

COTSWOLD SHEEP SOCIETY WOOL DAY, APRIL 19TH 2009.

By Rob Harvey-Long

A beautiful day greeted the Members to Derek and Maggie Cross's Wool Day at Wyck Rissington near Stow on the Wold. The day began with a demonstration of shearing, and was followed by a most entertaining and informative talk by former British Wool Marketing board judge Mr. David Jones who has been a Wool Judge for many years, and has judged many of our competitions. He outlined the many problems associated with producing good wool, including the importance of feeding, the places where sheep are kept, breeding, the need to produce white wool to meet the demand from buyers, and the relative merits of the individual fleeces that had just been sheared. After a lengthy question and answer session, we retired to Wyck Rissington Village Hall for lunch. There was an all day demonstration of spinning by the Members of the Oxford Spinning Guild and it was good to see their appreciation of Cotswold wool and enthusiasm for spinning it. After lunch we had another demonstration of shearing and a lesson by David Jones on how to correctly roll a fleece, followed by a further questions and answers session. Derek Cross talked about his sheep and what to look for when assessing Ewes and Lambs and the important points to bear in mind when assessing sheep. The day ended with presentations and thanks to Derek and Maggie for all their hard work in organising such a successful Wool Day, which was well attended by Members, and to David Jones who had travelled so far to speak to us.

A HISTORY LESSON AT WYCK RISSINGTON.

By Angela Reid

After lunch, and before the afternoon shearing session at Wyck Rissington, Rob Harvey Long gave a fascinating talk on his researches into the history of the Cotswold sheep. He has been looking at the origins of the Cotswold and told us how the Romans arrived in Britain and been less than impressed by our small, wiry native sheep. Consequently they introduced a larger, more solidly built sheep, with short wool, to improve our native stock. He has discovered that these sheep may have originally come from the Coraxi region of Russia, which is part of modern day Georgia. It is a mountainous region admirably adapted for the breeding of sheep. Over the years these imported sheep increased in size as their meat was important, as well as their wool. In Medieval times the Cotswold wool was still short, fine and strong; it was considered one of the best quality wools Britain produced. Indeed for many years the Venetians rowed their galleys all the way from Venice to Southampton to buy large quantities of it. In fact it was only during the nineteenth century that the Cotswold wool became longer and coarser; the result of Robert Bakewell's revolutionary stockbreeding programme. However, perhaps Rob's most interesting, and tantalising, line of research, was his unravelling of the myth of Chrysomallos; the winged ram with the Golden Fleece, so sought by Jason and his Argonauts. The extraordinary coincidence is that this myth also has its roots in the Coraxi region. So could it be that the Golden Fleece (in reality probably a fleece used to trap small pieces of gold from the streams that ran out of the gold mines for which the area was famous) actually belonged to a Cotswold forebear?

Maybe as Rob suggested, DNA testing could be the way to prove the connection - so if anyone is heading for Georgia, please do let us know.