

**FARMING ENCOUNTERS.**

**IN THE**

**20<sup>TH</sup>. CENTURY**

**BY**

**ERNEST E. JONES**



This work I dedicate to my wife, Winifred, for a lifetime of loving kindness. It may not be of interest to the present generation, but perhaps to my grandchildren

Ernest E. Jones

I offer sincere thanks to my daughter-in-law Debbie who typed this from the hand written form.

Ernest E. Jones

My thanks to my friend Peter Bartlett, who has scanned the original document onto the computer, to provide this work in a continuously available booklet form.

Ernest E. Jones  
January 2006.

Details regarding the purchasing of this and other booklets will be found on page 46.

Written 1992.



## INDEX.

Chapter 1	Our Daily Bread	Page 4
Chapter 2	The Farmyard Hen	Page 11
Chapter 3	The Honest Cow	Page 16
Chapter 4	The Humble Ewe	Page 22
Chapter 5	The Clinical Pig	Page 25
Chapter 6	The Noble Horse	Page 28
Chapter 7	The Faithful Dog	Page 31
Chapter 8	The Farmyard Cat	Page 33
Chapter 9	Farming and Wildlife	Page 34
Chapter 10	The Farmer's Wife	Page 37
Chapter 11	The Farmer	Page 39
Chapter 12	The Farmer's Children	Page 43

## **OUR DAILY BREAD.**

Why the title? To many people living in the United Kingdom bread is perhaps not all that important, but in many parts of the world it is the staff of life as it was for most people in times past. Even in prayer, the passage "Give us this day our daily bread", bread was very important. I believe that much of our ill health is because people do not eat enough of the right sort of bread. How it is treated with such low regard and the amount wasted is very sad, especially to anyone who has had to grow the wheat to make it.

In the early days primitive man, after clearing a patch of ground, produced a rough tilth with very basic tools, scattered the grain and in due course harvested a few ears of corn.

Then man invented the plough. Originally oxen then horses were used as the motive power to pull it along. The principle of ploughing is to invert the soil, that which is uppermost to be inverted between four to six inches. I feel myself very lucky to be old enough to have ploughed with a team of horses and really speaking, only then can one understand Robert Burns: "The best laid plans of mice and men are oft time gang a gley", or in English "events destroy our plans". The little field mouse in the corn field as the corn was cut and harvested, gathered up some ears of corn and in a hollow underground laid store for winter a safe home, only to be laid bare by the ploughman Burns.

On a clear autumn day to be ploughing with horses can be hard work, but only those who have actually done it can really understand the sheer magic of it. The quiet jingle of the plough harness or in farm terminology the, "G.O. Tack. G.O.", because a plough harness is just for pulling forward. The sound of small stones and pebbles against the share and the plough board was very satisfying; the pebbles were very useful in keeping the coulter, the share and the mould board, which were all made of steel, shining like glass, and then you had the unforgettable smell of fresh earth being cut. The coulter was part of the plough, either a knife type or a steel disc, and the coulter was very important to cut through the land to be ploughed and it left a straight edge for the next furrow, when ploughing grassland a disc coulter was better to cut through the turf. The ploughman walked very close behind the plough. In decent weather, on good level land with seagulls forever following close behind, this was hard work but very satisfying. On sloping land with rock and bad weather and low wages, after ploughing one acre a day the ploughman would homeward wind his weary way.

There was a time before the corn drill was invented that ploughing needed to be very well done, because the corn was usually sown or scattered directly on the furrows, then by harrowing over the ploughing the corn was planted.

In my youth, after having ploughed the land and planted the corn, the ravages of rooks was always a problem from daybreak until dusk. They would take any corn they could find. The crucial time was when the shoots of corn were coming through the ground. The artful devils would follow down to the grain. Here I draw attention to the difference between rooks and crows. Both are from the same family, a crow (Carrion crow) are much larger than a rook, mostly living as pairs not in colonies. They are more vicious and will take young chicks and soon set about anything dead. Rooks are more numerous, rest and live in colonies, are very noisy and are a lot smaller. They can be very useful in devouring wireworms and the like. During the corn planting time young lads were employed as crow boys, with a rough shelter built on the edge of the field to drive the rooks off the corn.

There was a rhyme that referred to the amount of seed corn to plant four bushels to the acre (about two cwt. or 100 kilos):

One for pigeon, one for crow,  
One to rot and one to grow.  
And so the corn was left to grow.

Another relic of the past is the scarecrow. A lifelike figure dressed in old cast off clothes and moved around the cornfields to help the crow boys. I was always fond of the following poem by Walter De La Mare:

### The Scarecrow

All winter through I bow my head  
Beneath the driving rain  
The north wind powders me with snow  
Then blows me black again  
But when that child called Spring  
And her host of children come  
Scattering their buds and dew  
Upon these acres of my home  
Some rapture in my rags awakes  
I lift void eyes and scan  
The skies for crows, those ravaging foes  
Of my strange Master Man

I see him striding lank behind  
His dashing team and know  
Soon will the wheat swish body high  
Where once lay sterile snow  
Soon will I gaze across a sea  
Of sun begotten grain  
Which my unflinching watch hath sealed  
For harvest once again.

Before the days of chemical crop spraying, one of the very difficult problems of growing corn was to keep it free from weeds and pests. Having ploughed a field of grass, wireworm was a serious pest in old grassland.

Perhaps we could dwell for a while on the aspects of ploughing. Before the days of the plough, man tilled the land with whatever tools were available. At that time they were very slow and very primitive. Then, I think, came the wooden plough pulled by oxen, then the iron plough pulled mainly by horses, with which I am familiar. A firm of engineers, by the trade name Ransomes, made a good single furrow for two horses, which ploughed nine inches wide and approximately four to five inches deep. On good land a ploughman could plough an acre a day. There were efforts to mechanise ploughing with a steam driven traction engine with winch and cable. I think perhaps the mid west of the U.S.A. were the pioneers in mechanical ploughing in the early part of the century. Mainly I think because of the vast open prairies they had to cultivate.

It was the outbreak of the 1939 war that speeded up the process in the U.K. With the need to plough up grassland and increase production of corn, and to help England, the U.S.A. sent over many thousands of the famous green Fordson tractors. On steel wheels, it imitated the horse in that it was just a pulling machine. With steel spade lug rear wheels pulling a three-furrow plough it was a very good combination in its day. I myself spent hundreds of hours with our standard Fordson tractor with an Oliver 3 furrow plough. My father bought the tractor, a T.V.O. model, new for £165.00. I can't remember how much he paid for the plough.

Mr. Ashley Reece of Broadwell Farm gave me my first lesson in the art of tractor ploughing, although I had ploughed a bit with horses. I had my first lesson in horse ploughing with Mr. Will Jeremy of St. Arvans.

The next development came when Harry Ferguson developed the hydraulic system, where the plough became part of the tractor. I never really came to terms with the hydraulic plough after using the trailer method.

In these days, 1991, with a 100 HP plus tractor, the amount of land a man can plough in a day compared with the acre a day I wrote of earlier is quite fantastic. This remarkable development can be applied to the whole process of growing corn.

Chemical spraying has made a great impact on the growing of cereals, before which the only way to keep land free from pests and weeds was to work a simple rotation. There were many in various parts of the country. Two years corn, one-year roots, one or two years grass then corn again. In the root year various crops were grown. Mangels were pulled in November and stored in a clamp near the buildings for use as stock feed from Christmas onwards. Some swedes were pulled and clamped and some foddered off with sheep. Also a few potatoes were grown. The main object of the root break was to clean the land, the roots being kept clean by horse and hand hoeing.

So the seed corn is planted and in the fullness of time comes ready for harvest. And how the harvesting has changed! In the days of the sickle or hook a man would cut the corn and leave in small bundles for women, mostly, to bind together with some stalks of corn. Or a man would cut with a scythe, which was a much quicker process, but the corn would need to be standing well and he would not leave it in bundles. Both these methods were before my time. When I came on the scene the reaper and binder had been invented. Firstly a horse drawn machine was invented just to cut the corn. Then came the reaper and binder. We had a Hornsby binder, designed for two horses, although if the land was steep and we had a heavy crop, three horses were used.

Reaping could be a very pleasant and satisfying job. Wheat I liked the best. A good clean crop without thistles or rubbish in the bottom and standing well, a good team of horses and a good hot August sun made reaping a real joy. But laid corn, especially barley, weeds and poor weather made the job a real nightmare.

Having cut the corn the binder would leave it in neat bundles in rows around the field. They would be tied up with special string called binder twine, of which Blue Bell was a famous make.

As the corn was being cut, two people usually followed and put the corn in stooks, in a special way with the ears uppermost in stooks of six sheaves. What a wonderful sight on a summer evening to see a field of corn cut and stoked.

There it would stay to cure for about one week for wheat and barley, depending on the weather. But for oats, they were supposed to stay to hear the church bells thrice (three weeks). The trouble with oats was, if got in too soon, they would heat up and spoil. They were left to stay their allocated time before being hauled away with horses and a wagon (a wagon is a four wheeled cart pulled by two



horses). This was hard work but pleasant enough if the weather was good and you had the right men who could use a pitchfork.

The corn was usually stored in barns or made into ricks near the homestead. The barns used were usually the stone type with a central passage and high doors, high enough to take a loaded wagon. Here it was left until winter when the sheaves were thrown down a few at a time onto the paved passageway. The farm workers would beat out the corn by hand with flails; this again was before my time. When I was a young lad the threshing machine had been invented. This was a very efficient, complicated machine, usually owned by a threshing contractor who went from farm to farm. The first I remember was driven by a steam engine. The contractor supplied the driver and his mate and the farmer found the rest of the gang: two men throwing the sheaves onto the top of the threshing drum which was approximately ten feet high, eighteen feet long and about eight feet wide. Then one man cut the band or twine and tossed it to the driver's mate who fed it into the drum, comprising rotating beaters that beat the corn out of the straw through various sieves with fans. The grain came out into sacks at the end of the drum. The chaff came out under the middle and the threshed straw out over the end. Another man was minding sacks, one raking chaff and pitching straw and one man building the straw rick. Usually we needed a gang of eight men plus the driver, who kept an eye on all working parts.

The farm I was brought up on was a livestock farm. Corn growing in the U.K., had gone into a decline after about the 1920's, largely due to imports from the grain prairies of the U.S.A. We had grown the odd field of corn, but not very much. The 1939 World War changed farming to a great extent. All farms were under a strict Ministry control, with ploughing orders rising to 40 per cent of the farm as the war worsened.

I disliked threshing time as it was always a winter job, and being a dairy farm with milking and a lot of routine work with stock, threshing started at 8 am and finished at 5 pm, and it was always difficult to find the labour to do the job. In passing, I would like to refer to the threshed straw that came out of the back of the threshing machine. This was tied in loose bundles by a machine attached to the threshing machine, mechanically very similar to a binder except that it used two strings instead of one. These bundles in this part of the country were called "boltens" and were mainly used for stock bedding. Oat straw was used for feeding to wintered cattle. Some wheat straw, if it was good and clean, was used for thatching hay and corn ricks. If being sold, boltens were always sold by the thrave and not by weight, with 25 boltens to the thrave.

Now, of course, the combine harvester has changed cereal growing altogether. In the days of the reaper the farmer had to be very careful not to apply too much fertilizer in case the corn got too heavy and got lodged or lain, which was a disaster.

The average crop of wheat was about 1 ton to the acre. There is little wonder really that there is a surplus of grain in the western world, with the combine harvester able to harvest crops that have even been beaten down with the weather.

The plant breeders set to work to breed cereals that are shorter in the straw and capable of yields of up to 4 tons an acre. With stronger, shorter straw the level of fertilizer has gone up without having to worry too much about lodging. Then pests and diseases began to be controlled by chemical spraying. In some parts of the country cereals are grown continuously, without livestock or rotation. As in all things, this progress has had its price. Whereas a man with his team of horses was quite in order in a 5 or 12 acre field, a man in a 100 HP plus modern, tractor with a multiple furrow plough needed space, so out came the hedges. With the hedges went the birds and the hedgerow wildlife and also the reputation of the farmer.

With the coming of crop spraying, out went the rotation and root growing. To keep weeds and pests under control the farmer came to rely on chemical spraying, and a very efficient way it is. Gone are the days when, in spite of good husbandry, we got thistles and couch and the like in arable land. But again the price has been paid. A lot of the weeds and pests have been controlled, but gone are a lot of our butterflies and insects, and birds that fed on these.

Of course, yet again, the name of farming in the eyes of our town dwellers has sunk to an all time low.

Another aspect of cereal growing in these modern times is the by-product, straw. In the days of the reaper, it was mainly used on the farm on which it was grown, mostly for stock bedding to make the famous farmyard manure. These days, on the large corn farms, most of it has to be burnt which, from a husbandry and economic point of view, is the obvious thing to do. But here again we have to pay the price. With the smoke and smut and the toll on wildlife the farmer is again held as the villain. (*Note; since these notes were written the burning of straw in the field has become illegal*). What a contrast in such a short spell of time. In the days of the reaper, no matter how diligent they were made, to gather the corn, there were always the odd ears lying about, and the poor widows of the village were allowed to go into the fields and gather any that were left for themselves "gleaning". So different now, the combine in experienced hands is a very efficient machine, and any that happens to be left just goes up in smoke. (Or germinates and is killed off with chemicals or cultivations)

In days past, at the end of harvest when all was safely gathered in, there were many old customs to mark the event. Many of them were superstitious, and as far as religion was concerned, the harvest festivals in our churches were very important in the life of the church, and not as old a custom as some people think.

When at home, hauling the sheaves of corn, my father, who was quite given to spontaneous singing, would start singing the hymn "Bringing in the Sheaves".

I have never been engaged in the modern business of corn growing, and a lot of the worry and physical labour has been done away with. I expect the combine drivers and the other people involved in getting the grain into the store are happy to see it finished, not forgetting those responsible for the financial aspect of the job. A lot of these large-scale arable corn growers have been ridiculed for their part in supplying the nation with grain and I must agree that they are not blameless in some of their actions, but I am sure they have their problems. When I see large fields of weed-free corn ready for the combine, I take my hat off to them. They are experts in their field.

So we are back where we started, this loaf of bread, still made from wheat as found in the Pyramids of ancient Egypt, still sown in the honest earth, still relying on Mother Nature with sunshine and rain, still dependent on the farmer to perform the art of seeing to it that there will be a harvest.

To those masses of people who walk around the Supermarkets and aimlessly prod the vast selection of loaves just waiting to be dumped into a trolley, without any regard of how it arrived there, they have my sympathy for being so ignorant. I am proud of my knowledge of the humble loaf and to those who waste bread I have nothing but scorn.

In this modern age of plenty in the western world, for too many the Harvest Thanksgiving means but very little. For my part I am ever grateful to my creator for providing us with the ability to provide for mankind so well.

## THE FARMYARD HEN.

These would come under the heading poultry or perhaps chicken and, in days gone by, mainly as fowl. The Farmyard Hen will soon be extinct as the old term implies. If we take note of the work of artists of bygone days and their interpretation of a Farmyard scene, there were very often half a dozen or so hens with a cockerel scratching around. Chicken, as we know them, were derived from two distinct species: the heavy type from Asia, more suited to cooler climates, and the lighter type from the Mediterranean. The chicken has been part of the rural life for centuries past, even in biblical times "When the cock crows twice you will have betrayed me thrice".

Chickens are also depicted on the weather vane. The country sound of the chicken has been lost. The cock crowing at the break of day is not a fairy tale as I can vouch for. One was alright, but it became a bit irksome, with young cocks being fattened for Christmas, crowing up one against the other.

Poultry keeping has changed completely even in the space of 50 years. I use the term poultry keeping as opposed to poultry farming because, if I recall the days when I was young, there were very few poultry farmers as such but every farm had chicken about the farmyard. These were mainly looked after by the "farmer's wife", assisted by any younger member of the family old enough to run about.

The usual system was about 40 to 50 hens of mixed breeding with a couple of cockerels running free range around the farmyard, with a fowl house as part of the buildings.

As far as the financial implications, the eggs, after supplying the family needs, were sold at the local cattle market on market day, or to local shops or special provision markets where a stall could be hired for the day. Not only eggs were sold, but also a few cockerels that had been kept to be killed during the summer and also specially fed cockerels for Christmas. Also hens, after about 2 years of age, were plucked and dressed for market, the plucking being done by anyone strong enough to get the feathers off. In market the young cockerels were known as spring chicken and the hens as boilers. The dressing was also different. The chickens legs or feet were washed clean but the boilers were scalded off because they would have become scaled with age. The resulting money, which was very hard earned, was used by the farmer's wife to keep the family in day-to-day needs. The feeding was not very scientific being whatever was at hand, a bit of laid corn and mash made up of what was available. During the short days of winter eggs were in short supply but in the spring, being free range, they produced very well.

To propagate the species everyone bred their own. To prevent inbreeding, a likely looking cockerel was bought off a neighbour or at the local market. In those

days broodiness in hens during the summer was very common, and in fact could be a problem. The cure being to shut them in a small coop with plenty of fresh air for a few days. However these broody hens were very useful as a few were put to sit on usually a dozen eggs, in a small shed with an earth floor. It was essential that the eggs did not become too dry as in three weeks the chicks would hatch, usually with good results, because the cockerel always ran with the hens.

One of the most pleasant events in those days was to see a hen and her chicks running around the yard, and how the old hen used to look after them. Rats would kill young chicks during the night and crows during the day.

The hen was always used to hatch goose and duck eggs. That being the usual pattern of poultry keeping on most family farms until the 1930's when the incubator, which I think was first used in the U.S.A., came on the scene.

The models we had at home held 100 hen eggs, with heat being provided by a paraffin heater attached to the outside with heat fed into the incubator by a large tube, heat being governed by a capsule which was placed inside the incubator. As the heat rose the capsule swelled and activated a steel rod that raised a damper on the inlet pipe. The eggs had to be turned every day by hand. On a Glevum model we had, there was a handle on the side which, when turned, moved a steel plate under the eggs and turned them perfectly. The incubator was the means by which hatcheries were set up and poultry keeping took on a new meaning.

With the hatcheries came the demand for egg laying strains, whereas the old farmyard hen was a hardy dual-purpose hen. When her egg laying days were over she was useful for the pot and the cockerels were quite useful table birds.

The new poultry farmers needed higher egg production. The main breed for this was the Leghorn. The perfecting of the incubator meant that chicks could be hatched in large numbers and although there was a demand for the pullets, the cockerel chicks were not wanted, so breeders started the sex link system where if certain breeds were cross-mated the sexes would have different coloured plumage as chicks and the cockerels would be destroyed at an early age.

Then the Japanese perfected a visual method of sexing the chicks irrespective of plumage, as day olds. As in all young things, chicken or whatever, they were prone to internal parasites, if reared with older chicken or run on stale ground, so the system of fold units came about. Young pullets were reared in groups of 50 in small wooden arks with an attached wire run, on a clean field, and moved on so many yards a day. This was quite a successful method.

Poultry keeping during the 1939 - 1945 war years, owing to the shortage of feedstuffs, was at a low ebb. During the war years there were hundreds of army camps set up in the countryside to house troops for various reasons. A few years after the war ended, the War Office decided to close these camps that were mainly large wooden huts. At about this time deep litter poultry keeping became popular, where about 200 hens were kept in a building with wood shavings on the floor, and here they were kept to feed and roost and lay. These army huts were ideal and very many were bought by farmers for use as deep litter houses.

By now the poultry breeders had bred a hen that did not go broody and was virtually a living egg-producing machine. So people, of whom John Eastwood was one, decided what a good idea it was to shut this hen in a cage and use it as a machine, and so the battery system came into being.

This was the death knell of the farmyard hen and the deep litter system, and now, in 1991, very few ordinary farmers keep hens. They mostly buy their eggs. Furthermore, a great many farmer's wives do not rely on a few chicken for house-keeping expenses, as a lot of them have jobs away from the farm, as the farm is a highly specialised unit of some form or another. Out of this ability to breed chicken for a particular purpose in vast numbers has grown up the broiler industry, where vast quantities of chickens are bred and fed indoors in strictly controlled environments to produce these very cheap chickens for the table that are available in so many different forms.

So we arrive now, at the end of 1991, with the poultry industry staggering to its feet after the devastating blow by the MP Edwina Currie, wrongly accusing the industry in many instances of Salmonella poisoning. The Ministry enforced blood testing and slaughtering of well over 1 million hens, which has caused a shortage of eggs, which was then made up by imports of a very doubtful origin.

Then the future of the humble farmyard hen has evolved into very big business indeed. I congratulate those people who have bred chicken capable of converting grain and by-products into a very cheap and plentiful supply of eggs.

There are clouds on the horizon in that the E.E.C. are laying down certain regulations relating to keeping hens in battery cages, and our British public are very flippant at condemning the system and yet at the same time wanting the eggs and poultry meat at bargain prices. To produce food the way the majority of the public requires inevitably cuts production and puts up the price, or pulls in imports, much of which is produced under circumstances that are very often beyond belief.

Here, at "Merrylea", we have eight hens, which are free range, and it is a joy to see them roaming the paddock. They are free, healthy and very happy and are

laying about 300 eggs each per year, and what a joy these eggs are to eat. Yet I cannot see it possible to produce enough to supply our national needs in a like fashion. For my part I do not like to see hens in cages, especially three in a cage. Perhaps it would be better to turn the clock back so to speak, to eat less eggs and poultry meat, and for people to eat more good British beef and lamb fed on good British grass, but that is another story or chapter.

When I compare the farmer's children of today with my own youth, they have so much luxury compared to us, without apparently making any effort to help to supply their own needs. Yet they can never have the pleasure of the simple ways of nature, seeing how an old hen will bring up her brood of chicks.

In this account of poultry keeping it would be unfair not to pay mention of the other species, ducks for instance. In the days of the farmyard hen, every farm had a few ducks. They have very different habits to hens and were great for foraging in the fields for slugs. They were very fond of corn, especially just thrown in a shallow bowl of water, and then they would dabble for it. They were not as clean as hens and were always best kept in until about 10.30 am during the laying season. They would never come back to their shed to lay their eggs once they were let out. There were two distinct breeds being the big white Aylesbury, not all that good for laying but very good for producing ducklings for the table, then there were the Khaki Campbells, a lighter breed very upright in stature and very good layers, but not so good for the table. The one big drawback with ducks for the table was the plucking. If left to be killed after a certain age the removal of the down was a very tedious job. As I think has been said we always used hens to hatch out the duck eggs, the funny part being that they did not seem to know the difference. It was quite pathetic to see the little ducklings very soon swimming in any water available and the old hen running around beside herself with worry.

Not every farm had geese, but many did. These were the aristocrats of the farmyard. The ganders (males) could be quite vicious. Five geese and one gander was the usual flock size. They were great grazers (grass eaters). The goslings again mainly hatched by hens would start to peck grass at a very early age and live on it quite happily all summer. Both ducks and geese were always hatched late spring - early summer. A few young geese were killed at Michaelmas, September 29th, or they were fed on barley meal with a drop of milk mixed into a mash from October to mid December. They were a very popular Christmas dinner before turkey took over.

Turkey in my youth was regarded as a luxury. We never had a turkey for Christmas. I have never had any dealings with turkeys but I have watched the growth of the turkey, which has become big business today. At one time they were mostly kept in Norfolk and the eastern counties, mainly because the area is drier. They were originally wild forest birds from U.S.A.

Turkeys do not like wetness. They were kept in airy sheds up off the floor. One of the big problems at one stage was their vulnerability to "black head", this was very devastating. However a vaccine has now been produced to control it. Now, of course, they are kept in vast numbers and are freely available at all times of the year and no longer the luxury that they were. In fact, goose is the luxury now.

People like Bernard Mathews have turned turkey production into very big business.

The only other member of the poultry family as far as the ordinary farmer is concerned are the Guinea Fowl (Galeenie). These were not plentiful but a few farms kept them. They are very pretty, black and white speckled, very independent, mostly roosting in trees near the farmyard and very noisy at certain times of the day. The call sounded like "come back, come back," over and over again. They have not much commercial value and are more of a novelty.

That is poultry keeping as I have seen it at first hand, not text book jargon. Poultry keeping as it has been, as for the future who knows? I don't.



## THE HONEST COW

Much has been written by very able people, on the origin of the cow. I will confine my writings to cows and milk production as I have lived and worked with them. Not ever wanting to appear boastful in any way, I can claim to have worked with cows all my life. I milked my first cow at eight years old, and now, sixty years later, I am still milking cows.

My first job as a little lad was to carry the hurricane lamp in front of my father as he carried the hay on a pike from shed to shed.

Green Meadow Farm, when built, was designed to milk six cows; the milk to be made into butter and cheese. This was early 1920. Towns were growing and there was a market for milk, which, although the returns were low, it was better than butter or cheese. My family have been selling milk for many years. Jews would come to my Grandfather's farm and would insist that they could see the milk straight from the cow into their own jug. They also produced milk at my Mother's home at Coedkernew.

In the days before the Milk Marketing Board, retailers bought the milk direct from the farmer. The farmer provided the churns and it was sent by rail. There were special milk trains so the farmer took the milk to the nearest station.

The country was in a poor state after the First World War, and then we had the general strike. Milk was very cheap and some dairymen would not pay for the milk they received, and as a small boy I had to go to Newport and Cardiff to try and get the money for the milk we had supplied. During holiday times the dairymen would send the milk back saying that it was sour, but only because they could not sell it. This was a very difficult time and many farmers went bankrupt.

Then a band of far-sighted men got together and formed the Milk Marketing Board. There was a lot of opposition in the beginning as, being a statutory Board, all producers had to sell their milk through the M.M.B. Retailers near villages and towns did not like it because all producers had to pay a levy but in return were guaranteed pool prices every month. From then on dairy farming took on a new meaning.

At that time there were very few regulations of any sort, and there was a certain amount of T.B. in cattle. The danger with T.B. was if it was in the udder. In 1938 the Ministry produced the T.T. accredited milk scheme whereby farmers were paid one old penny per gallon to have properly designed cowsheds and a dairy with a steam chest for sterilising all the milking buckets, etc. Steam was usually provided by a small coal fired boiler. The cows were also tested for T.B. My father entered

the scheme quite early and, as we always had chicken running around the farm, a lot of cows failed the test and were sold.

After a while the Ministry realised that cows could get Avian T.B. from birds which did not affect the cows at all, so they introduced the double intra-dermal test for Bovine and Avian T.B. In those days, the mid 1930's, an average size herd would be about 20 cows, which were, of course, milked by hand. I always found milking a pleasant enough job; sat under a cow as the first few squirts of milk hit the bucket there was a lovely smell of fresh milk. On a summer morning with the cows cuddling away on good fresh grass and the swallows darting in and out it was very peaceful. It was hard work but very pleasant, once your arm muscles were toned up.

As a Young Farmer, who did a bit of public speaking, I thought up many a good speech whilst hand milking.

The winter mornings were different. The cows would be tied in their stalls, the shed was warm and there was the unmistakable smell of hay, cows breath and dung. On a cold wet morning it was not a bad job, but the big drawback was that my feet got cold, as they were the only part of the body not working. Another drawback was that cows would sometimes lie in the gutters; also heifers with short teats were a bit of a bind.

Hand milking was the feature that more or less dominated the size of the herd. An average person, with run of the mill cows, could milk about seven cows an hour. Of course mankind had to mechanise the job. The strange thing is that machine milking is much more akin to a calf sucking than to hand milking. With hand milking you squeeze the milk out, whereas the machine is worked via a vacuum. Yet in most cases, there is more Mastitis with machine milking.

Our first machine was a 2-unit bucket plant where you had an overhead vacuum line and carried the bucket from cow to cow. A pump usually driven by a small petrol engine provided vacuum. The favourite engine for the job was the Lister 1.5 HP petrol engine, and there must have been many hundreds of these reliable little engines with their merry little sound, which could be heard twice a day on many dairy farms. Machine milking has become very sophisticated these days, and is largely responsible for the introduction of Milk Quotas. Some people have become very greedy with very large herds. With the increase in herd size came the housing problem. The cow stall cows chained up individually gave way to loose housing on straw in a covered yard. I went over to this system in 1961 and as far as cow comfort is concerned there is nothing better. Also the amount of slurry is reduced, but there are problems. With a few cows in season and bulling at night the covered yard became a quagmire unless straw was generously supplied.

So the next stage was the development of a cubicle system. I changed over to cubicle housing in 1978, using Enkamat cow carpets. For most cows this has proved a very good system. The passageways are scraped out three times a day and the system works well.

Another development came with feeding. We always relied on good hay, but it was not always possible to get the right weather at the time when the grass was at its best quality to be cut. For hay the ideal time for cutting is early June. The next stage in the feeding of cows in winter came the making of silage. We first made silage at Green Meadow in 1938. With horse and hand labour the grass was mown and manually pitched onto a horse drawn cart. The silo was made in wooden sections, 16 of them, 3 feet wide by 5 feet high, and were bolted together to form 16-sided structure. When this was full a second tier was added to form a 10 ft above ground pit. We sited it into a natural bank so that the unloading was easier. Harry Hebditch of Wisbech made the sections. The silage came out very well.

I, myself, started making silage at Green Meadow in 1953 with a little grey Ferguson tractor and a Patterson buck rake. The system was very simple, reversing up two 5 ft swaths of cut grass and when full unloading into a clamp without sides into a wedge shape. This could be quite dangerous as the height grew, there was waste at the sides, but the silage was good.

This system was abandoned after a few years, owing to the labour involved with feeding, in favour of the pick-up baler and haymaking. Although we did mechanise the job there was still some labour needed and by the early 1980's it was impossible to find anyone prepared to handle bales. So in 1979 above ground silage clamps were built. Contractors gathered the grass with a forage harvester. This system is still, in 1992, being used and my son, David, is producing some very good silage at Green Meadow.

So I would say at the present time that dairy cows on the good specialist dairy farm are fed, housed and milked to a fairly high standard.

The breeding has gone through some dramatic changes since the 18th Century. Robert Bakewell was one of the foremost of men who by breeding and selection started to improve the Shorthorn cattle in the early years, followed by his pupils Robert and Charles Coiling. These herds were sold in 1810 - 1818.

The Dairy Shorthorn was the recognised dairy breed in those days. They were spoiled to a large extent by turning them into a dual-purpose breed by crossing with the Beef Shorthorn. During the 1850's a breed of cow from Freisland, a black and white breed, was imported mainly to be kept in town dairies. The early Friesians

were not always of good conformation and although they were good milk producers the milk was inclined to be low in butterfat.

In 1909 the British Friesian Cattle Society was formed and strict rules were laid down as to conformation, ancestry and markings. With importations from Holland in 1914 and 1936 and from South Africa in 1922 the Friesian cattle became established. The first man I have knowledge of who kept Friesian cattle was Mr. G.L. Stafford of Bradbury Farm, Crick. He went over to a sale in Bristol and bought a bull. My father took his best cow, a Shorthorn, to his bull a few times and the first Friesian bull was bred at Green Meadow in about 1930.

The first Friesians were looked upon by many farmers as foreign cattle that gave poor milk and were inclined to go wrong, which was partly true of the early ones.

The early Friesian breeders got to work and did improve the breed although many natural breeding methods were slow. It was not until artificial insemination (A.I.), started that more rapid progress was made. In the early days bulls were getting into old age before it was discovered how good or bad they were. The Milk Marketing Board brought out an A.I. service from their own bull stud and together with National Milk Recording breeding dairy cattle took on a new meaning. For quite a small fee of about £1.00 the M.M.B. employed inseminators to travel to farms following the sending of a message to the local office, and any producer could have the service of a tested bull, which a few years before he could only read about. A.I. became wide spread in about the early 1950's, together with milk recording, although some progressive cattle breeders were recording milk and butterfat from the 1930's. We started with milk recording at Green Meadow in 1947. My father also started breeding pedigree Friesians at the same time with "Green Meadow" prefix. He bought his foundation stock from Bissel Bros, Monmouth.

When I started farming on my own account I was not interested in pedigree, and having to buy my herd on the open market in 1953 I wanted plenty of milk and not fancy names. However, my father's dairy farming collapsed in 1962, based mainly at Park Farm, Caerleon, and was quite a large herd. His son, my half brother, walked out on him, and my father persuaded me to buy about 12 pedigree cows, which I really did not want. However I founded the "Runmead" herd and by 1978 was mostly all pedigree. Following the update of dairying at Green Meadow in 1980 I bought in 30 non-pedigree cows. My son, David, decided to carry on the farm in 1988 though he was not interested in pedigree, hence the "Runmead" herd lost its status.

Another modern innovation that had quite an impact on dairy farming was the electric fence. As a young lad in the 1930's, cows were turned out to grass in the

spring, on grass that grew naturally without any fertilizer usually in a field near the farm buildings. They stayed on the same field or fields most of the summer or until a field was cut for hay, and after about a month there would be fresh grass, which we called aftermath or lattermath.

The first nitrogen I remember being used was Nitro Chalk made by ICI and packed in paper lined 1 CWT bags. This was broadcast by hand in the mid 1930's. We had our first electric fence in 1948.

I think that I have covered most aspects of dairy farming as I have seen it. Anyone taking the trouble to read this will find that some of which will not again come about as there have been so many changes very often born out of necessity and also to satisfy man's desire to improve.

I have been milking cows now for just over 60 years and there is no doubt that when the milk leaves the farm it now is of better quality than any other milk that has ever been supplied to the British public.

When a person endeavours to write history such as this straight from memory without making notes, it shows up weaknesses in memory in that you remember something that should be added, such as horns on dairy cows. In my youth a cow's horn was a good means of identification in that they were all different and changed, as they grew older. It was also an easy way of telling a cow's age after three years, in that a horny ring would show on the base of the horn similar to the trunk of a cut tree. They could also be very dangerous once a cow learnt how to use them on her herd mates. There were no problems in the days of cows chained in stalls; in fact cows without horns could learn to get their heads out of cow chains. As the method of loose housing became popular, in the 1950's, so dehorning became necessary.

Something else that has changed is the manner of selling freshly calved cows. In my youth, when selling a freshly calved cow the calf would at least go with the cow to market, complete with muzzle so that it would not suck the mother before the sale. One of the main reasons for this was that abortion was common in some herds and this way was a certain amount of proof that it was a genuine sale.

So why the "Honest Cow"! Because this is perfectly true as the majority of cows are very honest in that, with kind patient handling and proper feeding, they can be relied on to produce a calf each year and an abundance of milk, which can be used in so many ways for the benefit of mankind.

Unfortunately now, in 1992, there are clouds of doom in that we are producing too much milk. This is the view of the bureaucrats, those people who think they know. It is to the everlasting shame of Mrs. Thatcher that the dairy industry was sold

down the river in 1983; as now the supermarket shelves are full of foreign dairy produce of, in many instances, very doubtful origin.

So on looking back over the years, my advice to anyone contemplating milking cows for a living is that you need to be very fit in every way, very tolerant to extremes of climate be able to put up with disappointments and always be on guard as a 600 kg cow packs an awful lot of power into her hind legs. Intellect is always better than brute force and ignorance. Cows respond to patience and kindness.

Another development installed in 1980 when a new milking parlour was installed to speed up the actual job of milking was the electronically controlled out of parlour feeder for feeding concentrate feed, dairy cake. The cows were given a certain amount of feed in the milking parlour, but the high yielding cows were not in the parlour long enough to eat all the dairy cake they needed to sustain their high level of milk production. The out of parlour feeding station was built in the loafing area and was available 24 hours a day, it had provision for two cows to feed at the same time, in separate feeding stations. There was a bulk supply of dairy cake, and this was fed by an electronically controlled metering mechanism depending on the requirements of each cow. The cows each had a collar around their neck to which was attached an electronic transponder. A computer in the dairy controlled the transponder and the operator would program the computer to give the right amount of dairy cake to each cow during a 24-hour period, this amount depended on the amount of milk each cow was producing. The cows could feed at any time day or night, but once she had eaten her ration for that period no more feed would be dispensed for her. It was a very successful system and helped greatly in sustaining high milk yields.

## **THE HUMBLE EWE.**

I say the humble ewe because the sheep has changed but very little since biblical times. Many of our farm animals have changed but, by and large, the ewe still gives birth to her lamb or lambs in much the same ways as have happened down the ages.

Mankind, through selection and breeding, has brought about emphasis in different aspects. In some respects the wool is important and in other the ability to provide meat in the right place and now, in 1992, without very much fat. There is also emphasis placed on the encouragement of multiple births. But after all that, the time it takes a ewe to conceive and produce a lamb is just the same and the ewe with her uncanny mothering ability has still to be relied upon. Sheep are supposed to be stupid a view I have never held. I think it stems from the fact that if one sheep gets out through a hole in the fence, then they all get out. Surely this is clever, as if there is something better on the other side of the fence then let's all go.

To gather a flock of ewes and lambs in spring, mix them all up and watch them sort themselves out is marvellous. The bond between ewe and lamb at the moment of birth is a small miracle.

I have always had a great regard for sheep and for the contribution they have made to the well being of mankind. The origin of the sheep is not really known, but there is no doubt that their history goes back to biblical times and beyond.

Although sheep have not changed as much as some of our other farm animals they have been bred for specific reasons, such as wool, meat and to a lesser extent milk. The sheep have supplied man with mutton and lamb to eat and from a very early time skins and wool for warmth and protection. Also, something that is not generally known is that catgut, which supports the weights in Grandfather Clocks, has nothing to do with cats but is the sheep's entrails. I find this most extraordinary. Also, very much fine music is derived from the humble sheep.

In days gone by when wool was a very important commodity, wool merchants grew very rich off the backs of sheep. I remember the very elaborate tombstones in a Wiltshire churchyard in memory of some wealthy wool merchants. With the coming of man-made fibre, wool at the present time, 1992, seems to be at a surplus and we are rapidly getting to the stage where the cost of shearing the wool is almost as much as the wool is worth. As a young man of 15, I started shearing by hand with hand shears. I always enjoyed shearing, which was usually done at the end of May. It was hard work, but with the sheep in fair condition and the sun shining it was very satisfying.

Then came the shearing machine, turned by hand, and was very successful in its day. Man soon converted the mechanics over to engine driven shears, mostly driven by the famous 1.5 HP Lister petrol engine, later with an electric motor, where available, although there was a certain amount of danger involved with electricity and shearing. Even in these days of automation man has still to actually do the shearing. Shearing in itself has changed. I changed over to machine shearing in the early 1940's and the style was very much akin to hand shearing. Then Geoffrey Bowen came over from Australia and brought with him the "Bowen style". Although the shorn sheep were not as pleasing to the eye, it was easier on the man and quicker. I tried shearing the Bowen style but could not get along with it. An old dog has difficulty in learning new tricks. With good hot sun I enjoyed shearing time even though it was hard work. You needed to be young, good-tempered and very fit.

At the present time the emphasis is on lean meat, so we are in the process of producing lambs without too much fat. In nature, ewes would lamb in April or May when grass was growing for ewes to produce plenty of milk. A lot of the lambs are born indoors in January and February just for economic benefit.

Another development has been breeding for multiple births with ewes bred to produce 3, 4 or even 5 lambs. The surplus lambs are reared artificially. To my thinking whilst a ewe has only two teats then I am quite satisfied for ewes to have a decent set of twins. A few sets of triplets are useful to foster onto ewes with single lambs and make good any losses.

Lambing time is the most critical time with sheep and can sometimes be very difficult. It is often a real challenge and very time consuming, therefore experience, know how and dedication are required, and providing it does not last too long, a month is about the limit. After this limit fatigue and lack of enthusiasm begins to tell. To anyone contemplating sheep farming, I have worked with sheep for over 50 years and suggest that you be prepared for the fact that of all farm animals, sheep can be found dead for many reasons, some unknown. In some cases sheep can roll onto their backs and die if not put back onto their feet.

On fresh land that has not had sheep for a number of years keeping sheep seems an easy life, but there after internal worms can be a problem. That is where the skill comes in. A big mistake people make with sheep is in the fencing. It is far better to fence the land sheep-proof before putting the sheep in rather than waiting for the sheep to start getting out and then set about trying to stop them. You really cannot blame sheep for getting out if the grass on the other side of the fence looks better. They are foraging animals and that is how they survive.

The times I have spent working with sheep have been some of the happiest, although sometimes hard. I remember one very cold February night with heavy drifts



of snow. I had a flock of ewes at the farthest end of the farm and they wanted a bale of hay to last them through the night. I drove the Land Rover to within two fields and had to carry the bale the rest of the way. I crossed the one field and, after battling through bad conditions all day, I was very tired and I sat on the bale for a rest. It occurred to me how easy men have succumbed and dropped off to sleep. I stirred myself and finished my mission. Of course I have never seen the sort of conditions that the shepherds on the hills have to contend with, and to those men I take my hat off. They are like fishermen and I often wonder what makes men endure such hardships. As in all walks of life where there are hardships there are compensations. To be able to walk the hills in spring when lambing is over, with a couple of good dogs, the larks singing, the lambs skipping and the beautiful peace of the country is something that stirs the soul.

Although we are in difficult times May the hills of Britain remain so that sheep may safely graze, and to the humble sheep, my respect and gratitude.

## **THE CLINICAL PIG.**

To the uninformed this would be a false statement, but it is nonetheless true. The pig is a very clean animal in many ways. The pig has not much to protect it from the weather, just a thin coat of bristles. To protect itself from the heat of the sun it likes to take a mud bath, which also helps to curtail pig lice, but given the opportunity they keep their sleeping quarters very clean and dry. Man has changed the type of pig very much from the wild pigs native to the forest. They were quite small with a heavy forequarter. Up until the 1930's pigs, as most meat-producing animals, were bred to be very square, almost like a brick with a leg on each corner. Early photographs verify this. They were kept to grow to a fair size with a lot of fat. At the beginning of the century, and back through the ages, fat was necessary to provide energy, as most work was heavy and strenuous and farmers and workers had to work outside in the elements. Houses and cottages were colder with central heating unheard of. We had central heating at Green Meadow in the 1970's.

A lot of cottages, especially farm workers, had pigsties. They were usually small stone built buildings with a low roof, a small doorway of about 3' x 4', and a small walled around enclosure about 8' square. There they kept a pig fed mainly on anything edible. Though the pig was, the cottagers pride and joy it eventually had to be killed. In every village there was a pig sticker. The deed was usually carried out in early winter, depending on the phase of the moon. The pig sticker and a couple of his cronies undertook the task. There was no humane killer; that became compulsory in about the late 1940's. After killing, clean straw was heaped around the pig and it was set on fire to burn off the bristles. Then came the job of scrubbing it all off with water. I thought that the burning did give a good flavour to the resulting bacon.

To our town friends today this would seem a cruel barbaric way to carry on, but it was not that the people concerned were cruel for the sake of it; there was no other way. It is all very well for the folk of today, 1992, with their adequate salaries and pay packets, tripping along to the supermarket all dressed up, not even having to open the automatic door. They can just pick and choose from a practically world wide range of products derived from the pig, all packed up and in some instances ready to eat.

In the early part of the century, and from centuries past, every farm killed their own pigs mainly for bacon. For isolated farms and cottages without modern transport or electricity for deep freezers, a couple of sides of bacon hanging in the larder was a good insurance against the rigours of winter. The well-known phrase that the only thing wasted when the pig was killed was the squeal was no empty statement. Everything edible was used. With wages at 28/- a week (£1.40) for a married man it becomes easy to understand. With most work on the farm being carried out by

manual labour a lot of labour was needed. There were many casual and regular workers apart from the men in cottages, so bacon was an important source of food.

With the coming of industry the type of pig had to be changed, which evolved two types. The short chunky pig was kept for fresh pork and the longer leaner pig for bacon production. In the early part of the century pig breeding was not very scientific. In most districts a farmer usually kept back a likely looking male pig out of the litter and local farmers took their sows to be mated. A favourite method was to put a rope on the sow's one hind leg and after a few journeys the sows in season would almost take themselves. Replacement sows were usually a gilt pig kept from one of the litters of a favourite sow. There were usually one or two poorly piglets in every litter called by various names such as "wrinuk" or runt.

At that time most farmers ran one or two sows usually in the orchard. They were very useful to eat up anything that would otherwise be wasted.

During the 1930's the Ministry of Agriculture introduced a boar-licensing scheme, whereby farmers who kept boars were paid a small fee to keep a boar that had been passed by a Ministry Inspector. They were pedigree and usually the Large White breed. There evolved a type of pig keeping at that time. The sows were usually a crossbred mixture of Welsh Lop Eared with Wessex and put to the Large White. Pigs resulting from this cross had hybrid vigour and a lot of farmers sold the weaners at 8 weeks old to pig farmers who took them to fatten for pork.

Most of the bacon came from Denmark, although there was a Bacon Marketing Board and the Wiltshire cure had been established to compete with the Danes for bacon. However, owing to the 1939 war, pig keeping went back to the days of the cottage pig and Pig Clubs were set up for pigs to be fed on scraps. During the war there was an acute shortage of everything, especially meat.

Permits were required to slaughter pigs or anything else for that matter. Farmers were allowed to kill two pigs per year. If anyone was caught carrying out illicit slaughtering they could have ended up in gaol.

After the war, in the late 1940's, pig breeding changed again with the importation of the Landrace from the continent. They were far longer and leaner pigs, and gradually the ordinary farmyard pig was making way for the specialist.

As a young lad we always had a few sows. They are very interesting animals when kept as we did then. It was very plain to see when the sow was about to give birth. They would prepare their bed out of anything they could carry. It was not wise to allow a sow too much straw as they would bank it up and lay on the piglets. Two items that were of great benefit were furrowing rails around the pen, to prevent the

sow lying on her young, and infra-red heating. It was a pleasure to see a litter of pigs in straw, and later, when weaned, they were happy to lie in straw.

I feel sad for the pigs in these modern days, with the sows tied up and the pigs weaned in days rather than weeks and put in flat decks. The farmyard pig is a rarity these days. On a visit to Ireland in 1991, in a tour of 1500 miles across the South of the country, we never saw one pig. I think the pork we used to have during the late 1930's was far better than it is today. Then it was a prime porker dairy fed on skimmed milk or whey, was killed at about 16 weeks old weighing about 3.5 to 4 score dead weight, (a score is 20 lbs).

The breeders have, I think, taken the leanness too far and are killing the pigs too heavy. The pork lacks flavour and succulence. Times are changing yet again from the days of a happy farmyard pig, due to economies of scale and, of course, from a strictly financial angle we have to admit change is necessary. Whereas we had the odd few sows grazing in the orchard we now have herds of 300 - 400 sows.

Pigs, of course, can be quite dangerous animals. Try taking a young piglet from a sow and you take your life in your hands. They can get very vicious. The mature boars can get quite difficult to deal with. Sows will also fight amongst themselves and new sows introduced to a herd can end up in dire trouble. Also pigs kept without straw bedding can turn to tail biting and fighting in fattening pens. So as a result of large amounts of pigs being kept together the sow stall has evolved with sows tethered in stalls and put into a crate at farrowing time to give birth, although in many cases the pigs have lost out.

With a large amount of pigs there has to be a lot of dung. If this has to be pumped out and onto the land, when the use of straw for bedding is not practical.

Now, in 1992, sow stalls in the U.K. have to be phased out in favour of straw yards and pigs going back to free range. This is better for the pigs in many ways but it will be more expensive. Our competitors in the E.E.C. are able to keep sow stalls for some time yet, which is unfair on our pig producers.

So to sum up pig farming, the pig has been the loser. To see the farmyard pig with her litter running around with their curly tails is a great joy. The British public are buying their pork and bacon and all the other pig based products at a cheaper price.

As for the future, I would rather not try to speculate.

## **THE NOBLE HORSE.**

The title of this chapter, to me at least, is self-explanatory. When I think of horses I recall the horse of my youth, the Shire horse, and they really were noble animals. Mankind has bred the horse to suit the very wide range of uses to which the horse is put. From the fairly small wild horse we now have very many breeds and types. I will try and confine my writing to how I have seen them and how they affected the farming scene.

At the beginning of the century they were probably the most important animals on the farm. As far as farming was concerned there were three main types of horse used, the heavy draught horses for heavy work, the lighter type or half legged for lighter work and the hacking or riding type.

The heavy draught horse at the early part of the century was of the Shire breed, standing at about 16.2 hands high. This being the height at the withers, (top of shoulder, base of neck), a hand being 4 inches. These horses were heavy and powerful with a very gentle temperament. One drawback was the amount of coarse hair or in horsey terms "feathers" around the bottom of their legs, which was inclined to get itch mites and grease and was a difficult complaint to deal with. On most farms there was always one or two mares, which were bred from. Most districts had a Society. In our district we had the Chepstow Heavy Horse Society, which hired a stallion from a breeder who sent a horse and groom. During late spring and summer they travelled around the district on a timetable, staying at various farms for the night and covered mares at farms on the way for a fee. This was a very good system.

By about the early 1940's the type of Shire had changed. A lot of the course feathers had been bred out with flatter bone, and I am convinced that the Shire Horse Society would not agree that some Clydesdale blood crept in from somewhere, bringing white socks, a white blaze on the head and better quality bone and feather. By the start of World War 2 the Shire was a really great horse. Most farms, during this pre war period, bred a few foals every year, which were broken in to work at 2 years old. This was something in the farming year that we looked forward to.

It was an art to break in a colt and get a good result. To get the colt to lead, a special mouthing tack was used. This was a light bridle with a bit with three special keys like loose steel keys attached. The colt would play with these and get slobbering a lot, which would result in a soft mouth and make it more responsive to the bit. These colts would be worked on light work with mature horses, and then usually worked on the farm on heavy haulage of muck, roots, hay, and ploughing and arable work until 6 or 7 years old. They were then sold to go into town work. This was a sad part of the job as it was like parting with old friends.

Mating a Shire mare with a thoroughbred stallion usually bred the half-legged horse. This was a useful type of horse for lighter work like hoeing and light carting. They also ended up in the towns in light haulage work.

Then there was the old faithful, usually bred as a mixture of Welsh Cob, Thoroughbred and Mountain Pony. This was a very useful type of horse standing at about 15 hands, fairly light in the bone. It was a useful mount for a bit of hunting and not so temperamental as the Thoroughbred. They were usually used to trot to market with the Gig or Float (a light 2 wheeled cart) and were usually kept for many years.

In those days Horse Fairs were very numerous. October 29th was always Usk October Fair. Some farmers would sell their spring born foals (Suckers) at this sale. As always there were horse dealers, some of which were very dubious characters. To have any dealings with them you needed to keep your wits about you, which is something in the farming world I have always thought very sad. When animals are young and are put up for sale they are treated with respect. But the old horse having given its best, the old cow who has milked well for years or the old ewe having suckled many lambs do not carry much value and are sometimes physically abused. The trouble is, in the harsh world of economics, if you get too soft hearted you do not survive. My own attitude is that with all stock, while in my care, I see that they do not want or suffer. The R.S.P.C.A. have been and are doing good work in this respect. I am pleased that as from January 1992 the ear punching of lambs in market for the lamb subsidy has come to an end.

So the farm horses as I knew have mostly gone and with it a way of life that only we who grew up with it will ever know. At that time it was part of everyday life. Working with horses was much dependant on the weather. In the cold and wet it was not very pleasant and in the heat the flies were not very nice, but for my part I would not have missed it.

I would have loved to have seen my mother riding side-saddle. I am told that she was a great horsewoman. Unfortunately my mother died when I was just two years old.

There are still a lot of horses in the U.K., mostly kept for racing, sport and pleasure. They still have an important part to play and their lot, by and large, is a pleasant one, with the horses kept by ignorant people the most at risk.

So for my tribute to the horse I will end with Ronald Duncan's poem:

## **TRIBUTE TO THE SHIRE**

Where in this wide world can man find

Nobility without pride

Friendship without envy

Or beauty without vanity?

Here, where grace is laced with muscle

And strength by gentleness confined

He 'serves without servility

He has fought without enmity

There is nothing so powerful

Nothing less violent

There is nothing so quick

Nothing more patient

England's past has been borne on his back

All our history is his industry

We are his heirs, he our inheritance

## **THE FAITHFUL DOG.**

It would indeed be futile, even impudent, for me to write on dogs in general. A great many very able people have, over the years, written all there is to write. I thought it very unfair of me not to write how I have known very many faithful farm dogs during my lifetime.

An ordinary farm dog is usually described as a Sheep Dog, but that can mean many things depending on the size and type of farm and, of course, the type of farming carried out.

The Sheep Dog, or border collie, as seen on the television show "One Man And His Dog", or the dogs that compete in trials up and down the country, are dogs bred and trained for that particular purpose and I really admire those men and women who handle them. There must be many hours of patient training going in to creating such an understanding between man and dog.

This type of dog is not very different from those used on' the mountain and hill sheep farms, some of their work being very hard. I think that the coming of the A.T.V. (the All Terrain Vehicle) is making shepherding on this type of farm easier for both shepherds and their dogs.

Then we have the general all rounder. This is a dog that is not always easy to get. A dog to work cattle must not be too highly bred, should bark a bit and not be afraid to nip the cows heels. Then, where there are cattle and sheep, it is difficult to get a dog that is hard enough with cattle yet gentle with sheep.

But what a great help a dog can be. On a dairy farm, with cows to come in at night and morning, in spring and summer, it would be a nightmare to try and get them in the yard without a dog, when the cows would much rather stay out at grass.

In these days of crime and theft a good farm dog, or several, can be useful to warn off intruders.

The methods by which they are bred are often hit and miss. Someone with a useful bitch gets it mated with someone's useful dog. Surplus pups are sold at between £10 - £25. The most I ever paid for a dog was at a dog auction. We bought a trained dog. Those that are for sale are worked in a field with a few sheep prior to the auction. Winifred and I liked this dog. Sweep, and bought him for £250. He has been a wonderful help and friend and I have never regretted it for a moment.

Over the years we have had a good many dogs, some being good. Nell, one of the best, ate Warfarin and died. Three dogs were run over, one vanished and some



were hopeless, which was not always the fault of the dog as I am not one of the most patient people to be good at training dogs. Patience is a must.

So much for the farm collie. On a good many farms there are terriers, mostly Jack Russells. These are brave little dogs mainly used for ridding and are good at it. A rat does not stand much chance of survival when there is a Jack Russell about. We had one for Winifred, and pretty hopeless he was too. He would not stay home and in the twinkling of an eye he would be gone. I have always found bitches a lot more faithful than dogs.

At the present time we have six dogs. Sweep, the oldest dog at 12 years old is showing his age and getting slower, but still a great old dog. Then we have Meg, a young bitch of 15 months bought locally. She has started to work well but I doubt will be as good as Sweep. Then there is Min, Winifred's Pembroke Corgi, a housedog of 2 years who is very intelligent. Geoff has a bearded Collie, a very energetic 7 years old. He is Geoff's companion and a great favourite with most people. At Green Meadow there is Pip, not very scientific but a great old dog, a true and loyal friend who will go through muck and mire and could move a herd of elephants if need be. She is getting old now at 13 but still a great help. Lastly there is Gem, David's young Sheep Dog bitch, very impetuous but very willing and needs a lot of work. (I have always found bitches to be far more faithful than dogs as they will stay with you and do not roam off.)

## **THE FARMYARD CAT.**

This will probably be the shortest chapter, as cats are very independent animals and can, if need be, fend for themselves.

In days past cats were a very necessary and important part of the farmyard. Since the introduction of modern rat and mouse bait their role on some farms has diminished. I wonder sometimes if this has been for the best. In my youth we had rat poison. Rodine was a brand I well remember and it would kill rats. Then came Warfarin, which if laid in the right places will get rid of rats and, to an extent, mice. This, however, is not a very hygienic method in that corpses can be left to decay under floors and in bales, not very pleasant.

Good ratting cats will eat most of what they catch; a few good cats about the farmyard can be very effective. There is one disadvantage with cats in that they sometimes use short straw and hayseeds in the Meal House (where hay, straw and animal feed is stored) for their Latrine, and this is something that I do not like.

In the days of hand milking the cats would wait for their milk, which was not much trouble, but in the modern milking parlour it has to be someone's job.

Another aspect that has come to light in recent years is the fact that cats can harbour the organism that causes abortion in ewes. Maybe this has something to do with the fact that many more ewes are housed in winter and lamb indoors, so they are more likely to come into contact with the organisms.

The farmyard cat lives in a real world and has to fight for its place in the cat society. It has to learn to fend for itself, unlike its town relations who, like its owners, are pampered and do not really know what hardship means.

Only time will tell whether the cat will survive in modern day farming, but it will on the family farm where economics are not all that matter.

For my part, I hope they survive.

## **FARMING AND WILDLIFE.**

If I had the ability, this subject could require a volume of its own, unlike the previous chapter. In our present age this is very controversial and topical and an awful lot of people have jumped on the bandwagon earning or perhaps getting very high salaries.

As someone who has lived in the country for over 60 years, and without being boastful, I have lived for farming and country life which I love, but there is no doubt that it has changed. The three main things that have "for want of a better word" changed wildlife are chemical sprays, fertilizers and silage.

There is no doubt that crop spraying has changed arable farming completely. Most weeds, pests and diseases have been eliminated or at least controlled, and the fields of weed-free healthy crops of corn are a credit to the farmers, plant breeders and chemists. This is so much different to the corn grown during the Second World War where thistles were one of the worst problems. With all the hard work involved and a host of other weeds the yield was greatly reduced. It was not only the corn crops that suffered from weed competition and pests, also root crops, potatoes, beet, etc. The only way to keep weeds and pests at bay 40 years ago was by hand hoeing for weeds and a rotation system for pests. The growing of root crops was one way of cleaning the land for corn, and the folding of sheep helped maintain the fertility.

The burning of straw and stubbles has had a detrimental effect on wildlife and was a sure way of antagonizing the town folk. I am pleased to say that burning is to be banned from 1993. It is easy to understand the large arable farmers burning straw as they want the fields cleaned quickly and straw was never a valuable commodity.

Fertilizers on arable land never had a dramatic effect on wildlife although too much nitrogen in late autumn, with run off, does add to the nitrates in water supplies. On grassland it has had a different effect, especially on young leys, and coupled with silage has had a dramatic effect on wildlife.

As a young lad and through to the 1960's, hay was the basic feed for most cattle and sheep, except arable sheep, and was the maintenance or roughage part of the diet. Most grasses for hay were cut in the third week of June and into July and were cut or mown by a steady team of horses. By this time a lot of the flowers and grasses had seeded and ground-nesting birds had matured and were able to move away from danger, and field mice and leverets (young hares) had a better chance of survival. With fertilizers and the price of land ever rising, the farmers were forced to get more than maintenance from livestock fed on grass.

The middle of May is the ideal time to cut grass for silage. The cost of labour and the steady plodding of a team of horses are not economic in this day and age. The horse mower cut a swath of grass 4.5 feet wide whereas today modern machinery can cut 9-foot widths in easily twice the speed. By cutting the grass in the middle of May a lot of wildlife has not had time to escape. Grass made into silage has a feed value far above the hay we used to make in late June, July and even August.

The price paid in terms of wildlife is high. The flowers have not had time to seed and after a few years become extinct. This environmental subject is really a case of economics.

I was born on a small dairy farm of 50 acres. The rent, in 1920 was £1.50, (30/-) an acre and the rates were about £3.00 per year. The good 4 bed roomed house was built in 1920 on good land with mains water. When I became tenant in 1953 the rent had gone up to £3.00 per acre and rates had also risen.

By 1988 I had built the farm up to being a modern 100-acre dairy farm when my son, David, took over the tenancy. A lot of the new buildings were erected with landlord's consent and some improvements earned a 40 per cent Ministry Grant. The landlord had also carried out some improvements. The house was extended and improved and, in spite of my efforts, the rent rose to £45 per acre. The only way to justify that sort of rent and show a return on the considerable tenant's capital outlay was production, so the method of farming had to change.

The past passage is not an exercise of self-glorification but an attempt to explain the reason why the leisurely way of farming had to change.

If production to provide food for the human population is what is needed then 1950 to 1985 or thereabouts has been a success. But in the western world it has outstripped demand and now, in the 1990's, there is an effort to turn the clock back, and reduce production quantities. With human nature this is not easy. When humans are creating something, be it clearing land or creating something, enthusiasm runs high, but put the process in reverse and there is trouble, as with the suggestion of closing 31 coal mines. I honestly think the large arable farms in eastern counties have a lot to answer for, with the grubbing out of hedges, burning straw and perhaps indiscriminate use of chemical sprays, also the intense type of factory farming of poultry and pigs.

There are changes on the way to make life better for wildlife and stock, which is good, providing that imported produce is produced to the same standards as our own. Of course there are the cranks that think we should live on nuts and berries. This is very well if it is what one wants, but most of us like a varied diet, which includes animal products and fish.

It is beholden to man to see that animals are kept in good conditions and, when the time comes, are slaughtered in a humane way. I do not understand fishing. For a man to be sat on the riverbank, on a summers day is probably a very peaceful pastime, but what of the poor fish being hauled out of the water with a hook in its mouth. Some folk get very up tight about abattoirs but seem to think fishing very acceptable. Human nature takes a lot of understanding.

At the present time, December 1992, the British public are so well fed that wildlife and the environment are of prime importance and many would like to see free access to all farmland and nature allowed to take over.

As in most situations in this life moderation is the key word and should allow good sense to prevail.

## **THE FARMER'S WIFE.**

Perhaps some would say that I have my priorities wrong and that Chapter 11 - The Farmer - should have take priority. As in most things "not to be boastful" it is my book and I will write it my way.

I am in no way a feminist; life has been too hard for that. I honestly think that women are superior to men in many ways. If there is any group of human beings that the country should salute it is the Farmers Wives as, by and large, they are the salt of the earth.

From the early part of the century until the Second World War they had a hard time. Most farm houses were large and in those days had flagstone floors, no central heating, no electricity, no telephone and in some cases no water, with a privy down the garden like my Grandmother Parsons, at Maerdy Farm, Coedkernew.

Before the days of the Milk Board, the milk was made into butter and cheese in the dairy normally attached to the house. The home-cured bacon and poultry were also the responsibility of the farmer's wife.

Christmas was a particularly hard time, with geese, ducks and chicken to be plucked and dressed ready for sale. Then in the spring the wife was expected to mother the orphan lambs, and she had the job of putting the broody hens to sit on goose, duck and hens eggs.

In the early days of haymaking they were expected to turn the hay by hand and then it was a foregone conclusion that they would feed any workers that needed sustenance. By the 1939 war things were fast changing and by the late 1940's the family farm, as we had known it, was now rapidly changing.

Economics, as always, played a big part in this. In the early days ready money needed for day-to-day expenses was found by what the wife could sell. No money was withdrawn from the bank as farming was in recession and what money there was from stock and crops was for rent and bigger bills.

The coming of the Milk Marketing Board started the change, with a regular monthly milk cheque, and dairy farming became the main source of income. The responsibility was then taken out of the hand of the farmer's wife.

With the coming of deep litter housing and battery cages poultry keeping became a big specialised business. With intensive keeping of turkeys the goose lost favour and mass-produced chicken took the duty off the shoulders of the farmer's wife. So the role of the farmer's wife has dramatically changed.

The farmhouse has changed. Modern kitchens have been fitted; tiled floors, central heating, electricity, and telephones have all become features. Most farmers' wives drive vehicles. This is not to say that the life of the present day farmer's wife is easy, just that it has changed. With women in general seeking a career for themselves, many wives do indeed go out to work away from the farm. Those that do not take on the clerical business of the farm answer the telephone and drive errands for spare parts etc.

In the early part of the period most farms kept a good kitchen garden. Most farms had an odd boy for menial jobs around the farm, and before becoming trained by trial and error to become a general farm worker, it was usually these such boys who were put to work on 'the garden as for some strange reason it was thought by many farmers beneath their dignity to work in the garden. I suppose after working in the fields it is a bit of a come down, although for my part I have always found gardening to be peaceful and relaxing after tractor driving and a good place to think. With the odd job boys gone a lot of farms do not have vegetable gardens and the wives usually grow flowers.

At the present time there may be the danger that girls are not prepared to take on the role of farmers wife. It is indeed a very demanding life. Those that are gallant enough to take it on seem to enjoy the challenge that it can well be, with the men folk inadvertently making life very difficult sometimes with the cow muck, hay, oil and grease about their clothes, and often not being very punctual at meal times.

I have noticed that most wives are very good cooks. Of course with all their other duties, as through the ages they are also expected to produce the future generation, I write this chapter to a breed of women who are a race apart and I sincerely hope that enough will come forward to carry on this very noble tradition.

## **THE FARMER.**

How do we define such a person? From my youth in the 1920's to the advent of television, a farmer was a fairly rotund red faced person who went hunting, or a tranquil sort of rustic character leaning on a wooden gate chewing a piece of straw.

With the coming of television he was portrayed as a rather tall figure in a sports jacket and tweed cap, still, hunting and shooting, living in a large Georgian farmhouse, driving around in a Range Rover with a couple of Labrador dogs, issuing orders to innumerable employees. His wife drives around in a BMW and his children all have ponies.

I have lived in farming all of my life. It has been my way of life. When not working at it I read about it and, naturally, I have met a lot of farming people in my time and I will try and set down what I think a farmer is.

Over the past 50 years farms have got bigger and farming 'has changed. There have always been farms varying in size and nature of the type of farming carried out there. Economics plays a very large part in the style or type of farming, apart from the war years when the population had to be fed and a lot of land was turned over to arable farming, to which it was not really suited. We have the large estates, either inherited or bought by people who have acquired money in many different ways, where the owner is referred to as the farmer and yet has no or very little practical experience of running a farm. Very often large arable farms are run by a farmer manager, who really is the farmer. Large tracts of mountain, mostly in Scotland and some parts of Wales, are also run by a farm manager. In recent years insurance companies have gone into buying up large farms and running them in much the same way as estates.

Then we have the large farms. Owned by private individuals, people who have sometimes climbed the farming ladder, but due to the size of the farm, have men who do the actual work yet the farmer or owner is in charge of the running of the farm. I admire these men, as they have to know their job, be it crops or stock, to stay in business.

Then we have the real farmers. The men who rent or own their farms or perhaps rent some and own some, single-handed or perhaps with one or two sons and possibly daughters who take to it. The real family farmer knows how most jobs can and should be done.

This is my idea of a real farmer. The chap who is in the milking parlour at 6 am on a cold rough morning, in the lambing pens at midnight, and knows the rough, tough side of the job. His wife is there to lend support in times of need. There are



hard times and good times and of all types of farms there is nothing that can compare or compete with the real family farm and it is to the everlasting shame and disgrace of the politicians that so many good family farms have been sold in lots, with the house and buildings sold with 5-10 acres of land.

Then there are the Play Boy Farmers, the folk who acquire wealth by some means or another, mainly from the town. The type who buy up the farm houses and a few acres, keep a few horses, perhaps a few sheep, and think of themselves as farmers. A lot of them are decent enough folk but they are not farmers and never will be.

Then there are the Hobble-de-Hoys, the people with neither breeding, brains or brawn, who also acquire the odd field, build a few non-descript sheds or railway huts, usually live a few miles away, keep a few horses and a couple of sheep and think that all animals can live on grass in winter and summer. The RSPCA usually catch up with them and they end up in the law courts, which usually results in headlines in the Press of "Farmer" fined for cruelty to animals.

So what, or who, is a Farmer? The option is yours. I have given a fair assessment, unlike the media who have over the past 50 years put and printed a false picture. I am the first to admit that there are people in farming of whom I am ashamed of, as there are in all walks of life. Ever since the 1939 war and subsidies were introduced to prevent food becoming too expensive and Stanley Evans, MP, coined the phrase Featherbed Farmers. The Anti-Farmer Brigade has treated the British farmers very unfairly. We get the blame for much that we aren't responsible for.

The farm where I was born has been farmed by us for over 70 years and is a case in point. The woods and hedges are much the same with only a few hedgerows having been removed. I did plant some thorn windbreaks and some trees around the farm. Modern farming, namely large tractors, implements and the daily Milk Tanker and bulk feed lorries have spoiled many country lanes, an example being the lane from Hayes Gate, to Runston.

As a lad going to school, the lane was narrow with grass growing up the middle; wild strawberries on "strawberry hills", shivering shake grass and primroses. Most of these are now just a memory. Those were the days of the horse. This is progress and as always there is a price.

The greatest change to the look of the countryside as far as Greenmeadow Farm is concerned, and mainly for the benefit of the town people, has been the construction of the M4 Motorway, which tore through, as I remember it, a beautiful

countryside. Our peace has been shattered forever, night and day, as the relentless rat race roars by. It was an intrusion into our privacy that the media never mentioned.

Also in the past, if a bucket was left under a roof down pipe, except perhaps after a prolonged dry spell, the water would be almost clean enough to drink. Yet these days even after prolonged wet weather, after a nights rain horrible black silt will be in the bottom of the bucket. Not a mention of this from the media either even though it comes from the traffic on the M4.

On the horizon there used to be just trees. Now we have electricity pylons, which are not a pretty sight. Agriculture uses electricity we know, and appreciate it very much, but it is chiefly for the benefit of the town. So to accuse the farmers of spoiling the countryside is very unfair.

There are a lot of non-farming people who think that the countryside should be one huge playing field when the sun shines, kept tidy for their benefit. Something I have always noticed is when there are mushrooms or blackberries growing, these folk seem to think they have a God given right to help themselves without even asking permission. Yet if there is a field of baled hay waiting to be gathered, they just walk by without even offering to help. I have great sympathy for anyone trying to run a farm near a housing estate, it must be a nightmare.

There is fault on both sides. I am a bit fearful for the farming community because of course, we are very much a minority and are getting less. The public seem to be very sympathetic towards down-at-heel peasants, who really speaking are not of great benefit to anyone. Yet a farmer running a successful business and making a deserved profit, to put it crudely, they "hate his guts".

What our media and towns people also forget is that we were here first. I would imagine man lived near to water and became fishermen, or lived inland in caves and became hunters, industry with houses for workers to live in and all the urban necessities of life that is what has ruined the countryside.

As a lifelong farmer with a great love for my native land, now in the new year 1993, I look at the future with fear, not for myself now in my 70th year as the die is fairly well cast, but for the farmers like my two sons and the generation to follow. What for them? There is no doubt that a lot of the hard manual work has gone from farming as in many other walks of life. Yet farming, like fishing, can still be a hard tough life and with modern machinery a lonely life with a lot of danger. I often marvel as one who spent many hard long hours with a dung fork and long handled hook when Massey Ferguson introduced the hydraulic system.

So why so fearful of the future? In the past, as always an optimist, in that on an island like the UK with 50 million or so people to eat everyday, the fact is that be he scientist or fool, rich or poor, a human cannot go long without food. But times are forever changing, with the ability to transport goods all over the world, with industrialists and big business with goods to export to barter for cheap food, then that is why I am fearful. There is no doubt in my mind that the majority of British farmers who produce the food that this island is capable of, that on equal terms they can compete and even surpass anyone.

So that is my description of a "farmer". Maybe the reader will think me biased. I have tried to put it fairly and honestly and as counsel would say "there I rest my case".

*On a wet cold day April 28<sup>th</sup>. 2004, as I reread that which I wrote 12 years ago, I should think myself very fortunate to be able, as I indeed do, to look back on happy times. The situation in farming if anything has got worse, and also what was a wonderful country, has also deteriorated. The environment has been damaged and we seem to be a soft touch for those from other countries who seek to abuse our generous welfare state.*

## **THE FARMER'S CHILDREN.**

Being born and brought up on a farm I suppose it is inevitable that farm kids are different, although as one myself I never thought so. At an early age living out in the country, close to nature, you made your own games and your own rules and had to rely upon yourself. At an early age you learnt that things in life were not for the taking but had to be worked for and earned, and that there were sacrifices to be made. When the juvenile mind had planned certain things to do after school, there were chicken to be plucked or some unforeseen job to be done.

Getting to and from school in the 1930s was sometimes very pleasant, but in bad weather not so good, but that was good training for a life where nature and weather conditions can sort out the men from the boys.

Even in those days there were kids in the same village school whose homes were in the village. We did not envy them being able to get to school in minutes and whereas the only food we had was what we carried from home, with nothing to drink except water as we never carried anything liquid which was too vulnerable or heavy, the village kids went home to dinner. Our headmaster, Mr. Eddie Williams, who was a very saintly man, organised the older girls to make Horlicks for us in the mornings.

This upbringing applied to girls as well as boys and I feel sure it goes some way toward moulding that resilience of character that farmer's children seem to possess. Times have changed in that most of the village schools have gone and farm children are now transported to and fro school. Whether they will grow up to be better for this new system is hard to say, but it certainly is an easier and more pleasant way of becoming educated.

They are indeed better educated, but at a price. They are losing their contact with nature. You can learn more in one day walking home from school than in a lifetime of riding on a bus. Farmers and education has always been a mute point. A lot of farmers in the early part of the century automatically thought their sons should stay at home and learn the way father did and carry on the family tradition. Agricultural colleges were rather frowned upon. The girls had to stay at home and be taught by mother. These are reasons I suppose why a lot of farming families are closely related.

The aspects that began to change all this was the coming of the motor car for country folk, and the Young Farmers Movement with better education and Young Farmers clubs. Farmer's children began to travel and mix with adjacent clubs socially and in competition with quite often the outcome of inter-marrying. Also the more enlightened farmers sent their children to Agricultural College. I always thought myself very fortunate to be 14 years of age in 1937, at a time when the Young

Farmers Movement was getting underway and I think myself and Winifred, my wife, spent the best of our youth in its hey-day. Now I am very sorry to say that the Movement is in decline. Our club in Chepstow is struggling to survive, the reason for this is hard to find.

In my Young Farmer days, in order to get around you borrowed your parent's car, got on you bike, got a lift or caught a bus and in the country that was all there was to do with regard to socialising except an occasional dance at the village hall. Now most young people have their own cars and there are so many activities for young people I think it a sad reflection on the times we live in, that the Young Farmer Movement has been allowed to decay. It has a past to be proud of and still has much to offer.

Another disturbing fact is that with so many young girls seeking a career of their own, there seems to be a lot of young bachelor farmers about. I do not blame the girls for not taking up the status of farmer's wife as I have said in a previous chapter I think they had a very raw deal. This leaves me wondering if these said farmers of tomorrow, as well as being educated to be good farmers, maybe they should be taught how to be good husbands. Farming is a profession and if you compare the life of the farmer's wife with that of many wives in other professions it can be a very hard and difficult life. The main issues are mud, dirt and grime, hay seeds, straw and these days of silage some evil smelling clothes, not being punctual for meals (at times unavoidable), entertaining endless Repts. and answering the telephone. Most of these problems can be avoided but it does need an effort and thought for others.

I have always thought a farm is like a cartwheel, with the farmhouse being the hub. If the hub is secure and happy the farm will flourish. If not, it is liable to fall apart. So my advice to any Young Farmer is, if you are lucky enough to find a wife, then look after her, as it is the greatest asset you will ever have.

I have tried to cover the subject to the best of my ability. It is not a literary masterpiece and to anyone who has taken the trouble to read it I give my thanks. The facts are not fiction but most of it first-hand knowledge, with a little research in the earlier years.

To someone who has travelled the road of life what advice, if any, would I give to those who follow? Farming at the present time is going through a difficult period and many people farming today do not advise their children to take it up. As for my own family, the choice is theirs. If you like the life there is nothing to compare with it, though having said that, from a financial point of view it now provides a fairly pathetic income. Having worked 7 days a week, an average 10 hours per day, with a fair amount of capital tied up, and so really speaking I should be wealthy. I have

never bet on a horse race in my life yet in farming we gamble high stakes, with stock running around on four legs that can and do die without warning.

In farming you succeed or fail by your own efforts, no one gives you orders, you make the decisions.

Farming land is very captivating and becomes part of you. I have been a tenant and I own some land and really speaking there is no difference. We are only custodians. We cannot take it with us. But it is a sense of pride to own a piece of land.

Would I live the life again? I certainly would, and I often wonder would I have been a different person had my mother lived. I am ever grateful for the life I have had but I regret giving the best years of my youth to an ungrateful father and stepmother.

This work has been undertaken over a couple of years, mainly because I am basically an outdoor person and usually take to writing when inclement weather drives me indoors mainly in winter, so there are times I may not write for a few months and then one is apt to lose the train of thought.

One day in the early part of the century a farmer was haymaking with some strong farm hands, loading hay with pitchforks. The farmer's little son wanting to help found himself a forked stick and copied the labourers, who started laughing and making fun of the little boy. The father seeing his little son was very crestfallen and sad, put his hand on his sons shoulder and said, "Well done, my son, you have done your bit, a giant could do no more".

I think perhaps there are lessons to be learned from this simple little tale.

Ernest E. Jones.