

# The Camden Flock

## A history of THE CAMDEN FLOCK

—now registered as Mt Bute Camden Flock No. 3164 in the Australian Merino Flock Book Register

Captain John Macarthur, an officer in the 102<sup>nd</sup> Regiment, and his wife, Elizabeth, arrived in Australia in 1790, two years after the first settlement. In 1805 they took up a 5,000 acre land grant which was to become the centre of the developing Australian wool industry.

Macarthur had originally maintained a flock of Bengal sheep, but in 1797 he obtained three rams and five ewes from Captain Waterhouse, and one ram from Captain Kent, all from Capetown in South Africa. These fine wool producing sheep are believed to be descendants of the Spanish “Esturial” Merinos, given to the Dutch government by Spanish royalty.

In 1804 Macarthur returned from London with five rams and one ewe from the Merino flock of King George III, descendants of Spanish “Negrette” Merinos, the largest and strongest of migratory Merinos in Spain.

It was these two flocks which formed the nucleus of the Merino sheep bred at “Camden Park” by John and Elizabeth Macarthur.

In 1822, Macarthur’s Merino flock had grown to such an extent that he exported 150,000 lbs. of wool, and in 1827, a bale of Macarthur wool sold for 196 pence per lb. This remained a world record price until 1949.

The flock remained at “Camden Park” under the supervision of the Macarthur family until the 1840’s, when because of severe drought, the flock was transferred to other properties. In 1846, several rams and 150 ewes were acquired by the Hon. William Campbell, of “Auchmore”, Strathloddon, in Victoria. In 1857, he sold the complete flock to Messrs. Griffith & Greene and a short while later the flock was obtained by Mr C. Knight, who took them to his property “Dunmore”. They were then repurchased by Griffith & Greene, and transferred to “Glenmore”, Bacchus Marsh in Victoria.

In 1873, the Hon William Campbell again became the owner, moving the flock to Booligal, New South Wales, where drought reduced numbers from 3,000 to 160. At Sir William Macarthur’s request, Campbell sent a small number back to “Camden Park” in 1880. The remaining sheep were purchased by Mr T. Shaw, “Wooriwyrite” in July 1900 and soon after sold to Mr Samuel Wilson, “Ercildoune”, Burrumbeet in Victoria. This property and sheep was purchased by Dr. Allan Currie in 1922.

Mr William Buckland “Beckworth Court”, became the owner of the flock in 1933 and the present stud was founded in 1967, when Mr H.J. Collins, “Mt Bute”, purchased half the flock, comprising 2 rams and 39 ewes, from the estate of William Buckland. The remainder of the flock was sold to Mr Mac Troup of Clunes, in Victoria.

The present day ‘Camden’ sheep can be described as a very uniform flock of small, plain bodied sheep, with an open face, clean legs and showing little change in conformation and wool production. They have a micron range of 17 – 19. There is no neck development or wrinkle development in the breech area. Ewes weigh between 30 – 35 kgs and cut approximately 2 kgs of wool. Rams have heavy horn growth, generally more tightly curled than present day merinos, cutting 2.5 – 3.5 kgs of wool and weighing between 45 – 50 kgs. Despite the long history of inbreeding, the reproductive performance of the flock is still outstanding in terms of ewe fertility and ram lambs reaching puberty at an early age.

The registered flock number 3164, run at Mt Bute, is a closed flock with no outside additions and will continue to be run in this manner to preserve and maintain the direct bloodline from Macarthur’s ‘Camden’ flock.

*[This article was provided by Michael & Sue Collins, Mt Bute, Linton, Victoria, the current owners of the Camden flock. We acknowledge their contribution in retaining this living history of our Merino heritage. Camden Park is listed as a Reference Flock in the Australian Stud Merino Flock Register.]*