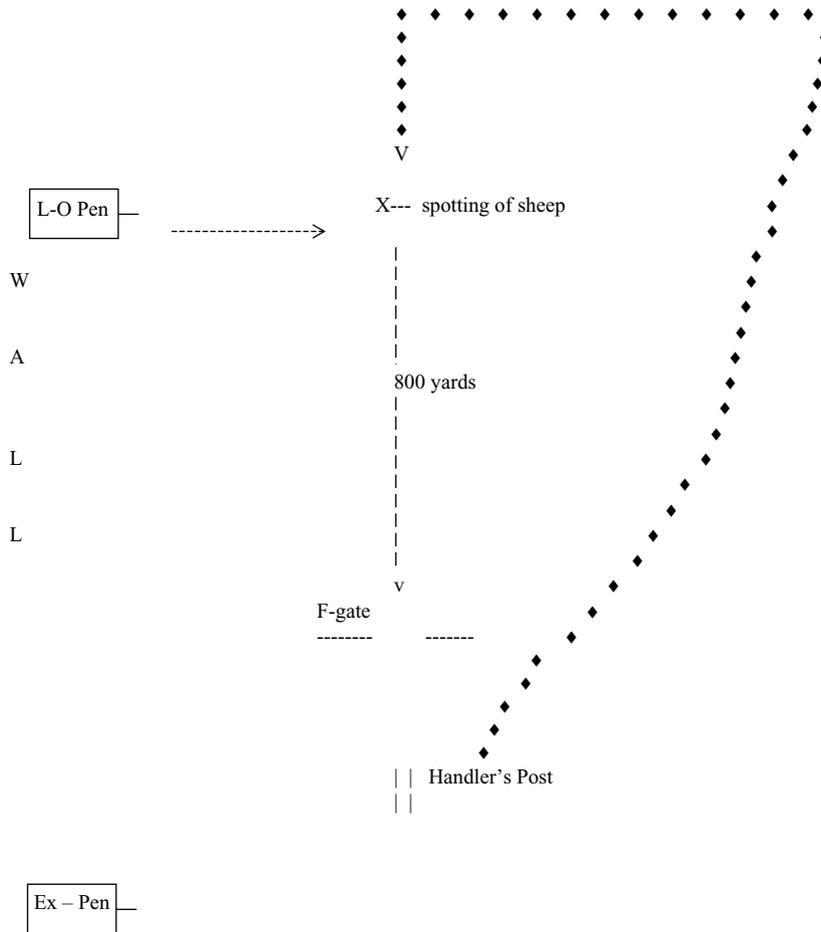


Figure 2. Bala Sheepdog Trial, 1873: Final Gathering Round.

them through a fetch gate to the foot of its master. The gather is thus what the sheepdog is quintessentially about: bred for its ability to aid the hill shepherd in collecting his charges over vast distances and exceptionally irregular terrain. Yet Sam who appeared in the first round to exemplify the classic qualities of the sheepdog failed in the gather; his run went terribly awry, and though he showed admirable skill in attempting corrections, his efforts cost him too much in time.

Sam's sheep at the top got mixed with a flock of geese, which disturbed the dog, but clearly this must have resulted from some fault in his initial contact with them, as geese would not normally be found on course. Next, his sheep drifted toward a wall, two popping over it while the third fell into the river. The dog showed great 'sagacity' in retrieving both lots, which the judges and the crowd applauded. Having brought them back onto course, he then failed to pass the sheep through the fetch gates, which would have placed them at his master's feet, though handler error, an unhappy chronicler maintained, possibly caused this mistake. Sam finished third behind Tweed, who took

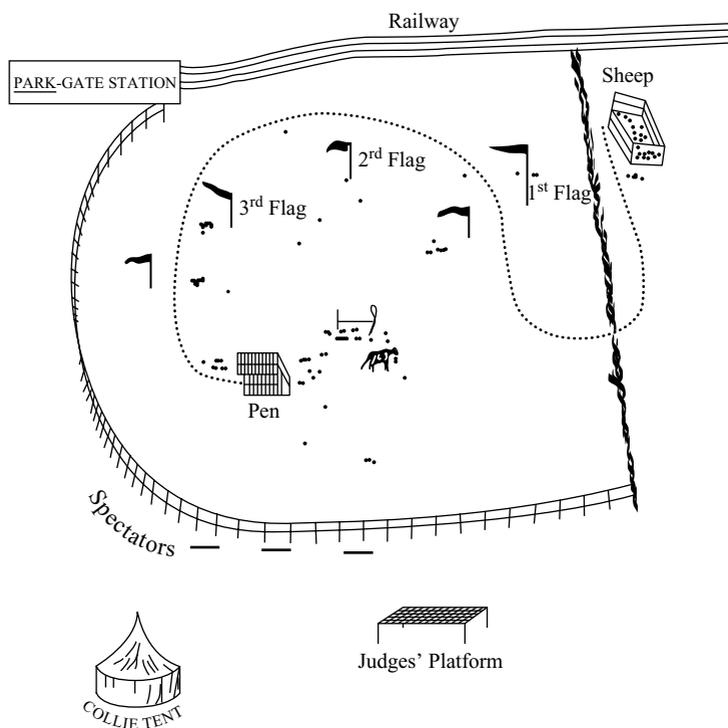


Figure 3. Sheepdog Trial at Wirral, Cheshire, c. 1892.

top honours, and a dog named 'little Chap', still besting mysteriously the fourth place finisher, a dog named Boy, whose gather, 'which he did sharpley and well', must have been superior to his.

The final round took place with far less confusion than the preliminary, now that the best dogs were competing. Yet the same principles governing the judging of the preliminary round still obtained. Judges placed a premium on speed, agility and obedience in getting around the course and in negotiating obstacles. Tweed's victory and little Chap's second place finish owed themselves principally to their gathering the sheep 'at a tremendous pace', negotiating the fetch gate smoothly without incident, and obediently dropping them 100 yards from their masters' feet. If disorder ensued, no matter how extreme, the dog's ability to make corrections by following commands would then be counted positively, partly as a demonstration of its 'sagacity', but also for the entertainment value this afforded. But ultimately completing the course and doing so in good time remained key for determining the placings.

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The Bala trial continued to be held until 1877, but was superseded a year later by trials staged at Llangollen in Denbigshire. These continued annually through the 1920s, with the exception of the period of the Great War, and became one of the important sites for sheepdog trials in Wales. The popularity of the sport spread throughout the

Table 1  
*Placings at the Sheepdog Trial, Wirral, Cheshire, June 6, 1892*

Total Points /Time/ Dog	Style 20	Command 20	Gen. Work 20	Penning 10	Total 70	Time 13 m
1. Turk	20	19	19	10	68	9 m 55 s
2. [Barcroft] Bob	19	20	17	8	64	11 m
3. Moss	19	17	19	8	63	12 m 30 s
4. [Ormskirk] Charlie	18	19	18	[t 1] 8	63	12 m 45 s
5. Kate	18	17	17	–	52	Time out
6. Trim	16	17	14	[t 2] 5	52	Time out*

Source: *The British Fancier* June 10, 1892, Pp. 442–443.

[t 1 = tied in points, with time determining the placings.

[t 2 = tied in points and time, with the points for style and General work perhaps determining the placings.

\*Having timed out, he completed the pen 15 seconds later, the judges giving him 1/2 his pen points notwithstanding, without which he would not have placed, and indicating perhaps a display of favoritism.

United Kingdom and, at Parkgate, Wirral, in Cheshire, England, on the site of the Wirral Hunt Racecourse, a comparable venue would be established by a local sheepdog society in 1892.<sup>10</sup> The course was set on a fifty acre field. Its design differed from Bala's by subsuming the gather into the general work of the dog, though allowing eight of the thirteen minutes given to each run for the dog to find the sheep. These were set at three quarters of a mile from the handler's post. Once collected, the dogs had to move their charges in an arc, a distance of about a quarter of a mile to the pen. The course design thus added the element of a 'drive' towards the pen, in which the dog moved the sheep away from the handler, and by the setting up of obstacles in the form of flags that it needed to negotiate with its charges along the way.

The 'drive' constituted a new phase of work that a future ISDS standard would gradually systematise,<sup>11</sup> while the pattern of the flag-obstacles, though assuming an arc-like shape, would also contribute to the subsequent ISDS requirement that the sheep move in a line. In other respects, however, the same principles of speed, agility and obedience to command would govern the judging of the dog.<sup>12</sup> Unlike at Bala, the Wirral trial used a point system, borrowed from the rules of the Cumbrian Working Sheepdog Club, which represented an important refinement in sheepdog trialing. Table 1 displays the judging categories and the scores for the top six placings. Clearly a combination of time and points governed their distribution.

The category of 'style' referred to the dog's method of work; two dogs might have performed similar tasks with identical outcomes, yet accomplished them in different ways. One might have worked upright, with a 'loose-eye', for instance, while another might have crouched and crawled on its belly while deploying its 'collie-eye'. Style preferences were, of course, entirely subjective and seem to have reflected the residual influence of the show-ring, from which the working trial had not yet emancipated itself.<sup>13</sup> The category of 'command' referred to the degree of obedience the dog displayed in the course of work, that is whether it worked under good control, while 'General Work', included the dog's

ability to control its stock, negotiate its obstacles, keep the sheep moving consistently in the desired direction, and finish the course in good time. The time taken to complete the course, though tempered by the number of points earned, separated the placings in the main, accenting once more the importance of speed. If an obstacle were missed, the dog had the chance to re-negotiate it,<sup>14</sup> or if something went terribly awry, the handler had the chance to make a correction, and if accomplished in a manner that displayed great skill which simultaneously entertained, the judges may have considered this hiccup a virtue rather than a fault.<sup>15</sup> The dog was to undertake the penning of the sheep with the assistance of the handler, though the degree of assistance was not formally specified. The pen tended to be set up as an additional obstacle, typically ‘with an opening of 22 inches, or just wide enough to allow one sheep to enter one at a time’. Not approximating the kind of pen found on a farm, the trial pen bore only an indirect relation to work and more an affinity to the show ring, with its accent on entertainment. At Wirral, the performances of the dogs at the pen revealed the bias in favour of working under command. The winner, Turk, displayed great obedience and control throughout his run, and at the pen began to wag his tail as soon as the last sheep entered, ‘as if conscious of his success’, suggesting however that he remained standing in place, covering their escape route, as his handler eased them in. Bob and Ormskirk Charlie, on the other hand, each penned the sheep unaided, a capability one would desire in a working dog. Turk received full points for penning, while Bob and Charlie each lost two points, for not working the pen closely under command, it would seem, and for style differences, as both worked on their bellies crawling, while the winner remained upright throughout.

The shape of the Wirral trial course, coupled with the trial’s accent on the dog’s speed, obedience, agility, and working style in moving the sheep, became prototypical of a type of sheepdog trial which, like the first Bala event, appealed to elite sensibilities. Indeed, its setting at a racetrack inspired allusions to ‘equine events’,<sup>16</sup> presumably horse-racing and show jumping. The Wirral trial possessed antecedents not only in Bala, but in a competition staged in 1876 at the Alexandra Palace Park, under the curious auspices of the show-ring oriented Kennel Club.<sup>17</sup> It would find successors in even more refined versions, in which flags would combine with physical hurdles to make obstacles more of a challenge.<sup>18</sup> Yet a parallel movement, also emanating from Bala, would lead to the emergence of sheepdog trials that linked their purpose more directly to the practical experience of shepherding, and would offer a set of criteria for judging the work of the dog that embraced alternative values, not at first completely, for even here residual influences of the ‘show-ring’ for a time would linger. Shepherds and farmers themselves would give direction to this new mode of sheepdog trialing, with the founding of the International Sheep Dog Society [ISDS] in 1906.

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In 1906, a small group of Scottish sheepdog enthusiasts formed the International Sheepdog Society [ISDS] at Haddington; although ‘international’ in name, its members and officers remained chiefly Scottish, and the trials it staged before 1914 took place mainly in Scotland and occasionally in Northern England.<sup>19</sup> The Society was not actually formed for the purpose of staging trials, but as a ‘Friendly Society’, or mutual benefit

club for shepherds, the main aims of which were to ‘give financial assistance to Members (and their widows) in case of need’, as well as to ‘secure the better management of stock by improving the Shepherd’s dog’, while more broadly ‘stimulat[ing] public interest in the Shepherd and his calling’.<sup>20</sup> Toward these ends, the Society decided to stage sheepdog trials, which would bring in revenue, refine and test the working ability of the dog, and attract public notice; eventually the Society would establish a stud book, the benefit of which would be to promote the breeding and sale of high quality working dogs by its members.

The Society held its first annual International trial in late November 1907, about a year after its founding. The course was set on ‘Gullane Hill’, an open hill field near Haddington, with twenty-seven handler-dog teams entered in competition. The course differed notably from earlier trials by a determined effort to link the test of the dog to normal work experience and to downgrade the significance of ‘time’ in judging the dog. Each team had first to gather four sheep over a distance from the handler of probably 400 yards; then shed off two marked sheep; pen them; return to the shed ring to single off one marked sheep; and finally drive the four away from the handler through two flag poles, before exhausting them in the holding pen for used sheep. The outrun to the sheep, the dog’s ‘lifting’ of them at point of first contact, followed by its fetching them to the handler would later be recognised as distinct phases of the gather, but were not here distinguished as such. The two types of shedding, or separating of sheep, and the driving the lot away from the handler through a set of obstacles were new, however, and emanated from the practical work experience of the shepherd. Time was also treated as less important a factor, as both the first and second place finishers seem to have taken longer to complete the course than the third to fifth placers, to the surprise and mild chagrin of the trial reporter.<sup>21</sup>

Following the Great War, between 1919 and 1921, the Society instituted two changes which led to the significant expansion of its membership. First, it created two classes of competitors, one for hired shepherds and one for farmers, reasoning that shepherds were at a competitive disadvantage otherwise, since they had fewer resources to train, acquire good dogs of their own, and to take the time from work to attend trials than did farmers who were their own masters. Secondly, trials became two day affairs, with the first day serving as a preliminary round, and the second day as a championship final round, in which the best from both classes combined would compete for top honours.

The trial course would also undergo dramatic changes, and a point system would be instituted for each phase of work. The gather would be disaggregated into its three constituent elements, with outrun, lift and fetch (including ‘midway’ or fetch gates to be negotiated), with each part assigned a point value; the drive would be expanded to 200 yards and would include two obstacles, such that the sheep had to be moved along in as straight a fashion as possible, with care to ensure the maintenance of proper lines, since such movement maximised efficiency, and in a triangular format in order to pass through them. A time limit would be set, at the expiry of which the run would end, with the handler keeping his points earned until then. Judges might use time as a factor in determining the placings, but only as one of several options for breaking tie scores. Time otherwise would only set the limits within which the quality of the dog’s work might

# PRIZE LIST.



## 1. Old English Sheep Dogs.

TRIALS.- It, Challenge Cup (presented by Miss Tireman, Sussex) and £5; 2nd £4; 3rd, £3; 4th, £2; and 5th, £1. Special—to the Best Dog (or Bitch) owned and worked by a hired shepherd—Challenge Cup (presented by Dr. A. L. Tireman, F.R.O.S., L.R.O.P., M.D.) Certificates of Merit will also be awarded to dogs not in the Prize List.

“TYPE” COMPETITION.—Challenge Cup (presented by Fl/Liout, H. B. Pett, M.C.)

“CONDITION” PRIZES.—Best Conditioned Dog, 10/-; Best Bitch, 10/-.

(NOTE.—The Cash Prizes have been gifted by O.E.S.D. breeders and friends.)

## 2. National Trials.

English Challenge Cup, value £15; (awarded to First Dog in Order of Merit, irrespective of Classes.)

### CLASSES.

#### (1) HIRED SHEPHERDS.

1st ...	“Newcastle Chronicle” Cup and	£8
2nd ...	... ..	£5
3rd ...	... ..	£3
4th ...	... ..	£2
5th ...	... ..	£1

#### Specials.

Breeder of Winner (if not previously won by same dog) ... ..	£1
Youngest Competitor ... ..	£1
Oldest Competitor ... ..	£1
Competitor Coming Longest Distance ... ..	£1

#### Certificates of Merit.

Certificates of Merit will be awarded to Dogs not in the above Prize List in the Judge’s discretion.

#### “Type” Competition.

Dogs.—Three prizes, 10/- ; 7/6 ; 5/-.  
Bitches.—Do do. do.

#### “Condition” Prizes.

Best Conditioned Dog ... ..	10/-
Best Conditioned Bitch ... ..	10/-

#### (2) FARMERS & OTHERS.

1st ... ..	£8
2nd ... ..	£5
3rd ... ..	£3
4th ... ..	£2
5th ... ..	£1

#### Special.

Breeder of Winner (if not previously won by same dog) ... ..	£1
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#### Certificates of Merit.

Certificates of Merit will be awarded to Dogs not in the above Prize List in the Judges’ discretion

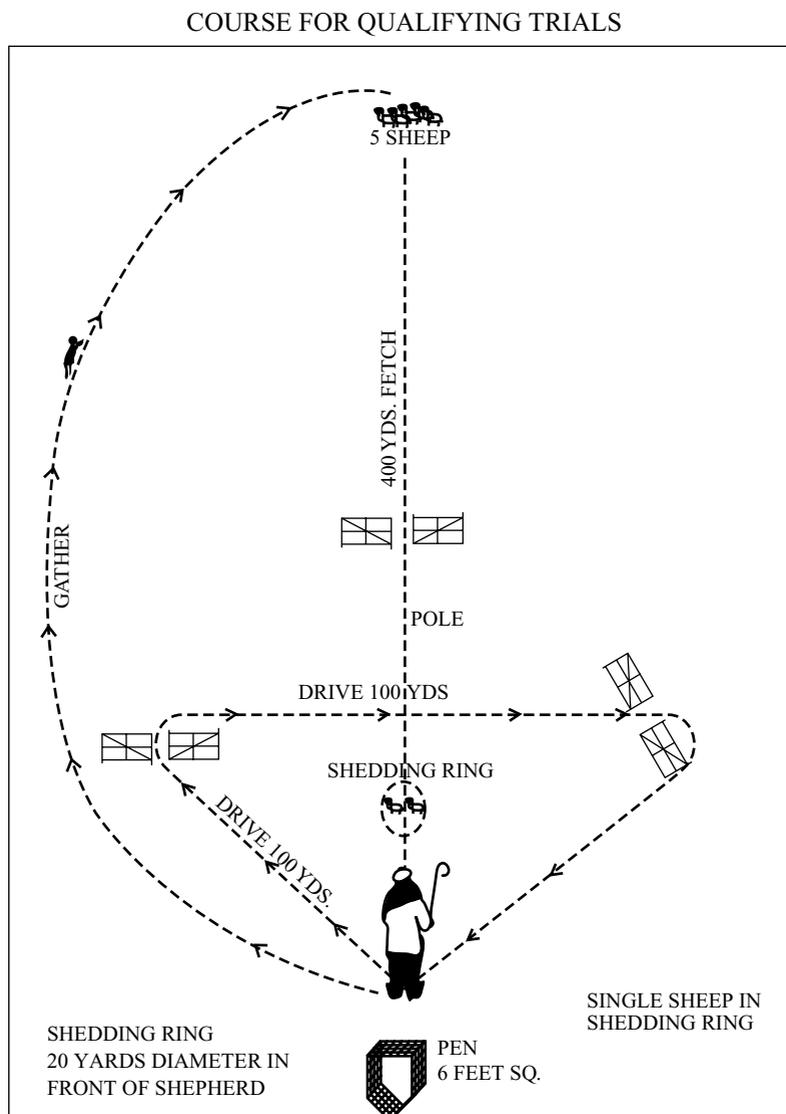
#### “Type” Competition.

Dogs.—Three prizes, 10/- ; 7/6 ; 5/-.  
Bitches.—Do do. do.

#### “Condition” Prizes.

Best Conditioned Dog ... ..	10/-
Best Conditioned Bitch ... ..	10/-

Figure 4. Example of a Prize List, Knavesmire, York. 1923.



NOTE. –In the “gather” dog may be directed on either side.

Figure 5. Diagram of an ISDS Trial Course: Preliminary Round.

be judged. ‘The judges shall cease to point a dog when the whistle sounds’, the ‘Rules for Trials’ stipulated, while the principle that ‘the quality of the dog’s work’ would be ‘the primary consideration and not the speed at which it is done’ would lay at the core of the new standard for judging.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, should a dog miss an obstacle, though points would be deducted, the amount would depend on the judge’s discretion ‘*having regard to the circumstances of the failure*’; at the same time, successfully negotiating an obstacle would not automatically grant full points for that phase of work, ‘the primary consideration being the [quality of] the fetch and drive as such and as a whole’.<sup>23</sup> The

*INTERNATIONAL SHEEP DOG SOCIETY.*

.....Welsh.....National at Llandrindod Wella on 12th &amp; 13th Augt, 1929

**JUDGES' POINTS.***Competitor,..R.J. Richarda.....**Dog's Name,..Loos.....*

	<b>Points Lost.</b>	
	<i>G</i>	<i>w</i>
<b>Outrun (5),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Lifting (5),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Fetch (10),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Driving (10),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Shedding (5)</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Penning (5),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Single (5)</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>Style (5),</b> ...    ...    ...    ...	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Command (15)</b> { <b>Handler (5),</b> { <b>Dog (10),</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Total 65</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Aggregate (each Judge 65),</b>	<b>180</b>	
<b>Points Lost, ...    ...    ...    ...</b>	<b>18</b>	
<b>Net Aggregate, ...    ...</b>	<b>102</b>	

**Time :.....10.....Minutes.....44.....Seconds.**

Figure 6. Example of a score sheet from the Welsh National, c. 1929.



that from 1922 Wales would join the International and adopt its structure of trialing.<sup>24</sup> The first Welsh trial to use these rules made a large impression on spectators and Welsh handlers alike. According to *The Field*, these included:

‘The quietness and confidence of the best handlers: the absence of shouting and voice: the ease with which they controlled their dogs from a fixed point by different whistle notes: the great pace, style and self-control of the best dogs : the pace on the outrun: the dog’s obedience to whistle when the handler wanted him to go wider, to drop, or to come on slowly: the easy way in which the driving was done. Great interest was taken in the tests new to them – shedding and single marked sheep’.<sup>25</sup>

*The Field*’s description highlights what might be called the dialectic of obedience and independence, which differentiated this new form of trialing from earlier prototypes. Clearly the handler displayed exceptional command, but the dog also possessed ‘great pace and self-control’, by which was meant an ability to understand the job and to work to an important degree unaided and in a careful, workmanlike manner.<sup>26</sup> In a fundamental way, the handler’s exercise of command was directed not at doing the job himself, but in assisting the dog in its work, a difference in emphasis that proved to be a difference in kind. The category of ‘command’ on the judge’s score sheet would remain through the 1930s, but by 1929, as figure 6 illustrates, it had been broken into two parts: five points for the handler and ten points for the dog, measuring the handler’s ability to control his dog and the dog’s capacity to control its stock independently.

The category would disappear by the end of the Second World War, however, to be subsumed in the general work of the dog as judges would individually appreciate it.<sup>27</sup> Still, the category of ‘style’ would remain, a residual artifact of the show-ring, until at least 1946; the working trial, after all, came to be appreciated as a thing of beauty, and the style with which the dog worked its natural expression.<sup>28</sup> But as a formal category, its relevance, like that of ‘command’, would eventually atrophy, subsisting only in the eye of the judge, to be used or ignored according to his own standard. Remnants of the show ring also persisted in prizes awarded to different ‘Types’ of border collie, each distinguished by gender, in which three ‘dogs’ and three ‘bitches’ out of all dogs entered in the working trial would receive an award; a second set of awards for the best ‘conditioned’ dog and bitch would be judged simultaneously in the ‘Type’ competition.<sup>29</sup>

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One way to summarise the metamorphosis of British sheepdog trials would be to ask a counterfactual: Had the earlier trials been judged by a later standard, would their outcomes have differed materially? Recalling the first trial at Bala, Tweed’s run in the preliminary penning round would have been met with approval in part for the way he approached his sheep without disturbing them and having got them to the pen unaided. But subsequently he would have been disqualified for three egregious faults, having been off-course twice and inappropriately assisted by his handler in retrieving the sheep the first time, by being lifted over a wall, and heavily penalised for three others: allowing the sheep to fly past the pen; moving with ‘great pace’, in this context meaning ‘speed’, which no doubt stressed them; and by displaying ‘great obedience’ at the pen, allowing the handler by implication, to perform the main work of penning. Similarly Sam, the winner of the

preliminary round would have met with approval for the overall smoothness and workmanlike quality of his performance, for his ability to take independent initiative at the pen, and to co-operate as a member of a team. As a pure working dog, not one used exclusively either for show or trial demonstrations, Sam appeared to have enjoyed an advantage; but by later ISDS standards, measuring the confluence of real work and trial performance would be the very point of the trial. Tweed and Sam reversed themselves in the final round, with Tweed declared the overall winner. From a later perspective, Tweed's gather could only be faulted for the speed with which it was evidently undertaken, which at Bala had been reckoned a virtue. Sam would have been heavily penalised for losing his sheep in the first place, and not rewarded for the 'sagacity' he showed in recovering them, as he clearly was, by being placed third over an apparently superior run by the fourth place finisher. At the Wirral trial, the accent on speed would likewise have been penalised instead of celebrated, with the independent display of the dog's work rewarded, so that the second and third place finishers would have been pointed above the nominal winner for pen and for 'general work', leading to a reversal in placings. Nor would time have been used in conjunction with points to determine the outcome, but only to delimit the length of each run. The sixth place finisher, who ended in a tie for fifth, would not have been placed at all, because partial pen points were awarded to him for penning after the time limit had elapsed. For the work of the dog to be optimal by ISDS standards, it had to be completed, not quickly, but within a designated interval appropriate to the task.

Another way to express change would be to examine the development of the trial format. Apart from the subordination of 'time' to workmanship, the rules of the International created an integrated structure which tested all key elements of the work of the dog from the components of the gather to shedding, singling, driving and penning, and offered a variety of formats of increasing complexity and difficulty, including 'double lifts' by a single dog in a championship round to 'brace' competitions involving the handling of two dogs simultaneously. Although obstacles in the form of fetch and drive gates would remain on the course, their significance became subordinated to considerations of the quality of the dog's work in moving the sheep. The format would undergo a distinct evolution, becoming more complex after 1919, and retaining categories such as 'command' and 'style', residues of the show-ring; but even these would be redefined to accent the independent work of the dog, and as formal categories would eventually become vestigial. The show-ring, too, following its metamorphosis into a display of 'working conformation', under early ISDS practice, would eventually find no place as part of a working trial.

Finally, there remained a clear class element to many of the differences between ISDS and earlier working trials. The emphasis on style, obedience, agility and speed in moving the sheep expressed an elite perspective that placed these sheepdog trials on a par with horse-racing or show jumping, and therefore were intended primarily to entertain. They may also be seen as the herding analogue to show-ring demonstrations to which they served as adjuncts. The focus of ISDS trials on the work of the dog and of the shepherd made them on the contrary adjuncts of the pastoral way of life and expressed the revival of rural craft traditions. Ironically, the commercial, pastoral economy had expanded during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, with a great emphasis placed increasingly on the

need for higher efficiency.<sup>30</sup> The shepherd's dog became better bred and better trained than ever before, as the shepherd too became better skilled and educated; and so the sheepdog became, fundamentally, the instrument of a revolution in pastoral productivity. But because the sheepdog was a living creature, with an especially high intelligence, his instincts for work were used not just instrumentally, but co-operatively as part of a joint effort, in which dog and shepherd would also create a special bond of affinity.

### Notes

1. *Crook and Plaid*, 2nd December 1907.
2. Barbara Carpenter, *et al.*, *Trials and Tribulations: The First 50 Years of the South Wales Sheep Dog Trials Association* (York, 2001), p. 3 ; cf. J. Wentworth-Day, *The Wisest Dogs in the World: Some Account of the Longshaw Sheep-Dog Trials Association* (Plaistow, Eng., 1952-3), pp. 25-6.
3. Cf. E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, VII (1974), 378-405, and Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations in English Society, 1700-1850* (Cambridge, 1973), p. 67, who is prepared to see gentlemen 'not entirely disengaged from the culture of the common people', and so participating directly in their pastimes.
4. See David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven, 1990).
5. *The Field: The Country Gentleman's Newspaper*, 18th October, 1873. Discussion of the trial is drawn largely from the detailed account given in this issue of *The Field*; for a purely narrative account, drawing upon the same source, cf. Sydney Moorehouse, *The British Sheepdog* (London, 1950), pp. 69-79.
6. Major and Mrs Le Gendre Starkey were so thrilled by this 'novel idea' of a sheepdog trial that they volunteered to stage one on their Lancashire estate the following year, offering a substantial prize of fifty guineas.
7. Harriet Ritvo has observed that, '[t]here was little overlap between the rough shepherds who bred collies for work and the affluent amateurs who bred them for show'; Harriet Ritvo, *The Animals Estate: The English and Other Creatures in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge, MA, 1987), p. 115. While this may have become true socially, the intermingling of working trials with the show ring persisted until the end of the Victorian era. Cf. 'Wirral Sheepdog Trials Association and Show', *The British Fancier*, 10th June, 1892. Ormskirk Charlie, a frequent competitor on the trials circuit, finished in a tie for third at the Wirral trial reported in *The British Fancier* below. The chronicler of the trial, commenting on Charlie's working performance, also noted that 'it was to the credit of the show collie, as in his case he is not only show bred . . . but himself a prize winner, having won first at Llanidloes and other shows'. And at this same Wirral trial, it was reported, that 'The show in connection with the trials brought together 85 entries'. Despite his show origins and successes in the show ring, Ormskirk Charlie was described nearly a decade later as 'the] best high-bred working collie living'; see 'Sheepdog Trials and How they are Conducted', in *The Ludgate*, May 1899, p. 59. Cf. Wentworth-Day, *The Wisest Dogs in the World*, p. 28 who described Ormskirk Charlie, the winner of the first Longshaw trial (c. 1898), then age nine, as 'a true bred collie [pure or show bred], so that its achievements break down the old fallacy that a true bred collie cannot be properly trained to perform these [working] duties'.
8. 'It is of the first importance that the pup be bred from the best working strains procurable', William Caig, ISDS president for 1916, proclaimed. 'While individual members of the same litter may possess varying degrees of working ability, yet it is only by breeding from the best that the best results can be obtained'. See 'Training of the Working Collie. Opinions held and Ideals aimed at by a Galloway Shepherd (1916)', International Sheepdog Society publication, n.d. In the private collection of Mrs. Barbara Carpenter, Pastor's Hill House, Bream, Lydney, Gloucestershire.

9. Robert W. Malcolmson, *Popular Recreations*, passim; cf. Carolyn Conley, 'The Agreeable Recreation of Fighting', *Journal of Social History*, 33, 1 (Fall, 1999).
10. The report of the trial, which took place on 6th June 1892, can be found in *The British Fancier*, 10th June, 1892, pp. 442–3; clipping in private collection, Mrs Barbara Carpenter.
11. The beginning of the 'drive' could be found a little earlier at Llangollen at which following the gather, the dog had to move the sheep away from the handler through an 'artificial fence' and then on to the pen, the handler not being allowed to leave his post to go to the pen until after the sheep passed through the artificial fence; 'Llangollen Sheepdog Trials', *The Field*, 9th August, 1890; clipping in private collection, Mrs Barbara Carpenter.
12. The second place finisher of this trial, Mr George Barcroft, had competed in Germany ca. 1889, astounding members of the German Collie Club; the report in *The Daily News* commented that 'The splendid working of the English dogs made a most favorable impression; the way in which *they ran their sheep through the obstacles, and finally penning them to the call of their trainer*, delighted the spectators'. [Emphasis added]. It should also be noted that Mr Barcroft handled Old English Sheepdogs and not Border Collies. See 'Sheep Dog Trials in Germany/success of a local competitor', news clipping extract, in the Barcroft File of Mrs Barbara Carpenter's collection. Cf. Wentworth-Day, *The Wisest Dogs in the World*, p. 28. Ormskirk Charlie won the first Longshaw trial because of good workmanship that here accented obedience, 'never hustling the sheep, but obeying his master to the satisfaction of everyone', and because he completed the course in seven minutes, the shortest interval (his erstwhile rival, Barcroft Bob, did so in fourteen minutes!).
13. See above, note 6.
14. Anglo-Manxman, 'Sheep-dog Trials and How they are Conducted', *The Ludgate*, May 1899, p. 58.
15. George Barcroft, the second place finisher at Wirral, won another similar trial ca. 1899, using the same dog, Bob, an Old English Sheepdog, where instead of flags, the dog had to negotiate sheep over 'hurdles', one being a gap through a dry ditch or watercourse. One of Bob's sheep fell into the ditch and had to be retrieved, while the others remained grazing at the side of the path. 'A prolonged whistle and Bob quietly crawls on his belly until he gets on the brink of the ditch facing the sheep, who, alarmed by his sudden appearance, jumps up and joins its companions. A loud cheer from the spectators shows their appreciation of this excellent piece of work.' See 'Sheep-dog Trials', in *The Ludgate*, May 1899, p. 61.
16. 'There was good attendance, but the spacious racecourse was in no way thronged, and in this respect . . . a marked contrast to its appearance on the occasion of the equine tournaments which are here periodically enacted. Sheepdog trials, however, are only in their infancy, and we look forward to a time when they may be as popular and as much interest taken in them by the public as is now taken in a race meeting, minus, we hope, the betting element.' *The British Fancier*, 10th June, 1892, p. 442.
17. Report from *The Illustrated London News*, 8th July, 1876. Typescript reproduction in private clippings collection of Mrs. Barbara Carpenter.
18. See 'Sheep-Dog trials', *The Windsor News*, n.d. [but c. 1930s], pp. 491–6; in the private clippings collection of Mrs. Barbara Carpenter. Cf. Wentworth-Day, *The Wisest Dogs in the World*, pp. 26–7. The first trial at Longshaw in which Piggins' Ormskirk Charlie and Barcroft's Bob featured as competitors, evidently followed this same pattern.
19. 'Blue Riband of the Heather: Development of the Society's Trials, 1906–1936', ISDS pamphlet, c. 1936, p. 1.
20. 'Objects of the 'International' (Excerpt from [the ISDS] Constitution), attached to ISDS 'Programme of WORKING TRIALS at Knavesmire, York., 19th and 20th September, 1923; photo. From document in the private collection of Ms Kim Gibson, Yorkshire, England.
21. News Report of the 'International Sheep Dog Trial', c. Nov 1907, unidentified clipping, in the private collection of Mrs Barbara Carpenter.

22. ISDS, Programme of Working Trials, 19–20th September 1923, Knavesmere, York., p. 10: 'Details of Trials'; *ibid.*, International Programme, for 1930, 'Judging Rules'. In private collection, Ms Kim Gibson.
23. *Ibid.*, International Programme, for 1930, 'Judging Rules'.
24. 'Blue Riband of the Heather', pp. 1–2; in 1923, the Talybont-on-Usk (Breconshire) adopted the International's rules for the first time, 'with the object of arousing interest in the highest form of sheep dog work and of demonstrating to South Wales handlers what may be expected of them and of their dogs': 'Buckland Sheep Dog Trials', *The Field*, 18th October 1923.
25. *Ibid.*, 'Buckland Sheepdog Trials'.
26. The phrase 'great pace', in this context, where the dog is working in a 'quiet and confident' manner and the sheep presumably as a result are moving in a measured way, suggests a careful pace established by the dog. When used in the context of the first Bala trial, to describe for example Tweed's preliminary run, the phrase acquires a different connotation: that of *speedy movement* by the dog, as the sheep were breaking wildly up and down hill and the dog needed to gain control quickly and move them hastily in order to finish the course.
27. In any given phase of work, for instance, points might be deducted in that phase for the handler 'over-commanding' his dog, or for the dog not taking control of its stock sufficiently well unaided; see Colin Gordon, *One Man's Opinion: An Approach and Guide to Judging Sheepdog Trials* (Privately Published, 2000).
28. 'Hired Shepherds' international Championship', Programme for 1946, private collection of Ms Kim Gibson. The categories for points included Gathering (30, two runs of 15 each), Driving (10), Shedding (10), Penning (5), and Style (5). Interestingly style was given equal status with penning, but no category for 'command' was here included.
29. See Figure 4 above; the prize list for the 1930 International was more explicit in describing both the Type and Condition prizes awarded. See flyer for the International, 29th and 30th September and 1st October 1930 in the private collection of Ms Kim Gibson. Cf. Wentworth-Day, *The Wisest Dogs in the World*, centre photo, c. 1947 'left to right: Colonel J.P. Hunt, T.D., J.P., Mrs Hunt, E. Ashton Priestly with 'Pat' receiving the Sheffield Telegraph's cup for the Best Conditioned Dog'.
30. Roderick Floud, *The People and the British Economy 1830–1914* (New York, 1997), pp. 104–106. Floud illustrates the dramatic increase in pasture and fallow land c. 1867–1913, the main gain occurring before 1890 but a considerable rise continuing until the outbreak of war. Commercial agriculture, with the increasing primacy of the pastoral sector, responded to the new competitive international economic environment by becoming more efficient; and this drive toward higher productivity touched the agricultural workers, whose numbers became less plentiful, but whose skills and education improved. Suddenly they 'became less dispensable, more a vital source of the increased efficiency upon which the farmers now depended'. The refinement of the shepherd's use of the border collie was no doubt a part of this process.