Hello and welcome to Ear to the Ground

with me Aled Jones and happy new year.

Yes, this is our first podcast of 2021

and I know last year was quite a volatile year on many fronts

but we do hope this year is going to turn out better. Having said that, it's been a very successful period

full of excitement in the world of sheepdogs

because we've seen over the past 12 months the world record for the highest priced sheepdog been broken at least three times, so it's no surprise that there is quite a bit of interest in training sheepdogs all across Wales

at the moment.

That interest has led to a group of farmers coming together
to form an Agrisgop group through

0:00:51.120,0:00:54.079
Farming

0:00:51.760,0:00:55.360
Connect and I'm joined by the leader of

0:00:54.079,0:00:57.520
that group Elen Pencwm

0:00:55.360,0:01:00.000
alongside two of the members of the

0:00:57.520,0:01:01.920
group on this podcast, Dewi Jenkins

0:01:00.000,0:01:04.080
and Elin Hope and we'll come to Dewi

0:01:01.920,0:01:07.040
and Elin in just a moment.

0:01:04.080,0:01:08.960
But first, Elen, welcome to Ear to the

0:01:07.040,0:01:10.880
Ground. It's wonderful having you

0:01:08.960,0:01:12.240
on this podcast. This feels a little bit

0:01:10.880,0:01:13.600
strange talking to you in English

0:01:12.240,0:01:14.560
because we're so familiar with talking

0:01:13.600,0:01:17.119
to each other

0:01:14.560,0:01:18.240
in Welsh. But first of all, how are you

0:01:17.119,0:01:21.520
keeping?

0:01:18.240,0:01:23.200
Hello Aled, siwmai. Yes happy new year

0:01:21.520,0:01:25.280
and everything and happy new year to

0:01:23.200,0:01:26.479
everybody who's listening. I'm keeping

0:01:25.280,0:01:29.360
very well thank you,
I can't complain. I've been very busy over Christmas with two little boys, never-ending turkey sandwiches and now I'm looking forward to 2021. Absolutely, and I know you've been leading a group of very enthusiastic and determined young people who are keen to forge out careers in the sheepdog training world and people are already doing an exceptional good job for themselves already. Tell us a bit more about that group, how it came together and what you want to achieve? Yes. Well Aled, my background was in media and stuff like that. I moved back to Ceredigion and I wanted to
work in the agricultural sector.

I'm a farmer's daughter, even though you know

I'm not a farmer.

It's too long hours for somebody like me.

I couldn't be doing that all day, too much hard work, but I wanted to be supportive of our countryside and the people working in it and I wanted to live here out in the sticks. I went to Menter a Busnes and the next thing I knew I started work as an Agrisgop leader.

For anybody who maybe hasn't heard of it, it's available to anybody who has a little bit of land and it brings people together who have a
vested interest

or want to work on a project together. Or,

maybe they don't even know

what they want to do. It's about bringing

people together forming this nucleus of

people and then,

through action learning, using their

ideas to go on

and do whatever they want to do. It

was back in 2018.

I've known some of the young sheepdog

handlers.

I remember interviewing Elin.

I think she must have been,

she'd be able to tell you if I was right,

but I'm sure she was about 11 or 12

years old,

and I went to Abermeurig and I

interviewed Elin and she was running

sheepdogs then.
Even then I thought, god she's good

but she's only 10. So you can imagine

what she's like now.

Then there’s Dewi. I've known Dewi since he was about 11

because he was in the young farmers in Talybont.

And I can tell you this,

not only did I get Dewi Tyngraig to come to the Agrisgop group,

I've also had Dewi wearing a pantomime dress and lipstick and bloomers,

he was one of my actors. What happened was, when I joined the Agrisgop group,

I thought what about doing something
with sheepdogs. It's a
world that I'm very interested in,
I'm very fond of the people who work in
that industry
and I'm also mesmerised by the whole
process.
I contacted Dewi, and as it happens in
an Agrisgop
Group, he then went on to have a few
more names and we came together.
And we've had an amazing time. We've
been
with the best. We've been with Kevin
Evans, Nigel Watkins,
Aled Owen, we've spoken to Sarge van der
Sweep
over the internet during
lockdown and we've learned quite a lot
and it's been good fun.
Yes, I'm sure it's been a lot of fun and a lot of learning as well.

You and I are both people from outside of the sheepdog world and I'm sure working with these young people has given you an insight into a world which you didn't know a huge amount about beforehand. I'm telling you now, they're very ruthless, ruthless lot darling, you better be aware! I'm just joking, but they are very keen, they are very passionate and they know what they're doing. There's something for a midlife 40 year old woman who can
sometimes get around to maybe getting
the kids to school on time, maybe
chucking a bit of ironing
and doing a lasagne, these guys can train
and do such a good job. That's
why you hear about them. You heard about
Dewi
selling his dogs. You heard
about Elin winning in the trials
and it's really quite lovely to see.
They're just capable young people.
Absolutely, and let's meet them now Dewi
Jenkins and Elin Hope. Well, Dewi
Jenkins from Talybont,
he's a familiar name to many of us and
known in the sheepdog circles. We see him
on television
very frequently and also we hear about
his success in the sales.
Elin from Felinfach, near Lampeter, and is also making a name for herself in the sheepdog scene and also has been working with sheepdogs since a very young age. Dewi, if I turn to you first. You're very experienced in this world, but that said, you are still keen to be a part of this group and to learn more. Yes, what an opportunity it was, to join this group and being able to go around the country to the best handlers in the country and in the world and to learn off every one of them which was very interesting.

Every one of them were different in
their way. They had different

ways of training their dogs and

it was a very good experience for all of

us and I think we all learned a lot.

Elin, how about you? Did you

find that people were very

open to sharing their knowledge and

their expertise? Because for somebody

like me from outside the sheepdog world

it can appear to be a very

competitive world, in a very

secretive world, but were people more

open than you thought they would be?

Yes, I think they were quite open to the

ways

of training their dogs.

But I also think they might be hiding a

few tips and tricks

under the shoulder! But no, it was very

helpful and I learned a lot.
As Dewi said, they all had different ways of training dogs and every dog is different so it requires different training methods and techniques to get the best of that dog. And I guess there's no right or wrong in so far as, everybody's got to develop a style that suits them and the type of dog that they like to work with? Yes you're right. A lot of people like different type of dogs but the type of dogs that people like these days are smooth coated and prick-eared dogs that have got plenty of power when working sheep. Those are the ones that are selling
for a lot of money, therefore, we try and breed those type of dogs.

I see Elen you wanted to come in there.

Yes, I just wanted to add in, this I think is one of the beauties of being in the group.

As Elin was saying, you do expect they're not going to give all their tips away but we go to different people and you have a little bit of everybody's information.

Also, I think Dewi might say that's right actually. What I noticed, because they would bring their dogs, Elin would bring a young dog with her and Dewi would bring something young,
we would watch the master
classes. So we'd watch
Nigel or Kevin or Aled working with
Dewi and his dog. What I noticed
was that
you learned a lot from standing back
a bit.
You learn just as much from standing
back and watching somebody else
having a master class because it can all
pick up
and that I found was quite interesting.
You can learn from all
different aspects,
even just talking together in the crowd.
You'll be surprised
what things come out can just be those
little bits of information.
And what I found as well being a part of
different groups over the years are,
when you're learning together, everybody picks up on something different depending on how you've interpreted things you've seen or heard.

As a group, collectively, you probably absorb a lot more information rather than trying to learn on your own. Yes, definitely.

everybody was there to help each other and I think we picked up a lot and we've seen new handlers coming into this Agrisgop group when they've come on in into the nursery trials and on to completing the trial which is nice to see.

Does it take quite a bit of confidence to start competing?
Is it quite intimidating when you're competing for the very first time? And Elin, you're somebody that started competing from a very young age, does that help as you develop your skills and confidence?

I think it has, but it's quite nerve-wracking when things aren't going right on the trial field. With big competitions I'm sure everyone gets nervous as you're trying to do your very best. But I think it does help when you do it younger because you're not thinking as much about it, it's only you and the dog out there. Competing, so it does help when you're younger doing it.
And Dewi, what do you think? Do
top sheepdog handlers, do they still get
top sheepdogs, do they still feel nervous even
the big names, those who've won several
times do they still feel nervous when they're out there
Competing? Well
they don't look nervous.
while we're watching them running but I'm sure they are.
Don't get me wrong, with a bit of luck in the trials,
sometimes you can have a bad sheep and that makes things
much more difficult so there's a bit of luck on the day.
But when that luck comes, you need to
be ready for it. Yes, absolutely, and I know you've focused a lot during your master classes on the tips and hints around how to go about training and getting the best out of your dog, but how important is the breeding and the bloodlines of sheep dogs and working dogs? Is that a key component in all of this? Yes definitely. A good dog always goes back to something good in his line. Since joining this Agrisgop group I've been studying the lines of dogs more. I think it's very important to see which blood
clicks together and try and do it again to have something special.

Whatever you've been studying, Dewi you've done okay because you've been doing quite well in the sales.

Yes, tell us a bit more about that there. We know we've seen some incredible prices being reported, why is that? Why is there such interest and demand for sheepdogs now? I don't know. It's a job to put my head around it because I thought when this virus first came on the scene, they thought the sales would be struggling and it'd be a job to sell them but it's gone totally the opposite way.
The prices of dogs have flown up and the price of puppies has gone up as well. That helps. So, now somebody buys a working bitch, they can always breed from her and potentially the pups will pay for the bitch.

That's one reason why the bitch have gone up in price. And obviously over the past 12 months we've seen a lot more online sales, how successful have they been Dewi?

They've definitely been successful. It's open to the world to bid so easy rather than depending on the phone to somebody for a few seconds when the sale is
actually on. They can bid from their own house in their own time.

It's definitely been a massive success really.

And Elin, is there a big demand from foreign buyers for Welsh sheepdogs that are Welsh sheepdogs and the bloodlines have been developed very sought after on the global market?

I would say there's a lot of demand for sheepdogs that are in Wales just because of their breeding are of high quality really.

Also, the trainers and handlers in Wales are very good, therefore, people from other countries want to buy those dogs.
And Dewi, when you’re looking for dogs, what are the
characteristics that you look out for? What’s the
ideal type of dog for you?
I think the most important thing is the temperament.
If that's wrong you're struggling all the way,
but if the temperament is good, the dog likes you,
you like the dog, you're on the right foot to start off.
You're friends with a dog and it makes the training sessions
much easier. On top of the temperament,
looks counts a lot now. People like a smooth coated smart dog. Maybe you try and pick
something smart

and then it comes down to the

other things then like speed

and power.

And like Elin said, the dog

that's uses

its own head, a dog like that is

priceless.

Yes and Elin, is there a dog that

stands out

in your memory as a very

special

dog that’s made a big impact

or a major impression on you?

It might be one you've bred yourself or

one you've come across in the trials,

what is the standout dog for

you? I'd say

the dog that's made the most impression

for me is the
first pup that I had and trained

with the help of

Jane Drinkwater. She was called Fflos

and from training her

I was learning and she was also learning,

and she taught me a lot

on the trial field and also

at home working on bigger flocks.

I'd say that she's the one that's

really helped me be the person I am

now with dogs.

And what about you Dewi, what's your

stand-out dog?

I'd have to say as well the same as Elin,

my first

border collie dog I had as a

present from Dai Jones Llanilar.

Mos is 12 year old now. He's

retired from work but he's still helping
I was very lucky there was something special about him and I think he taught me more than I taught him. By today, I've got the son of him and grandson and the granddaughter of him as well who keeps on going with the line. And do you become very attached to certain special dogs so much so that you cannot sell them? Yes it's very hard to see a dog going, especially one which has been with you for about two or three years but you know sometimes you have to leave.
them go to make room for a young

As long as they go to good homes,

looked after, I don't mind. And

Elin you were telling me earlier in

fact that you're always keen for your
dogs to find good homes

Yes, I always like to make sure that the
dog is in the right place

and that the dog suits the

handler as some people are harder

than others on
dogs therefore a weaker dog would not
suit

a hard handler. I like to

make sure that they're in the right

place.

Maybe I'm being a bit too soft and I

look after them too well, but I like
to see them happy in their new homes. And Elen if

I can

turn to you, listening to Dewi and Elin there, it's absolutely fascinating.

It's a window into a world I know very little about. I'm sure you've had that same feeling of excitement and interest from what you've learned? It's really interesting and I think just the end of that conversation and if there's something that's going out there, because it's easy enough for people to say who don't understand this world, they say, oh they make money and dogs are selling for a lot of money,
yes,

but as we heard Dewi and Elin say,

yes,

they put a lot of time, they put a lot of effort

and more than that, they make sure that

they are

selling these dogs to working people

where the dogs are being

used and they enjoy it. These dogs have

the best

life because they're doing every day

what they were meant to do.

They're not sold to people to be kept in a home and

not going out. These are dogs to work

with animals or cattle or whatever

and they're really responsible. To be

Honest,

it makes me really proud because I think,
in Wales Aled, we're good at
doing three things right. First off, we have
the best authors in the whole of the
world, we're pretty good at singing
and the other thing is the
sheepdog world. If you go anywhere around
the world,
go back to the breeding 60 years-
70 years, you'll go back to dogs from
Wales.
I really think this is an
important industry
and we need to support each other and I
think in the Agrisgop group, that's what
I've seen.
If people are doing well, don't
knock them,
learn from them because if their game is
up
it brings everybody else's game up. I'm very proud of the people I've had in the group and their success and it's just lovely to see, it really is lovely to see.

Maybe who knows Aled, if there are people listening, sheepdogs might not be your thing, it might be something else, but join an Agrisgop group just to have that help and to have that support with other like-minded people.

Yes, absolutely and I'm very envious of you Elen because you've been spoiled as an Agrisgop leader to work with such enthusiastic and really impressive individuals in Dewi and Elin and others of course.
Elin if I continue now to you,

there'll be people listening to this podcast, farmers

all across the world potentially, who from time to time think they should be spending more time training their own sheepdogs or wanting to start training sheepdogs for the very first time, what would be your tips, hints and advice to them?

Training dogs takes a lot of patience and doesn't happen overnight.

My tips for people is to take time and not to put too much pressure and also
to learn from different people.

Ask people for help and for tips.

I think it's best if they buy a pup from a young age that they can also learn from the pup and the pup can also learn from them, so that they're working together.

What about you Dewi, what's your advice?

Yes, definitely try and have a pup as young as you can from eight weeks old and bond with the pup, make friends with him and it will make the training sessions much easier if the pup is happy in your company and willing to learn with you. That's a pretty good advice
there. As we draw this podcast to a close I'm going to ask you all the same question now. We're at the beginning of 2021 it's the time of year we'll be all setting out our new year's resolutions, Elen, if I can turn to you first, what's your plan for 2021? Well I've been working with my Agrisgop group Aled and everybody else since 2018 so this year, I'll be glad to get rid of them all! Only joking! Who knows I might make a million, I might carry on with my very famous modelling career and I might just be driving my brand spanking car around the place or maybe I just
carry on,

having another year of me and just being quietly happy. Whatever happens will be fine.

Yes, absolutely. Elin what about you,

what's your plan for this year?

I think we're all lucky that we're here because the last year has been quite tough on everyone,

so we're just lucky that we're all safe and well.

But it would be nice that we'll see some trials happening this year as we didn't have so many last year,

so it'd be just nice to get together and attend some trials. And the final word over to you Dewi.
What a difficult year it was. Let's hope 2021 will be better. We were meant to have three quite big trials, two in Wales last year, the Welsh National in Tywyn and the International in Aberystwyth, our local international.

So, let's hope we'll have those two this year, something to look forward to. Also, let's hope we'll have some local trials as well because that's where it all begins. Yes, Absolutely, we've really missed the shows and the events over the past year and we really do hope that the things will improve and they'll be able to hold those events in the very near
future. Well

Elen, Dewi and Elin I've thoroughly enjoyed in your company, it's been absolutely fascinating. I've learnt a lot over the past 20 minutes or so and I can safely say the future of Welsh sheepdog handlers is in safe hands.

All the very best to you in the future and who knows, we might see Elen running a sheep dog in the trials one day soon! I look forward to seeing that.

but in the meantime, many thanks for joining me and all the very best.

Thank you very much.