

Tickhill Local History Group.
The Living Memories of
Farmer Derrick Brookfield of Stoney Brigg Farm Tickhill .
Interview 31.08.06 by Rosemary Cornish

Originally, Derrick lived at Castle Folds Farm in Castlegate, Tickhill.

Derrick when I saw you last week you talked about your first memory – your first memory of farms.

Well, my first memory of farms is the amount of farmers there were in Tickhill I know I counted them up once and I think I got to 31 or 32.

Were all the farmers living in the village area or outside?

Yes, they were all in the village.

All in the village streets?

Yes, or just on the outskirts.

What did they do with all the muck and things like that?

It was spread on the land and things like that – there wasn't much artificial fertilisers then and no sprays at all in those days. It was putting the humus back into the soil.

You talked to me about helping your Granddad collect muck or pigswill.

The waste from the houses - and then we used to go and feed it to the pigs. That has stopped now, because they have banned swill feeding.

Your Granddad was a farmer before your Dad.

Yes, I'm the third generation and my son is the fourth.

And your son is....

David

David Brookfield, and he's the fourth generation farmer.

Yes.

And how many years does that cover?

Well.....

I think you mentioned to me that your Grandfather moved to Castle Folds in 1921.

Yes, that's right and he was farming before then.

So it's well over 80 years then isn't it?

Yes, at Beulah Farm down Sunderland Street which I think is Meadow Drive now. Well it was on the road side. My first recollection of farming was with my father I suppose and I remember going down fetching the cows up – the cows were kept down Water Lane and there is a photograph which I think you've had

Yes, I have it here

.....Walking up Water Lane.

Yes, I remember going with him to fetch the cows up in Summer.

Did you take the cows actually to the farm where you were living?

Yes. We used to walk past the Millstone Hotel down to Castle Folds Farm. We used to milk them by hand in those days – I remember doing that.

What did you do with the milk after you'd milked?

Some if it was taken round the village – we had our customers round the village. I used to go with the bike and deliver it.

What did you put it in when you delivered?

For a start I remember it was in a churn and you ladled it and then we went to bottles.

You actually put it into bottles.

We bottled it at home.

You had a proper bottling plant?

No, we put it straight into the bottle and had cardboard tops to put on. There are still some of those bottles about today.

Really ?

As we got older we took on extra help. My sister would help .

Can you remember how much you charged for the milk?

What I can remember is milk at 4 pence ha'penny a pint and a loaf of bread at 4 pence ha'penny. Now I'm sorry to say, today, if I get a loaf of bread it's 95p and the farmer is getting something like 16 or 17 pence a litre for milk. I'm sorry but if things go on as they are there'll not be a lot of milk left for this country.

No – the farmers won't be able to afford to...

Well, there's hundreds going out now – hundreds - it's diabolical but the supermarkets have got it tied up.

Yes. When your Granddad farmed Castle Folds Farm, did you actually live at the farm as well?

Yes, I was born at Castle Folds Farm.

You talked about helping to bring the cows in, but when you were a lad, what other jobs did you help with?

I know we always had a week off school in October to pick potatoes. This was during the war of course and I remember having a card and we had to have it marked and how many days we could have off and when we'd done those days we couldn't have any more. But we always used to have a week off school in October. I was talking to a lady who was in my class at school the other weekend and she said 'I can remember going and picking potatoes when we were at school'

Did you get any pocket money for it?

Oh yes, we never got paid when I was working at home!! (laugh)

Oh yes – you did it for love!

I remember going once for a week to another farmer and I got 10 shillings for a week of potato picking, I was rich! (laugh)

You talked about the cows on the farm but what other animals did you have on your farm?

We` always had a few pigs and sheep – we always had a flock of sheep. The sheep used to be on the grass during the summer and then we always used to grow turnips, and we'd what we used to call 'folded' them on the turnips during winter. We'd give them so much every 2 or 3 days. Then we had to go and move the nets we didn't have electric fence in those days. And we had to move the nets every 2 or 3 days through the winter – that was alright until you got about 6" of snow. When you rolled the nets up you couldn't lift them – It used to be a cold job, I remember that!

Did you keep the sheep just for meat or for wool?

Well, the wool was worth more than it is today, comparatively, but it was for the lambs – we used to sell the lambs. In fact I've been to a sale today in Bakewell, and there were eleven and a half thousand lambs in that sale today.

So you sold the lambs. Did you shear the sheep at all?

Yes, I learned to shear - me and a friend used to push bike it to Blyth and some chaps were shearing sheep there – I think it was the Ministry of Agriculture and it must have been - It would have been the end of the war so I'd only have been about 15 or 16 and we used to push bike it to Blyth when we'd finished work and they taught us to clip and we did that for a week and then I used to clip at home and then eventually I got to clipping other people's – that used to be a backbreaking job until you got into it. – Yes, I clipped sheep for quite a few years. Before that they used to hand clip them.

Right

We used to have a Young Farmers Club those days in Tickhill when I was about 14 and at school if not before and we used to go to..... you know – competing – between other young farmers and I used to be in the cattle judging team and we used to have cattle to judge, hedges to cut, ploughing, and during the Summer it was sheep shearing and I once remember going to Cawthorn where there were three in a team, which meant that they had two sheep to shear each. But when we got there we were used to machine shearing. John Salt was our shearer. One other person turned the machine by hand and the third caught the sheep and wrapped the fleeces. We still finished before the others. Then we got disqualified! (laugh)

Oh Dear! You talked about Tickhill shows. Did you do that kind of thing there?

Oh, Yes, Competitions, Cattle Judging..... and I remember one farmer – he lived at Loversall actually, was on our Advisory Committee of the Young Farmers and we used to go on a night and he used to teach us how to judge cattle, and then of course, you had to use a microphone for public speech which used to be nerve wracking when you're very young.

When was the Tickhill Show held?

I can't remember exactly – it would be during the summer.

Where was it held?

I know we had one at Eastfield and one down at the Castle field and I think we had one on the cricket field if I remember right but my memory isn't quite as good as it ought to be.

And was it well attended?

Oh Yes. There were horses and cattle and then as the Young Farmers we used to judge the cattle but I can't remember judging horses and the girls did baking and things like that, you know. We had some good times in those days– they were very thriving once and we used to love to compete with other Young Farmer's Clubs.

Did you ever win anything?

Oh yes, I come first in the cattle judging.

Very good. You said you were about 14-15 when you left school?

I was 13. I was nearly 14, my birthday was in August.

So you began to work on the farm full time?

Yes, full time from then.

I remember when I saw you last week, you were talking about ploughing. When you first started to plough you ploughed with horses. When you first left school you started to plough.

Yes, with horses.

What year would that be?

I was about 15 when I ploughed with the horses.

What year?

1945.

1945 you ploughed with horses.

Well I were driving horses when I were about 12 because during harvest I used to be helping I used to be leading the horses to the farm from the field

When you ploughed, could you describe to me how you ploughed a field with the horse.

Well, I always remember the first time I went ploughing my father said "I'll come and start you and set you a rig" and that meant you drive up one way and turn back the other way and leave an open furrow, then you shut it back in again so it cuts all the land underneath and he came and set the rig and I know the horses hadn't been done much and they shot up the field like mad and I hadn't done a very good job and I always remember, he said "do you want another rig setting?" and I said – "no, I've done it!" (laugh) Once you've been shown how, you know what to do. I enjoyed working with horses.

How many horses would you use for a plough?

Just 2 for a plough. You just have 1 line on each, you wouldn't have 2 reins or anything, you could just drive them with 1 line on each – 1 rope.

What other jobs would you do with the horses, besides ploughing?

Well, the horses did all the work like when you planted the crops, you used to harrow in between the rows and in hay time they were raking the hay, they used to run 3 horses in the binder. They'd be cutting with the binder and they'd to have 3 horses in that.

So life would have been very difficult if you hadn't had the horses.

Well, we didn't get a tractor until 1947. We were the last farm in Tickhill to get a tractor..... Mind you, you couldn't get them very well at the end of the war – they were in short supply I know my father ordered one and I think it took me a year – as a matter of fact, we were the first farmers in the village to get a Fergusson tractor. We were the first to get one in this area.

Did you find it easier to do things to do things with a tractor than with the horses?

I found it a lot easier – yes. There was one thing you noticed, because you walked miles and miles a day walking up and down, but when we got a tractor you were pulling 2 furrows instead of 1 it was a big difference.

And did you have a driving test?

Yes. I had a driving test. I brought the tractor out of Castlefolds's drive, went round to the Mill Dam, went round the seat that's there and back to the farm and that was my driving test.

And you passed?

Yes.

What did you grow on the farm? You talked about turnips and obviously the animals.

In the root crops we grew, potatoes, sugar beet, turnips and mangels. Now the turnips and mangels were to feed to the cattle and sheep, sugar beet went to the sugar beet factory and of course, we sold the potatoes. We dealt with a firm at Rotherham Dan Hopkinson & Sons – my grandfather dealt with them and I dealt with his grandson until he retired about 3 or 4 years ago. I never met him but we used to call each other by our first names. But then he retired and then we used to sell them at home then. Now we don't grow any at all.

Did you have a particular rotation system?

Yes, what they call a four year rotation. We grew wheat or oats and we'd undersow that with grass seed. The following year it had to be either made into hay or grazed with the sheep, and after that it would go in with wheat and after that it would be roots, and after roots it would be either wheat or oats. We didn't grow much barley in those days, it were oats to feed for the horses or cattle. We didn't grow much barley at all or a mixture of oats & barley and peas but of course, we cut them with the binder and stooked them and they dried in the field. Harvest time to be a busy time. We used to 'open the fields out', moving round the outsides with a scythe, tying the oat sheaves up by hand. For wheat, we just 'opened out' the corners.

You said something about putting the stooks in a particular way.

Yes, I think we stooked them North to South so the sun got 1 side in the morning and the other side in the afternoon but if they came wet we used to have to go and turn you know, move them to get.....I've spent some time stooping and turning them and pulling them over where they've been stood around, to dry them – there's a lot of work attached but of course we'd a lot more labour on the farms then

Of course! How many people did you employ on your farm?

Well my grandfather didn't do a lot when I'd left school, there was my father and we always had someone else – a horseman with us right up until we got – I think we'd got 2 tractors in the end and then we didn't have anyone with us then – only at busy times, you know – harvest times – we'd have someone else in.

Did you tell me that when you had harvest time you often helped each other out?

Yes, at threshing, and at harvest. Yes, we used to help one another when we could. We did more of that ...mind today I think it's coming to that again you're getting contractors because small farms can't afford the machinery.

No. When you first started farming, after you left school, could you give me an idea of what a typical farming day would be like back then.

Well, I remember I used to start work about 7 o'clock unless my father was away and then it was 6 o'clock. To fetch the cows – it used to take us ½ an hour to get the cows in from the field and then we'd be hoeing until about 8 or 9 o'clock at night - you know they used to be long days.

Long days in Summer

Yes in time of harvest they were long days. I never remember finishing much before 6.00.

Would you work 7 days a week?

Now – No. When I was younger it wasn't often we worked on a Sunday. No, even in harvest. I only remember once going and re-stooking some corn from being wet. I went turning the stooks to get them dry and we did that on a Sunday and my father never worked on a Sunday before then – no, there weren't many farmers who did work on a Sunday in those days but of course they weren't farming the acreage that they do today for a start – it's a different type of farming all together.

Thinking about the different seasons. Perhaps you could start at Spring and just give me an idea of what kind of thing happened at different times of the year on your farm.

Well, in Spring we'd set off with the land that most had to be ploughed and left over from Winter and then we'd start with the sowing of corn and then we'd go on to potatoes and in those days, of course, it was going up with the horse with the plough that made rows and then we used to get the manure in the carts and go up the rows throwing it out, then we'd go and knock it into the rows with forks, into the bottom of the rows and then plant the potatoes by hand. You know, you'd dot the potato bags up the field and then go and get a bucket and plant and when you got to the next bag you filled your bucket and carried on. Then you get the horses and cover them up again. And then with the roots we had a drill for drilling ... we had a drill that either drilled mangels which were a lot bigger seed or turnips which were small. We'd drill both – that was with the horse and then it was hay making time, but before that the roots would come up and you'd be going with the horse over them and then you had to what we called 'gapping' them, and you know if you wanted them 6" apart you'd drill a 6" hole and with mangels and turnips it was a 9" hole and you'd put the row through and just – well, you couldn't leave 1 plant, you left 2 or 3 and went through the rows like that and then when we were younger, when we'd left school we used to go on a night and where there were 2 or 3 you'd take 2 out and just leave 1 – you'd just leave 1 plant – what we used to call 'singling' and we used to go 'singling'. And then we'd be cleaning them and then we'd start hay making – the next job was hay making, depending on the weather, how that went, but that was cutting the grass with the horses raking it up with the horse – horse rake – which we've still got, then after that we'd have to go through the roots and clean them if there was any rubbish growing, also in between the rows and perhaps we'd do that 2 or 3 times through the Summer. Then it was harvest and we'd start cutting with the binder and stooking and then after that we'd be back to ploughing. In between all that, of course you looked after the sheep and milked the cows. And all the general day to day jobs that you have.

How did the war affect farming? You would only have been a lad then wouldn't you?

I don't think, in the village, anyway, it affected us too much but 1 thing I remember is they dropped some land mines in one of our fields on Limestone Hill and I know my father was ploughing the field and he went up to plough the field, and the army was guarding these land mines and they wouldn't let him in the field they said that they were magnetic and if he went near them on his

plough they could go off so he had to go back home and any road my Grandfather said 'I'll go and get it'. Now, it's one of the lads who was in the army told me this tale and he says 'Your Grandfather came up and they said 'I'm sorry, sir, you can't come in the field' and he says 'Thy's not going to stop me! I want that plough and I'm going to have it. – my lad wants to go ploughing and if he can't plough in this field he can plough somewhere else!' No...I remember we stopped taking sugar in tea during the war. And I mean there was no oranges or bananas and grapes - things that were imported, there was none of that. Sweets were on ration I remember as a child.

Did you have any directives from the Ministry of Agriculture, you know – things that you had to do extra?

Yes, we had to have permits to sell milk and eggs I remember that – we had to have a permit for that. How they kept tabs on what we'd got and what we'd sold I don't know. As far as everything else we kept us own chickens and we always kept pigs – we always killed a pig or 2 every year that was hung up in the kitchen.

Were you expected to grow anything different or extra?

We had to plough grassland – yes, the Ministry came and we had to plough grassland to grow food.

So did that make any difference to the animals that you looked after?

Well I suppose it cut us hay making down a bit. But I think we only had to plough a certain percentage a year.

So you still had enough hay to feed your animals?

No, I never remember being short of anything.

Now – you were involved in the farm and your Dad and Granddad. What about the rest of your family?

Well my sisters used to help with the milking, and they...,you know, fetching the cows up and perhaps drive the tractor during harvest because ..from stook to stook while we were leading.

Were they expected to work on the farm when they got older and left school as you chose to?

My sister who died, Brenda, she worked on the farm.....in the house and did the milk round but Doreen, she had a job in the office at Burtons for quite a long while and Gillian, well, she helped a bit on the farm.

What about your Mum, how much was he involved on the farm?

Well, she was involved quite a lot really because when we had the milk round she saw to the milk – bottling the milk – she saw to all that – this is why she had someone helping her in the house.

So that was her job for the farm?

At harvest time, she saw to the meals.

Of course

If we had extra help, the kids used to go out to the fields and she were packing teas up and threshing days they used to have bread & cheese for their lunch well for their...they used to stop about half past 10 and she used to ...a basket full of bread & cheese and tea - mugs of tea. I think all the farmer's wives helped out on the farm. I haven't mentioned much about threshing have I? Because when I left school, when I were young, the first job you had to do was when the threshing machine were out..... You've never seen a threshing machine working but you know, the corn goes in on the top and then goes through a drum which is a revolving drum that knocks all the corn out and the straw goes out one end and the grain goes out the other and all the chaff and everything goes through the bottom and that's got to be pulled away all the time while they're threshing so when you left school when you're young it was your job to move all this chaffthat used to be a job!! So gradually I graduated, I think when I was about 16 to corn carrying and they used to be 16 stones in those days. No wonder I've got a bad back. (Laugh)

Did you take any special precautions about lifting heavy weights?

No – we had what they called a hicking barrow, which had a chain round a barrel above, which when turned by handle, wound the bag of corn up to the height you wanted in order to get it across your shoulders.

So you didn't have to bend down?

Oh no – it weren't bad work it were just heavy work. Especially if ...most corn chambers used to be the most furthest thing away from where they were threshing. And the chaps who were feeding the machine would love to see you running if you were carrying corn. They were keeping you busy.

There have been a lot of changes in your farm over the years. You had your cows, you had your sheep, you had your turnips and sugar beet – you don't have your sugar beet now – you don't have any of those things now – how did it change – evolve over the years?

Well, it set off with the cows, really. And sheep – I forget what year it was now – it would have been the late 1970's I think or beginning of 80's – the milk had got to go in bulk by this time of course, we'd gone into machine milking - about 1948 we started milking cows by machine. Our land was more spread around the village than it is today, so with sheep we were always having to

move about - moving this. So I said 'look, we'll stop sheep and milk more cows if we've got to put a bulk tank in. You wanted at least 150 gallons to be worth while doing it. So then we went into more milk and more cows – we still kept a few roots on and we were still growing potatoes then. Then – I think it was about 1983 if I remember, we finished with milk and started doing beef. It was ...it became uneconomic for us to work with cows. We were working cows over the Summer, you know ½ an hour up and ½ an hour Well, 2 hours a day and so we went into beef then. And we've been in beef ever since.

Well, I'm a kind of 'townie'...What do you mean by 'going into beef'?

Well instead of milking we went towe were buying calves in and feeding 'em and then selling them at the market for meat and we did alright with it.

Where did you take them to market?

Well, Doncaster used to be our good market but then that was shut so us nearest market – well, there's 2 - either Newark or Selby. They're both about the same distance away. We were going to Newark and buying calves – we could go to Newark, sell the fat ones and buy calves the same day so we went to Newark for quite a while and we started keeping more beef, so we started buying them off a dealer then, calves. He used to go to market and buy them and we could never get the amount we needed at the markets we were going to and we hadn't the time to keep going so he supplied us with calves and then we stepped us beef up and at one time we were keeping 120.

Were you keeping them outside at all times?

No, they were inside.

So you started to keep them inside.

Calves and bulls.

Yes.

They used to inject them with protein. Now what did they call it? I forget what hormones, that was the point ...and so they stopped that and we they called it. And they stopped that – they banned us from using it – well we never did use it and that's when bull beef came in because they'd got the stopped then when bull beef came in because they'd already got the hormones there and they produced beef quicker then when you castrated them so that's ...in fact America, I think still use it.

Would that all be happening at the same time as you moved to this farm?

No – before.

Before.

Yes,

So at Castle Folds Farm you had your beef cattle.

We couldn't keep many there, we could only keep about 30-40 down there. And then we got chance to move where we are now, which is very fortunate, because, you know, any thing we bought was coming in articulated lorries and we couldn't get them down the old place.

The track was too narrow wasn't it?

Yes, and you couldn't get round the corners
We used to unload them on the road.....the cattle..... a lot of stuff.

So what year did you move here to Stoney Brigg?

'94 I think. We started building. I know we moved into the house in '96 but we got the cattle here before then.

And how many cattle do you keep now?

At the present moment only about 20 because David is now – my son – is gone into livery - horse livery.

Does he sell his packs of beef?

We still do that – we're still butchers. We started butchering – doing us own butchery in – I think it's 8 years since. We put a cold room in and a cutting room and we're very fortunate we've got a slaughterhouse at Wadworth. In ½ an hour from leaving us they're dead, so they are not stressed up. Then we hang them for 2 ½ to 3 weeks then we have a butcher come and – well we all muck in and cut them up and sell them as freezer packs, which has gone very well, actually.

Do you do your own marketing? Do you sell them from here?

Yes the delivery – we don't have a shop we deliver most of the freezer packs.

I know you advertise in the parish magazine.

David and Anna deliver most of it anyway.

And what's this livery you were telling me about – that David's doing?

Well, he went into this last year. He put a shed up and we've got several stables and he's filled those with horses .

Not your horses...

No. The people rent the stables and grass off us and they look after the horses themselves and ...it's going quite well, actually.

So, is this the face of modern farming?

Well, it's what they call diversifying isn't it? On our sized farm – very near 200 acres – you couldn't make a living on that and so he's had to diversify. It's funny because I was reading in the farming press this last weekend that someone had been writing that soon, farmers will have to start diversifying again and grow food! (Laugh) There's 60 million people in this country remember and we've had the driest summer - not only us but on the Continent as well and, well, you know, there's more and more mouths to feed and eventually, mind you I know Russia has a lot of land

So you'll have to start rotating again. (Laugh)

Yes, It's funny that, Farmers will soon have to start diversifying and grow food.

Do you get any input from the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries is that what it's called?

They're running us.

They're running you?

Yes.

So they are telling you what you should be doing?

You know –nowadays we've got some land that is in what they call the Countryside Stewardship Scheme. Now that land is left to grass which it was years ago and we don't fertilise or spray it only unless there's some ragwort and that sort of stuff, you're not supposed to let it run to seed There's so many acres in that which he gets paid for. And now, if you leave - we leave 2 metre strips round where there's hedges, unploughed, and I do think they pay a little bit towards that. Actually with this new system, I'm out of it because, you know, David runs the farm now. I don't have a lot to do with it. I'm supposed to be retired.

But you still help.

Yes.

Do you ever see yourself being totally retired?

No! I wouldn't like to be anyway.

Well, you told me your Granddad had a little strip of field didn't he when he was supposed to be retired.

He grew vegetables and took them round the village. In fact he was the first person I remember who sold sprouts. He used to cut them off at the bottom and sell them at so much a stick. Now I believe I saw that down at our greengrocers this last year!

Yes, very popular.

He said 'they can pull their own and I can stand at the fire instead of me getting frost bite!'

Is there anything else you'd like to add to what you've said that we haven't covered? Any little memories?

Is there anything that we put down the other day?

We've roughly covered everything but you said that thoughts may have come to your mind

Well, it was the Young Farmer's Club that I forgot to mention.

You were quite involved weren't you with the Union?

I was involved with the NFU, sorry, yes. Oh, yes, I was chairman of Doncaster for 2 years, and then I was chairman at the executive meeting at Leeds – I did my 2 year stint on that. That involved quite a lot of travelling and I enjoyed it very much because, you know, you met a lot of people. I met some grand chaps. I think farmers are a breed of their own. You know, if you get 2 farmers together, that's all they can talk is farming. No, but I used to travel about quite a bit when II remember going to a meeting when BSE started and I didn't know anything about it. Well, I got to the meeting and I hadn't listened to the radio that day and BSE had started and that was a traumatic thing wasn't it really?

It must have been for you.

Yes,

Did it affect this farm particularly?

No. Mostly it was cows that was affected. Older cows. And we never had – most of our beef are killed by the time they get to 14 month old. You know, there's not many over 14 months.

Yours are kept inside anyway aren't they?

Yes.

They're not in contact.

And, I think this disease came from feeding bone meal which we – we don't buy - the only thing we ever bought with our cattle is calf milk. And a few cartons when they're younger. We grew us own feed – barley and peas – we started feeding peas when they started with this – what do they call it –

GM crops?

Yes. Well they started genetically modifying and we used to feed soya bean for protein and then they started with this GM soy bean so I said to David ' we'll grow us own peas'. People are not happy with this genetically modified stuff so I said that if we grow us own peas, you know, we're not using that, and that's what we do. Our cattle are fed on barley and peas and silage

Which is organically produced.

That is, yes, Very near. Not quite – we do use fertiliser and sprays on the corn. No. Farming's altered tremendously in my lifetime -it can't alter that much in another 50 years really. Well we say this but things do – you'll be getting tractors which drive themselves, but it'll be a long way off I think.

Would you say you've enjoyed being a farmer?

I've been very fortunate. I played hell about it, sometimes, with the weather ...but I've been very fortunate because I've enjoyed doing it.

You don't wish you'd done something else?

No. I can remember, Margaret, my wife, saying years ago, when miners were getting a big rise, and I says to her then, 'Look, I don't care how much they're getting - me, I wouldn't go down the pit. I think they deserve every penny they get, as far as I'm concerned'. I'm very fortunate, out in the fresh air and it's always different – the seasons are always different and you're not doing the same job. You know, you're always looking forward and planning.. You know, I'm just sorry that farming has been in the doldrums these last few years but 7 lean years and 7 good ones and I reckon we should be coming to the 7 better ones soon. That's my opinion anyway.

Well Derrick, thank you very much that's been very, very interesting.