Notes from Local Interest Group 28th October 2021

Present in Hall: Maureen Lloyd (ML), Wendy Ozols, John Price, Erika Cunningham, Cynthia Price, David Price, Cherry Williams, Iris Lloyd, Robert Collingwood, Lucy Trench, Roy Lloyd, Richard Thomas

Present on Zoom: Dainis Ozols, Juliet & John Lewis, Allison Joyce, Sylvia Illingsworth, Eva Morgan, Jennifer Lewis, Jenny Francis, Diana Lloyd, Elsa Harflett, Helen Barnett, Angela Swindell, Bronwen Jenkins, Grace Davies, Lindsey Rogers.

Apologies: Joan Lloyd, Jenny & James Martin, Ann & Howard Dean

ML welcomed everyone and said how astonished she was to see so many present in the Hall on such a dreadful evening, weatherwise. She explained that she was our speaker for the evening.

Two Hundred Years of Hill Farming in Radnorshire

ML began by setting the scene. The landscape is the result of a long history of change by humans since Neolithic times and each generation has contributed in some way, sometimes in a positive way and sometimes negatively. Obviously, the changes that have occurred here in Radnorshire have not taken place in isolation as it is a county, not an island.

ML showed us a map of the county to illustrate the physical geography. The county covers an area of roughly 300 000 acres (110 000 ha), and possesses both upland and lowland, although it is mostly upland. This physical geography has had an influence on the type of farming that can take place and what crops can be grown and which livestock can be kept.

FIG. 16.—The Land-Use Regions of Radnorshire.

ML decided that, for the purposes of this talk, she would start in about 1800 and she has divided the 200 years into eight different time periods to show how farming has changed over this time.

Pre-1800, farming had experienced a boom since about 1750, especially during the reign of George III (Farmer George). During the latter part of the 18th century, the government was worried that there might be a revolution in Britain, as had happened in France (1788-1799). One of the causes of the French Revolution had been the failure of harvests and the ensuing starvation. The following years under Napoleon were good for farming as the armies fighting the many battles of the early 19th century (which ended with the Battle of Waterloo in 1815) needed to be fed. In Britain, the

Corn Laws (tariffs and other trade restrictions on imported food and grain designed to keep prices high in order to protect domestic producers) were enforced between 1815 and 1846. As a result of the activities of the Anti-Corn Law League, they were repealed in 1846, a time of famine in parts of Britain.

In Radnorshire, the major influences on farming in the 1800s were the enclosure of common land, the development of transport and industrialisation. The century was characterized by modernization with the end of the tithe, which had been a real bone of contention, especially amongst Non-Conformist farmers; many Radnorshire farmers belonged to the various branches of non-conformism. It also saw the end of copyhold, although this was not actually abolished until 1925. (Copyhold tenure was a form of customary tenure of land common in England and Wales from the Middle Ages. The land was held from a manor.)

The enclosure of the common land started as a result of prosperity in farming, from about 1750, although the Radnorshire enclosures were quite late, all taking place in the 19th century, and most of those after the 1845 Act, which made enclosure easier. The enclosures brought a lot more land into production. The common was split between those who had claims; these were usually the big landowners and this meant that they had greater acreage to rent out to their tenants. Once enclosed, the farmers had full control over the land – they could grow crops or keep livestock without having to share acreage with others. Enclosure Commissioners approved enclosures and also facilitated borrowing for the improvement of land by drainage, for fencing and for buildings. The 1840s saw the Rebecca Riots, a time of social unrest during which farmers and labourers collaborated in the burning of toll gates. Although the tolls were the grievance, the underlying causes were agrarian depression, land hunger, high rents, the new Poor Law, Chartist agitation and (mainly) the prevailing poverty.

Although Radnorshire did not have as many railways as other parts of the country, they were still influential in many ways. From about the 1860s, goods could easily be transported to the industrial towns of S Wales and other areas of high population. These goods included eggs, butter, cheeses, poultry meat and rabbits. The railways also saw the demise of the drovers, although they had been struggling since the early 1800s because the turnpike roads were costly and enclosures limited their access to grass feed along the routes. Markets became more important for the sale of local stock – they could be fattened and sent to the consuming markets by train. Villages that had depended on the drovers saw a decline (eg Painscastle), unless they were on a railway line. The railways also enabled goods to be brought in from further afield and people no longer had to rely on local building materials, for example (a good thing for Radnorshire where the stone is generally of poor quality for building). Railways also resulted in a reduction in transport costs.

Although Radnorshire is a landlocked county, international shipping also had an influence, especially from the 1800s when steam ships took over from sailing ships. This led to greater accuracy in journey times and so imports became more reliable and exports were also possible. Refrigeration was invented in the 1830s and, in 1879, the first frozen meat exports from Australia arrived in Britain. In addition, cattle could now be fattened in Radnorshire, slaughtered locally and the meat sold to other parts of the UK. By the end of the century, dairies from places further afield in the country more suited to milk production were supplying London with milk and the dairies surrounding the capital started to close down.

Agricultural land was generally held by the large estates, some of which had existed for generations. There were large numbers of small tenant farmers, many of whom had a few acres as well as working on one of the larger farms. After the end of the Napoleonic Wars (1815), there was a

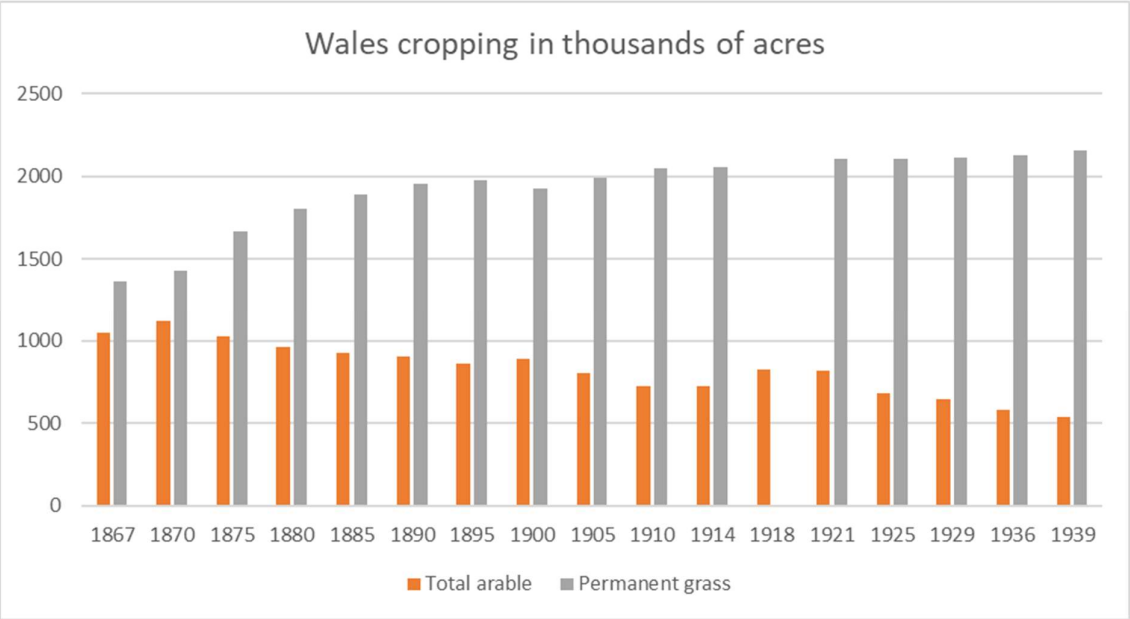
gradual decline in the prosperity of farming and this became really acute in around 1880. Cereal prices fell and far less corn was grown. By the end of the century, many acres were laid down to pasture for cattle and sheep. As a result of industrialisation, many farm labourers were being attracted away from the land by the higher wages in the coalfields of S Wales. With better iron and steel production, more farm implements and machinery could be produced. Although these were often still horse-drawn, steam-powered machines were beginning to be used. The new machines were first used in the areas with large flat fields with straight hedges and wide gateways, and so it took some time for them to become commonplace in Radnorshire, and then probably only in the eastern area bordering on Herefordshire.

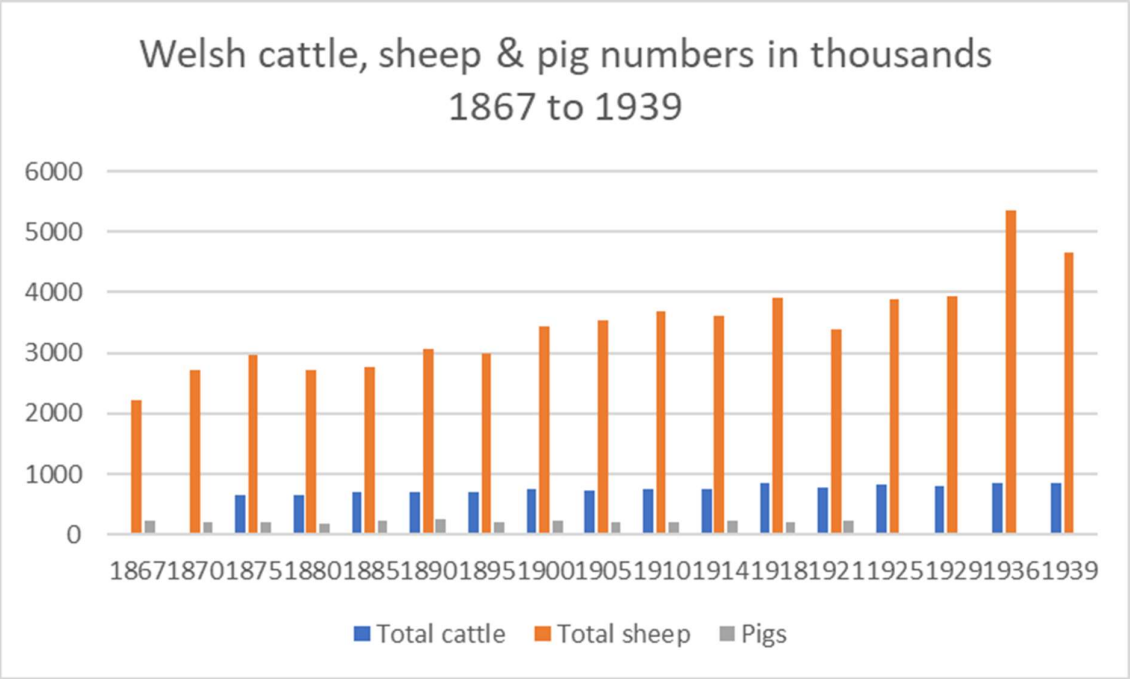
In the early 1900s, farming continued at subsistence levels. Many of the large estates were experiencing financial pressures and so some sold off their farms. The 1894 budget imposed death duties on agricultural property for the first time – arable land, pasture, woodland, cottages, farm buildings, etc. There was a large increase in land sales with a sense of insecurity permeating all landowners. The 1907 Smallholdings and Allotments Act aimed to slow the drift from the land; the first Radnorshire smallholdings were at Cwm Farm, Llanyre, in March 1908. Output was still more or less dependent on horse and man power. Many families survived because their costs were low and they used family labour. Slag, a by-product of the steel industry, was a cheap fertiliser containing both lime and phosphates and proved valuable to grassland farmers. Shorthorns were the main breed of cattle kept at this time and milk production increased, meaning that by 1910 milk was being sent to London from 130 miles away, by train.

When WWI started in August 1914, the President of the Board of Agriculture assured the population that there would be no food supply problems. However, the enlistment of men and requisitioning of farm horses by the army, together with an interrupted supply of imported fodder, fertilisers and food, all led to issues in food production. The setting up of County War Agricultural Executive Committees resulted in pasture being ploughed up and used for cereals and potatoes in order to feed the nation. During the war, the County Committees directly farmed 64 000 acres in England and Wales. The Corn Production Act 1917 provided guaranteed prices for wheat and oats and a minimum wage of 25s per week. At this time, most agricultural land was occupied by tenants, but the leases were not usually for a specified period of time, and generally ended as a result of death or bankruptcy. Many families had held the same land for generations.

Between the wars, the two Law of Property Acts (1922 and 1925) finally extinguished all forms of copyhold. The sale of the County Committees' machinery in 1919 allowed the introduction of tractors to some farms, and smallholdings were established for returning ex-servicemen. Between 1918 and 1922, many Welsh landowners placed at least some of their estates on the market and most of the farms were sold to tenants, who often bid grossly inflated prices in order to ensure they out-bid "outside" buyers. In 1909, overall owner-occupation was 10% of the total acreage; by 1941, this had increased to 39%. The Welsh Plant Breeding station was set up in 1919 and marketing boards were established for milk, pigs, bacon, potatoes and hops. Although these measures helped, farming remained in crisis. Farming families lived largely off the produce of their own land and sales of livestock and wool helped to pay rent and the bank. Poultry, eggs and butter were sold locally and enabled the farms to buy groceries and, occasionally, clothes and footwear. In 1927, there were 2000 auction markets in Wales, but these were dominated by dealer rings, which continued to suppress prices. Lamb sales took over from mutton at this time, but Radnorshire did maintain its mutton trade. Even though tractors were available, horse power remained the main source of power on Welsh farms throughout the inter-war period, with only 1932 tractors in the whole of Wales in 1939.

ML went on to show us some graphs and data to help illustrate some of her points.





The graphs illustrate clearly how arable land declined and permanent pasture increased over the period. Also, cattle numbers were remarkably consistent, as were pigs, but sheep fluctuated greatly during the time period.

The table on the next page shows the decline in arable land in Radnorshire, with most of the decline being in wheat and barley. Oats remained fairly constant because the county was still dependent on horse power. There are still as many horses in 1937 as there were before the introduction of motor power.

Radnorshire Statistics from 1870 to 1937

	1870	1890	1913	1920	1930	1937
Arable Land	51,723	43,009	37,353	42,970	36,704	37,840
Perm grass	91,430	120,433	124,180	115,046	117,780	115,562
Rough Grazing			126,806	120,753	128,763	128,689
Fallow	1,961	1,359	479	768	107	194
Wheat	7,526	4,370	1,944	2,729	790	732
Barley	5,196	3,737	3,539	3,581	1,304	573
Oats	12,334	12,261	11,525	13,598	10,919	10,553
Potatoes	1,611	1,044	656	731	512	483
Turnips & swedes	6,772	6,007	5,116	5,399	4,490	3,446
Mangolds	60	29	215	199	235	419
Total Horses	6,995	9,604	10,500	9,299	7,989	7,519
Cows in milk	9,551	10,712	10,158	8,756	11,915	11,725
Total Cattle	28,967	31,492	32,922	29,596	33,527	34,321
Ewes			98,727	94,965	124,095	171,400
Total Sheep	284,576	272,325	277,941	261,237	321,667	351,219
Total Pigs	6,607	6,530	4,046	4,393	4,005	4,766

With WW2 likely, Neville Chamberlain told farmers, in 1938, that Britain would not be starved in the event of war! However, farmers were still using the same implements as they had been for 50 years and horses were the main source of power. Fields and buildings had changed little, apart from new sheds being built for dairy cattle and pigs. Since 1916, the area of agricultural land had shrunk by 2.5 million acres, and arable by 2 million acres! At the start of the war, the WarAg made farmers plough up a lot more land and any farmer that could not meet the requirements had their farm taken over by the local committees. Cattle and sheep farming became more intensified.

By the end of the war, the country was very close to starvation and so the Government passed several agricultural Acts in order to increase production. This began with guaranteed prices for agricultural products, as well as subsidies and grants to increase production. Farmers and their workers had adequate pay and living conditions as a result, and there was provision for investment in equipment. Crop output increased as higher yielding varieties were introduced, along with fertilisers and sprays, and mechanisation helped to reduce costs. Farmers were encouraged to increase stock numbers by improving their inbye land using drainage and fertilisers, etc. They could also make more use of their common grazing rights. An increase in farm buildings meant that both cattle and sheep could be housed inside.

In January 1973, Britain joined the European Union and agricultural support changed from deficiency payments to protection and intervention payments. The UK sheep population steadily increased to a peak of about 18 million ewes in the early 1990s, and set aside was introduced for large arable farms in 1992. Cattle testing for Brucellosis resulted in the country being declared disease-free in 1985. BSE was first discovered in Britain in 1986 and, at its peak in 1993, nearly 1000 cases were recorded every week. 4.4 million cattle were destroyed in order to control the disease.

The headage payments of the 1980s and 1990s encouraged production of livestock. Mechanisation meant that larger, modern buildings were required to house machinery and also for the increasing numbers of animals and, eventually, even sheep flocks were lambed indoors. During the last two

decades of the 20th century, the hills were heavily grazed in order to maintain high stock numbers. There were also changes in the breeds of both cattle and sheep being kept. In cattle, there was a move away from the traditional Welsh Black and Herefords to the larger continental breeds. With sheep, more lambs per ewe, together with bigger finished lambs, were required and so farmers changed from the hill breeds of Speckled Face and Welsh Mountain to crossbred ewes and continentals which were not suited to grazing on the hills for much of the year. A designation order for a Radnorshire Environmentally Sensitive Area was set up in 1993 under the Agriculture Act of 1986. This scheme was designed to protect some traditional farming practices, and habitats such as hay meadows and woodlands. Many upland farms joined the scheme and two of the Radnorshire Hills also signed up.

The Welsh Assembly was established in 1999 and became responsible for Welsh agriculture. In 2001, the UK-wide outbreak of foot and mouth disease had a substantial impact on the sheep industry. It is estimated that over 5.5 million sheep were slaughtered, leading to a loss of 2.4 million from the breeding flock (around 12%). On 1st January, 2005, the Single Farm Payment was introduced and, in Wales, this was based on the area of a farmer's claims from 2001-2003. In 2015, the Basic Farm Payment (still based on the hectares that were farmed) was introduced as the agricultural support.

TB in cattle has been an issue for a long time. From 1935-1937, the Ministry of Agriculture introduced the Tuberculosis-Attested Herd Scheme. By the mid-1970s, all cattle herds in the UK had been cleared of bovine TB but, unfortunately, not all at the same time. In two areas, Cornwall and Gloucestershire, herds that had been cleared continued to have further outbreaks of confirmed bovine TB and during the 1980s the number of cases started to rise again; TB is, once again, widespread in cattle in England and Wales. Sheep scab is another problem, especially on the commons. Attempts to control it started in the late 1800s and compulsory dipping began in 1928. In 1992, it was admitted that eradication had failed and so disease control was deregulated.

Diversification has been the "buzz word" of the 21st century so far and Radnorshire has responded to the challenge with poultry sheds and holiday accommodation. Where in the past farmhouse B&B provided extra income for farming families, the emphasis now is on lodges, pods, glamping, tree houses, etc, all exploiting the wonderful scenery that Radnorshire can provide. There has also been a move to supplying direct to the customers via farm shops and farmers' markets, etc.

ML showed us the following graphs in order to illustrate the changes in farm animal numbers in Wales, and also in Powys.

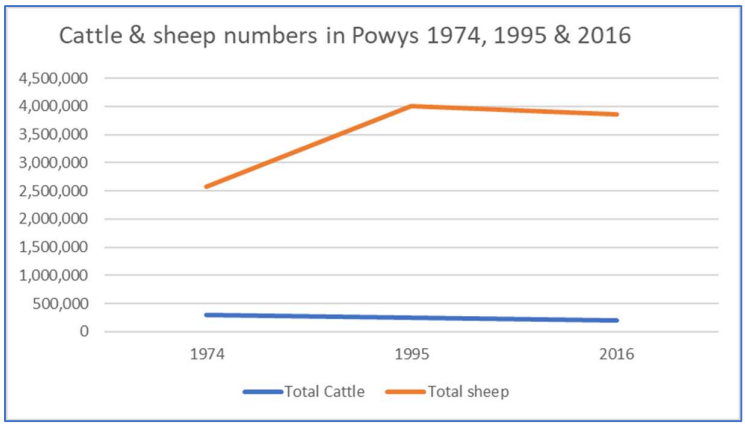


Chart 1: Total sheep and lambs in Wales 1970 to 2019 (millions)

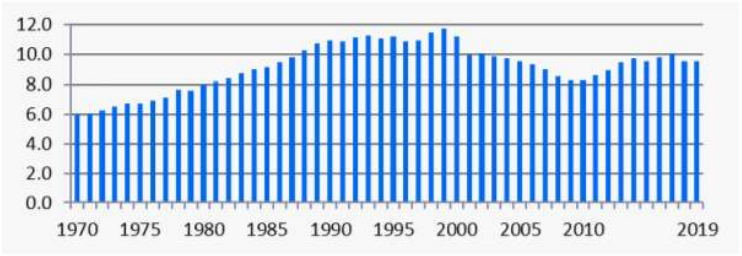
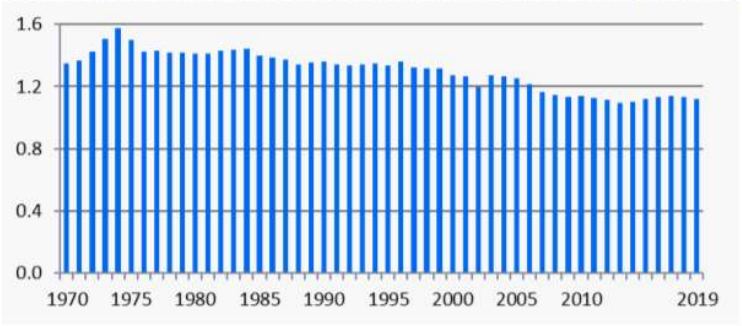
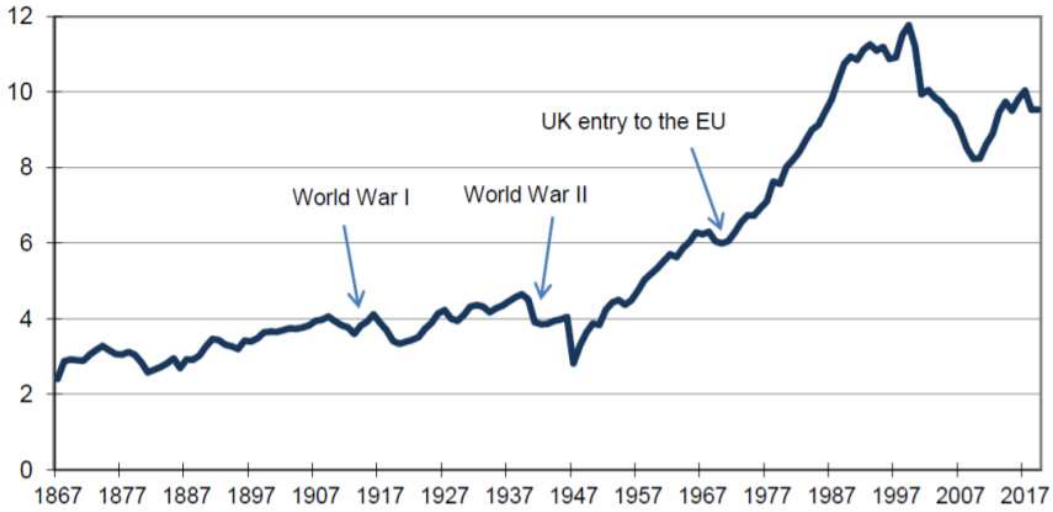


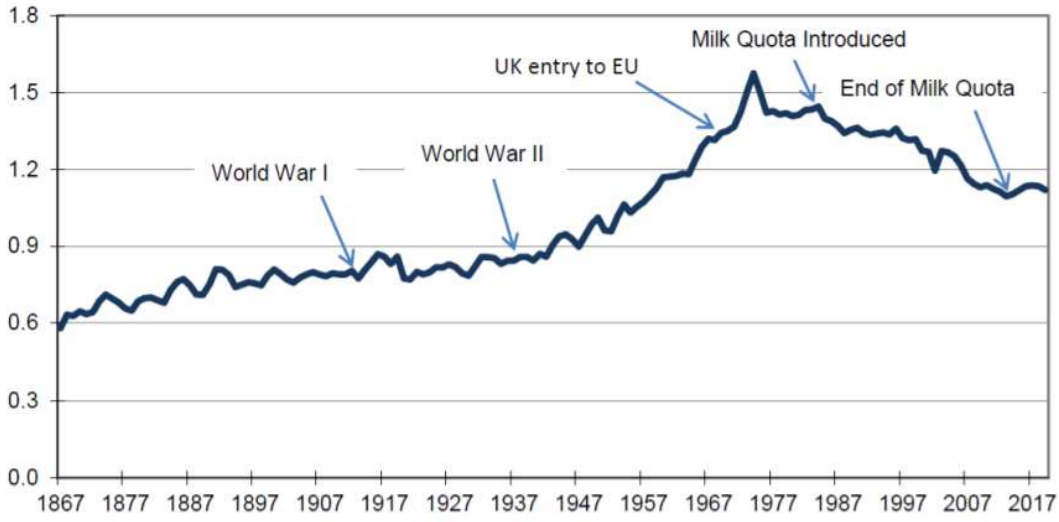
Chart 2: Total cattle and calves in Wales 1970 to 2019 (millions)



Total number of Sheep and Lambs in Wales (millions) 1867 to 2017



Total Number of Cattle and Calves in Wales (thousands) from 1867 to 2017



As you can see, livestock numbers were fairly static in the 19th century. The graphs show the big changes since WW2 and the increase from the early 1970s illustrates the change of support payments, from guaranteed prices to headage payments.

Pig numbers have gone down dramatically over the same period; pig farming became much more specialised in the 1970s. Poultry numbers have fluctuated over the same time period and are now on the increase again with the advent of large chicken sheds housing thousands of hens.

Farm buildings have always been essential for housing livestock and storing winter fodder. In the 1870s, several model farms were built to exploit the new ideas in both livestock and arable farming. Badlands, near Kinnerton, was built to rear cattle in outside yards with all of the modern facilities of the day available, whilst Dolassey, near Bleddfa, built storage barns above cattle sheds for its herd of cattle. Today's farm buildings have many aids for feeding and looking after animals, including automated systems. And finally, ML showed us some pictures to illustrate how horses have been replaced with modern tractors, and carts with often quite specialised lorries in order to transport goods to market.

We all agreed that ML had given us a fascinating and most comprehensive account of farming and how it has changed over the last 200 years. Quite a few of those in the audience were not from farming backgrounds and so this was an opportunity for us to learn more about the background to our food production. ML had put in a huge amount of time to research and produce her talk and we are all most grateful to her. Thanks must also go to John Price for, once again, working so hard to ensure that our "hybrid" meeting ran with no hitches. This sort of success is the result of a good deal of preparation prior to the event and we are most grateful to him for giving so generously of his time.

After a few questions and comments, ML told us what was planned for next month's meeting. The date clashes with the launch of Dr David Stephenson's new book on medieval Welsh history. Dr Stephenson has done a lot of research and has added to our knowledge of this part of Radnorshire during the fluctuating times of the 11th to 14th centuries. LIG will join the launch, when Dr Stephenson will speak about his subject, the family of Meurig ap Philip from the 13th century. Later, we will have one or two films on wildlife and local interest. We will again have a hybrid meeting,

with our Zoom members able to log on directly to the book launch, and then we will run our meeting from the hall, again using Zoom.
Refreshments (including ML's tasty Welsh cakes) were served in the hall whilst people had an opportunity to reminisce about past farming practices and look to future changes.
(The graphs have been taken from Welsh Government statistics)