



**Herdwick Sheep** are regarded as the most hardy and resilient of our native British hill breeds often spending the winter months on the fells without additional feed withstanding cold and relentless rain grazing on the limited quality food available on the beautiful upland hills fells of the central and western dales in the Lake District (National Park) in Cumbria at heights of more than 3000 feet. A very pretty native sheep (the rams are horned but the ewes are hornless). They are now also found in small flocks across the UK. With their distinctive white faces and legs and their dark naturally coloured woolly fleece, the lambs are black when born, They become brown when a year old (called 'Hoggs') with the fleece colour eventually developing towards a lighter grey as they get older as the more brittle 'kemp' fibres increase with age.

**History** It is thought that the Herdwick sheep came to England during 10th and 11th centuries and have evolved and adapted to our climate over centuries. The name 'Herdwyck' means sheep pasture and is recorded in 12th century documents. Sheep farming influences in the culture and terrain of the countryside and Herdwick have been a key species in the Lake District. The breed Society was established in 1916. However the shift in the economic environment with agriculture turning towards tourism put great pressure on farmers keeping Herdwick sheep. Keeping this breed became increasingly unviable and fleece prices dropped to as low as one penny per kilogram at auction so the cost of shearing and getting the wool to the depot were uneconomic. There were around 100,000 Herdwick sheep before the Foot and Mouth Crisis in 2001 which claimed about 25% of the total breed. It is now a rare and protected species.

**Beatrix Potter Heelis** became interested in the breeding and raising of Herdwick sheep, soon after acquiring Hill Top Farm with the proceeds of her books and a legacy from an aunt. In 1923 she bought a former deer park and vast sheep farm in the Troutbeck Valley called Troutbeck Park Farm, restoring its land with thousands of Herdwick sheep. This established her as one of the major Herdwick sheep farmers in the area and was greatly admired by her shepherds and farm managers for her experimentation with biological remedies for the common diseases of sheep. In 1942 she was named President-elect of The Herdwick Sheep Breeders' Association, the first time a woman had ever been elected to that office, but died before taking office. She bequeathed sixteen farms to the National Trust with the requirement that they are stocked with Herdwick sheep and continue to graze Herdwick flocks to maintain and preserve not just the places of extraordinary beauty but also the valleys and poor grazing lands that would be irreparably ruined by development with afforestation, quarries and timber production on these farms. 2016 marked the 150th anniversary of the birth of Beatrix Potter.

**USES** farmers need to shear their sheep for health reasons. The fleece weight is typically 1.5 – 2kg each. The naturally coloured wool is used mainly undyed in carpets and rugs, and blended with other local breeds sheep for use in upholstery/apparel cloth weaving and even rugged knitwear. The kemp in the yarn gives it a lot of character and it can be naturally hand dyed with natural plant extracts, or commercially package and piece dyed and it will still maintain a tweed effect with the lighter shades using the light grey yarn and darker colours using the dark grey base yarn per the picture. We sell only the grey yarn as a stock supported yarn but we can organise to have yarn commercially package dyed (minimums will apply) or we can put you in touch with some dyers if you wish.



With farmers only manging to keep going by selling their lambs for meat whilst receiving European subsidies from Rural Development Programmes, or agreeing to adopt sustainable farming practices **Gardiner Yarns** embarked on developing yarns from the Herdwick wool primarily to support the breed creating demand for Herdwick wool in traditional Lakeland clothing products, carpets, rugs and knitting yarn. By using fleece and marketing Herdwick yarn we hope to promote and raise the profile of this hard wearing rare & photogenic breed.

We were accepted as a Campaign for Wool member in 2016

