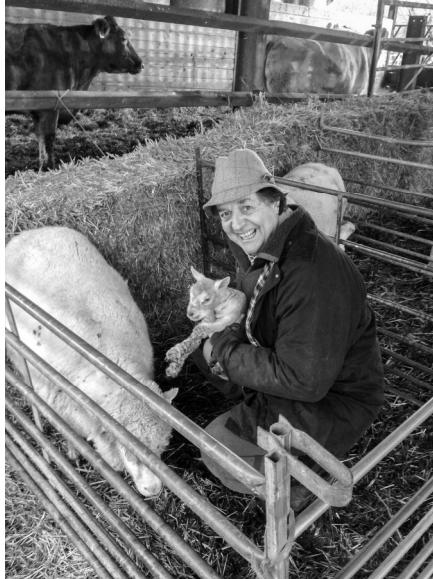


Not in Our Wildest Dreams!

Life most certainly takes many twists and turns and I am always amazed when I find out what is waiting around the next corner for me. For those of you who know me, I do not exactly speak in the vernacular of this wonderful country but with a twang more at home in climes far south. Just to add to the confusion, I have a surname that hails from across the Irish Sea and have been further blessed when marrying a very Texan wife.



the existing farm stock. Little did we know when signing the cheques that we were opening a door into the very different and hugely challenging world of animal and land-husbandry. Late last year, I was privileged to help with some of the lambing with a young farmer called Luke who lives with his family in a cottage in the grounds, managing the animals and the

lands for my family. No previous experience prepared me for all of the joys, hard decisions and little tragedies of lambing that always seemed to happen at two in the morning on knees in a cold, dark, damp shed.

A Pretty Rum Character

That said, I do have rather a lot of good English blood gurgling around inside me from my Mother's family who can trace their lineage back to Ivo de Taillebois who arrived on these shores with William the Conqueror. De Taillebois was a pretty rum character according to Charles Kingsley in his 19th century work, *Hereward the Wake*, so I hope we have all mellowed a little over the centuries.

In the hopefully very long term, Cindy and I will have to take on responsibilities in Somerset that include a farm, which, for this particular and simple *techy geek*, is a rather daunting prospect. We decided that the best preparation for this life-changing future would be to start by buying a flock of yearling poll Dorset ewes, some young rams, and a herd of Simmental heifers before adding them to

Thunderbolt and his Harem



Dorset ewes are large classic looking sheep, of the type usually seen in

children's books, that in winter sport a hair style to challenge even Elvis Presley in panache. We decided that we should invest in a very grand young Dorset ram, named *Thunderbolt*, to maintain the pedigree of the flock and three equally grand French Charollais rams at the annual sales. I fretted, having signed a sizable cheque, that naming a ram was possibly a very cunning selling technique to attract the un-initiated so was greatly relieved when told by Luke that *the boy* was fully earning his accommodation and victuals. He can commonly be seen these days sitting on his haunches like a dog overseeing his harem in the middle of his field as if he is the king of all he surveys, which of course he is. We are planning to show him at the next Royal Bath and West show as he is such a handsome young fellow.

I was under the great misapprehension that ewes are shy, wilting flowers and scared of their own shadow. I was very quickly corrected of this foolishness after stupidly having some of the young ladies behind me when I tipped food into feeding trays and instantly found myself face down in the muck with more than one set of muddy hoof marks on my back!

The Blondes

The farm was very pleased to be awarded the south-west champion Blonde d'Aquitaine herd by the governing society last year. I can see why, as even in my ignorance, *Freddie* the bull and his ladies are the most wondrous of creatures, and as I busily fork silage in their general direction it is always consumed with great gusto. We hope that the new herd of Swiss Simmental heifers will add to the prosperity of the enterprise. I recently watched them gambolling about the fields full of the joys of life with

Freddie, before they were all brought in for the winter.



Quick Wits Needed

After decades working in my sort of science with all its rules and equations, I now know that farming is a very different prospect, needing a quick wit, intellect, knowledge, stoicism and special skills. The farm was badly affected by the nasty *Schmallenberg* virus last year but this season a new vaccine was approved by the Government and we have not had a single tragic case, then the floods and winter storms came. Fortunately, the farm has only a small proportion of its lands on the Somerset levels but the terrible storms over winter caused damage and some losses among the un-born calves as the cattle sheltered in their sheds with everything crashing about in the wind and with Luke and I trying to lash things down. The Dorsets and their lambs carried on as usual, completely unconcerned by all the goings on. In our wildest dreams we never thought we would have anything to do with farming but we feel hugely privileged that a door has been opened for us into such an all-encompassing and wonderful world. We have much to learn which is all very exciting.

Tom Shannon