

ARMSCOTE MANOR

A Natural Fibre Company case study



Rare Portlands knit way to survival



PRODUCING a British Rare Breed, naturally-coloured wool processed in England is something of which Deborah Williams is justifiably proud.

The story started three ago when she began producing DK wool, but goes back much further than that.

She has lived with her family at Armscote Manor in South Warwickshire for 25 years. The house itself is Jacobean and built by John Halford, a wool merchant, in the early 1600s.

'I decided to keep sheep to keep the grass down' she says.

'Jo Henson was a neighbour and having

visited his farm I decided to keep a rare breed that was at that time at high risk.'

The family breeds Portland Sheep, the oldest recorded sheep in England and one that managed to get mentioned in the Domesday Book.

'I also have a few Black Welsh Mountain Sheep and have blended their wool with the Portland and have Portland with a dash of Black Mountain and Portland with a splash of Black Mountain.

'This year we have produced pure Black Welsh Mountain Sheep wool. We also have two widowed ladies, Edna and Kate, who knit for us.

Using the Natural Fibre Company (www.thenaturalfibre.co.uk), they have produced large and small cable cushions with British slate buttons, a baby cable throw and a large reversible cable throw knitted in one piece.

'All the items we sell are available in all four colour ways. We can also knit to order using our wool.'

The Williams family show their sheep at the Moreton Show and the animals are also shown every year at the Shipston Wool Fair (Sheeps Town), of which Deborah is a Patron.

'I keep a rare breed as I believe biodiversity is important and it is such a shame that this nice natured, pretty breed, is not bred commercially simply because the ewes only normally produce one lamb.

'Since we started breeding Portlands we've only had three pairs of twins.

'Hopefully, showing our sheep will encourage others to keep Portlands.'

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