

Footprint to Tyre Tread

and

Other Memories

By

Ernest E. Jones.

Written 1999.



Edited and first printed by Peter Bartlett. 2008.

Contents.

Footprint to Tyre Tread	Page	3
Nature and Farming	Page	24
The Pudding Stone	Page	33
Feeding the Dairy Cow and Other Stock.	Page	35
Other Livestock that I have Kept	Page	44
Our Family Farm	Page	47
Other Booklets	Page	49

Footprint to Tyre Tread.

It is safe to say or more aptly to write that this is the age of space and the jet engine. Just a few moments ago as I was contemplating how I should start this personal account of the title, "Foot Print to Tyre Tread", on 7th. January 1999. Here in the study at Merrylea even in this very modern world it is very peaceful and quiet, and I think we are indeed very lucky to live in such a very beautiful part of the country, and this is one of the reasons why apart from when duty calls Winifred and I are happy to stay put; and as I was sitting here the peace was shattered as a jet aircraft roared over head and was soon gone and out of sight. It may be true to say; that old men look back and remember and young men look forward and contemplate, yet as our daughter Anne once said; "if you do not know where you came from, you do not know where you are going". So I am going to look back and hopefully build a story.

There are I feel certain situations that trigger one's train of thought for a subject. On January 1st, New Years Day just past I drove as usual the 3½ miles down to the farm for the morning milking, granted it was early about 6 am, but the thing that struck me was the stillness and the quiet, it was if the world had died. There was not a sign of human life in any shape or form, even the M4 motorway was deserted, nothing moved, I have thought since then that, that was how it must have been before man arrived, although not entirely as at that time most of the human race would have been sleeping off the effects of seeing in The New Year. It was not a dark world, mankind had left a lot of lights burning, the wonder of electricity! Mankind as clever as it is can easily get things out of perspective cocooned in our own little life, to loose sight of how big the world really is, even in parts of this small island on the remote hills and mountains. Some years ago one of our sons, David and I climbed Scafell Pike and what a desolate and inhospitable place it was, not even moss grew there. Just for the sake of making a story I will suggest that when this U.K. of ours rose up out of the sea and life began, here again better not to get into detail, but did man or animals come first, they were created together with vast forests and some open spaces, and animals would move from place to place in search of food and water. Now it is a fact, if you are at the edge of a field and want to cross to a point across it and there is dew or snow on the ground, having crossed in what you believed to be a straight line if you look back at the tracks you have left, it will not be a straight line, it will follow the contours of the land and be quite crooked. When animals walk it is just the same so early man would follow these

paths because they were ready made by animal foot prints, they would be the origin of roads. Unlike the road making of today where obstacles like hills are moved and water is bridged over, years ago roads or tracks followed the contours of the land and avoided any obstacles, this is the reason why old roads wind so much, they would have been old animal tracks that have been widened.

Early man would have followed these footpaths in the hunt for food, and one would imagine fairly naked except for the animal skins they wore for warmth. Walking or running were the only means of getting around, there was no such thing as a wheel. So one would imagine that they would not travel far, although what is surprising, if two or more people set off walking, and just for illustration if one stopped to remove a stone from their shoe or some similar reason and the others walk on it is surprising how far they will have gone during an apparently short period of time. Then man having the gift of intelligence, seeing that animals with four legs could out pace them, and then man jumped on the animals back and found through trial and error that the horse was the most suitable animal to assist them in travelling longer distances, faster. Although it is said that a dog is a man's best friend, if the truth be known, mankind owes a very great deal to the horse. I am an old man now and I can remember when we worked horses on the farm, and if you took the horses out of farming in those days you would be back to prehistoric times. One only has to recall the king who said, "A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse". The sort of horses man uses to give all the punters so much excitement on the racecourse are like so many of our animals very far removed from the animals of prehistoric times. The prehistoric horse was quite small and once man had a halter made out of wild clematis (old man's beard) his means of transport was much improved. It is so hard for us to realise how very difficult even small tasks were in those days.

Lighting a fire, how wonderful is a box of matches, compared to the different methods of creating friction and thereby heat, even the basic method of getting firewood, we reach for a well sharpened axe, or these days the wonder of the chain saw. One of the great advances for early man was the wheel; once the wheel was established together with the primitive cart and then the horse was hitched up to the cart and man became mobile and was able to move his possessions as required with less effort. This led to the establishment of the paths and animal tracks that were used to get from place to place. Man soon found out those wheels needed a flat smooth surface not only for the well being of the user but also for the

durability of the conveyance; we probably owe much to the Romans in this respect. If it had not been for the advent of the 1939 war I would say that the years from 1930 to 1960 were some of the most pleasant in the history of the United Kingdom. My father who was born in 1889 would tell of the wonders of the invention of the bicycle, and how much simpler it was than the horse, they were known as the iron horse. He grew up with the coming of the motor car, and how everyone tried to be in front in the dry weather because if you were following another car the dust from the roads made the experience most unpleasant. To maintain the roads heaps of large stone were left on the side of the roads for the roadmen to break up with sledge hammers into a size suitable for filling up the pot holes. Then the Scotsman McAdam invented tarmac and the roads took on a new meaning. But how can I really do the coming of the roads justice in a few penned pages. From the very early days of the wheel to the roads that I first knew makes my life time almost a mockery. Yet I can well remember the main Chepstow to Newport road and all the bends that were in the road from Hayes Gate to Pwllmeyric that over the years have been removed with the straightening of this length of road, this is before the garage which is now known as the “Jet”, garage and the drive of Rosegarth which was not built then was in fact part of the main road. At Hayes Gate there was a lodge at the end of the drive to St. Pierre, this lodge was knocked down when the M4 Motorway was built and the bridge was built to take the A48 over the motorway and the entrance to St. Pierre was re-sited. The bends on Parkwall Hill were far more severe than they are now and cars regularly went over the hedge, and where the Indian restaurant and industrial units are was just a cottage. Killcrow Hill has been much improved and at Crick the road was the forecourt of the garage. The dual carriage way from Crick to Caerwent was built and the village of Caerwent was bypassed. The road from Caerwent to the Wentwood Inn has been straightened and widened and the road by the refuse depot; which was a quarry years ago; had some very severe bends in it and it was very narrow, the lay-by by The Cayo was the main road. I well remember the straight stretch of road from the Tabernacle Chapel to the Rock Farm, which is now the Rock and Fountain. My father and I drove to Newport with a pony and trap in the early 1930’s when the road had not long been made, the verges had been reseeded and we stopped to gather some red clover and grass for the horse to eat while being stabled at the Kings Head in Newport. Before this the stretch of road from the Tabernacle to the Rock went around past Llanvaches School. There are several lay-bys on

the Chepstow to Newport road that were in fact the original main road; all these changes from the original animal tracks have been made to satisfy the needs of mankind.

It is easy to understand that before the roads and the motor car, if we refer to old church records most people married within the community, many being baptized, married and buried in the same church. The mode of transport that must have had a dramatic effect on life in general was the advent of the steam locomotive and the coming of the railways. The majority of the railways are built in a straight line and there must have been much opposition to this when for instance the line was to cut through a farm, one that comes to mind is Pill Farm at Caldicot where the main line is very near the farmhouse. It opened up a whole new industry that had to provide not only the railways but also all the rolling stock to go with it. The old village of Caldicot was a railway village, many of the families depended on the railway in some shape or form. One event which had a very dramatic impact was the building of the Severn Tunnel, which was quite a feat in that day and age.

There was something very special about the steam locomotive and I think that the United Kingdom can feel very proud for being able to produce such a successful means of transport. The engine driver and his fireman could transport all those goods and passengers over great distances. Even when I lived at Green Meadow farm it was good to hear the trains on the London to South Wales line. But then with progress there were changes, oil took over from coal so the fireman whose job it was to shovel the coal into the fire to enable the boiler to produce the steam which drove the train forward was no longer needed. Then Dr. Beeching came along with his axe and closed a lot of railway lines that were deemed to be uneconomic; it would be easy to write in favour or against this action, and when listening to the radio and hearing the road reports or the reports of serious accidents and the chaos caused, was this closure of railway lines such a good idea.

As far as my family are concerned they were very much involved in the railway, my Grandfather had six sons, he had a farm but he also had a franchise to haul goods to and from Abercarn station using horse and carts or wagons, my father and his brother were employed doing this job. My other grandfather was affected by the railway in that railwaymen were a good source of casual labour for work on the farm. Coming more up to date when I worked at home with land at Caldicot we too were pleased to have help from the railwaymen. There is a move afoot to try and get people to travel by rail and take the pressure off our crowded roads. Freight or goods is a strange argument, in the heydays of

the railway, factories and mines were closely linked to the railway system, then it was mainly heavy industry whilst today we have mostly light industries, the big articulated lorries are loaded direct and can deliver over a wide area and with the Channel Tunnel deliveries can be made anywhere in Europe.

The railways did have an impact on farming even in my life time; on the dairy farm the milk produced was needed in the growing towns, more than that which could be supplied by the farms that were local to the towns. In the villages someone would be sent to the local farm with a jug to get milk; then as the villages grew it became worthwhile for the farmer to take the milk in a can or small churn to the village and ladle the milk direct into the housewife's jug with a measure, usually a "Gill", which was a quarter of a pint. Then as the towns grew milk became a business, the local dairy man came into existence, and he would buy the milk from the farmer and then deliver and sell it to the households. Also in some areas especially parts of London there were town dairies where the cows were actually kept.

As for the railways they ran special milk trains, the farmer would take his milk usually by horse and cart to the nearest station, in our case this was Portskewett, in those days the standard churn held 17 gallons and was supplied by the farmer with his name on the churn. My father had E.A. Jones, Portskewett on his churns and as a lad I enquired, why Portskewett when he did not live there, he explained that if they got lost on the railway, they would come back to Portskewett. We did use the rail service a lot, animal feed came in covered vans and there was a time limit to get these vans unloaded, we also sent sugar beet by rail, this we had grown at Court House Farm at Caldicot in the late 1940's. Horses were also transported by rail in special padded vans with a separate compartment for the groom who would accompany the horses. We used to send hunter horses from Chepstow Station and it can be quite a job with some temperamental types. Another dodgy business was taking a young horse to the station for the first time which if you consider for a moment, a horse born and reared in the country in peace and quiet would become quite nervous when it encountered a steam train, possibly an express roaring through the station or a train starting off from the station hissing steam and smoke and then a shrill blast on the whistle, to a young horse this was a horrible monster.

There were also special trucks for cattle, and at Severn Tunnel Junction there were special pens for holding cattle. The cattle trucks would draw alongside these pens which would be at the same level as the trucks and the cattle would just walk into the trucks, it was

quite a humane way of handling cattle in that unlike a motor lorry there is not the swaying about. The drawback was that in those days most cattle had horns, and cattle can be very cruel to each other. There is no doubt that rail transport was a very successful means of transport not only on this little island but in many countries of the world.

In the early days of the village transport was not a problem as they were largely self contained, life mostly hinged around the farm and its needs. It is when industry came into being and people became more mobile, and men started to seek work further a-field, at distances from home that were too far to walk, that the need for better means of transport was apparent. This is when the bicycle became part of the workman's tools of trade, and to be truthful the bicycle was a very economical means of transport, a persons legs operate very similar to the piston of an engine, it is also very healthy exercise and comparatively cheap to maintain. As with most things there is a downside, rain and cold winds make this means of travel most uncomfortable. In the early days there were only adult machines and the art of riding a bicycle has to be learnt, it is just the matter of balance. The early models had solid rubber tyres, marvellous in that there were no punctures to worry about but on a rough road they could be a bit uncomfortable. Then man invented the pneumatic tyre and tube and that really was a revolution not only for bicycles but also for motor vehicles which previously had all been built with solid tyres. During the 1939/45 war it was impossible to buy tyres or tubes and I had to keep a Morris 10 van on the road every day and in those days before the M.O.T. you just kept on using the tyre almost down to the tube. When the walls of my tyres had fractured and I would stitch them together with thin wire and put an old piece of tube in to protect the inner tube. Bearing these shortages in mind today when I see the hundreds of scrapped tyres on our silage clamp it almost makes me want to cry. We live in a different age today, the vehicles we had could not possibly produce the speed of today and the powers that be have to legislate to deal with vehicles on the motorways driven at speeds up to and exceeding 100 mph, at these speeds a faulty tyre can be lethal. In the 1930's a lot of young men had the ambition to own a motorbike which was a natural advance for man to make, we had the bicycle so why not put an engine to power it and just before the 1939/45 war the British motor cycle industry was one of the finest in the world, the models I remember although I never owned one were, Norton, Triumph, Raleigh, A.J.S., B.S.A. and others that I can not remember, a Japanese motorbike was not heard of then. My father had a motorbike and sidecar in the 1920's which I can just remember. In 1939 these factories were producing

motorbikes for use in the war effort, and some turned over to war production. Then the war ended no thanks to the Japanese who had treated some of our service men absolutely disgracefully.

The Japanese then started to produce light weight and cheap motorbikes and they did eventually cause the demise of our motorcycle industry. Although I hate to say so they produced these little petrol engines for all manner of uses and they are very good. The British did produce some wonderful stationary engines, the Lister 1½ h.p., engine is a legend in its own right, built solid and heavy, and the Villiers was another wonderful engine. At home at one period father bought a “Power”, petrol/T.V.O., 3½ h.p. engine to drive a chaff cutter and a corn mill, quite an early model and it was very heavy for the horse power it produced. To start it you cranked it by hand, the electronics were by a trip magneto and there was a small vessel that you filled with petrol which was drawn up by suction and once going and when the engine was hot enough you switched over to T.V.O. it was not easy to start. These days I have a couple of small petrol engines, Japanese of course, they are very light and they perform very well. There are many people who say we should forget the past and by the look of the amount of Japanese cars that are on the road a lot have. It is strange, I myself have not forgotten and yet I bought and drove a Subaru for nearly nine years, this was a pickup truck and it was on the road every day, and it never let me down. Now I drive a Ford Mondeo and a Susuki Jeep, both are really good. I have had a driving licence since May 1940, I have it somewhere and luckily I have never had an endorsement, I was driving on the farm from the age of about 12, there I drove an ex army lorry made by Guy Motors, for its motif it had a Red Indian Chief with his feathers and it was a model before the ball change gear lever, what was known as a gate change, you put the gear in the desired slot, to get to reverse there was a spring loaded brass knob that had to be pushed, the registration number was MK 43. There was no such thing as a self starter, starting was by a crank handle in the front of the lorry, no signals when turning you put your hand out.

At one time we had an early Standard van, it was in the days when you bought the engine and chassis and took them to a coachbuilder and he built the body you required. Car owners today do not realise what a wonderful job the motor engineers have done, the modern car or pickup truck in capable hands is a credit to the designers and engineers. At one time the windscreen wipers worked by suction from the engine rather on the principle of a bicycle pump and the early indicators popped out of the side like illuminated arms, the

glass was just ordinary glass, quite lethal in an accident, and now at the end of the century the motorcar has become something of a menace. To accommodate them the motorways have cut through our beautiful countryside, the volume of traffic has blocked some of our towns, to such an extent that many towns have had to be bypassed. In spite of the efforts by the manufacturers to make them thief proof, hundreds of motor vehicles are stolen and often end up in accidents when innocent people get killed.

The latest craze is the mobile phone with drivers trying to use these devices whilst driving and sometimes this results in accidents. One thing I am very much against is driving after consuming alcohol, this is criminal. I believe any one convicted of driving whilst under the influence of drink and was involved in a fatal accident should be banned from driving for life, and by that I mean they should never be allowed to drive again. The same goes for any criminal who is convicted of a crime and is sentenced to imprisonment, it should be fair and just to match the crime, the offender should be told very plainly that if they abide by the rules they will be released, if on the other hand they resort to damaging prison property so much will be added to their sentence. I loathe any form of torture or cruelty, but when people break the law of the land let it be upheld and not shrink from seeing justice carried out in full.

In this day and age the majority of people in the U.K. live in towns and this results in many not understanding the farming way of life. Last evening there was a programme on television, "A grain of truth", which featured Oliver Waltson, where he admits to getting rich on subsidies and is paid for not planting some of his land,(this is known as Set Aside), and is seen driving an ex army tank that he owns, like a lunatic. I would not blame the townspeople if they were to dislike farmers even more than ever having watched that programme. There is no doubt that there are some large arable farmers who have been paid too much subsidy but it is difficult to adjust the amount especially now that we are in the E.E.C. and at the same time being fair to the small farms. The point that bothers me about Waltson and others who seem to acquire large sums of money is that when I was farming and this was my only source of income, when the accounts showed a profit the Inland Revenue soon sent me a tax demand. I remember at one time I was milking 60 cows and the profit from 20 of these went to the Inland Revenue. There are farmers, who have no regard for anything except for profit, but all farmers are not like that and I would remind all people that we all descended from fishermen or farmers and that is not difficult to work out.

So we have come a long way from the prehistoric man tracking animals for food and for fur, to the modern motorcar but then in earlier times man was very clever in using water to get from place to place. Water is a very powerful force and it is not unlike fire, a good servant but a bad master and in certain parts of the country manmade canals were a very popular method of transporting all sorts of goods, and this was very sound from an environmental point of view as the barge was pulled by a horse much less polluting than a heavy goods lorry, but when the economics and speed of delivery is considered then the lorry wins.

There is a great hue and cry about global warming, as far as farming is concerned we could go back to the days when the horse was the source of power on the farm, it would take a few years to breed the necessary number of horses and to train the men to use them but the costs of producing food would increase quite significantly. The intensive units of battery hens, broiler and turkey units could be replaced with more traditional methods of production this again would be more environmentally friendly but again more costly. On the arable side we could revert to the use of the dung fork and the hoe to reduce the environmental impact. The result of this would be that prices would have to increase, there would be a shortage of some home produced foods and as happens now imports would flood in some produced in a manner that the British people would deplore in far from ideal conditions and of dubious wholesomeness.

I have been a working farmer all my life and I have seen some pretty tough times and real hardship, having said that there are men I admire very much. I have been fortunate to have visited the coastline of this island of ours and looked out across the sea; all that can be seen is the sea and nothing visible beyond it and there have been men who have set out to explore beyond the horizon, those were real men. Even today men set sail to catch fish and they have to face hardship and dangers, but in my case the thing that kept me going was the knowledge that the farmhouse was there, safe and solid and secure from the storm. The other breed of men that I admire are the coal miners, although conditions are better now than in the 1920's when they had to grovel in cramped conditions in the dust and grime of the coal with its many dangers and all for a very scant reward, they were real men who were exploited.

Going back to man's use of water I am convinced that better use could be made of it's power to drive turbines to generate electricity, but then if the economics say that it is

cheaper to use coal, oil or gas then environmental issues are ignored. As for a person swimming in the water, if God intended man to swim he would have given him fins, but it is logical for a man once in the water to propel himself along and it is not unreal. It could be said that it is unreal for man to fly again if God meant man to fly then he would have given him wings.

Just to dwell on water for a while, the old saying is very true, “that you never miss the water until the well runs dry”. There are many people who do not value water until there is none, mankind and some animals can live for quite a long time without food, but they can only survive for a short time without water. Many of our old farms were built near a source of water.

Mankind is its own worst enemy and we could learn a lot from nature, in nature if a plant is weakly pests will set upon it and the weak are weeded out, similarly if any animal, bird or fish is in some way deformed or weakly they die out and the strongest and healthiest males predominate. In prehistoric days one can imagine that the biggest and most powerful cave man would father most of the children. Now we go to the extreme and keep alive human life that in their own interests it may be better for nature to take its humane course. In the infant world when it is obvious that a child will be a burden forever would it not be far kinder to let it pass away peacefully and then to concentrate efforts on the health and well being of other children, especially protection of those children who suffer abuse and cruelty from their parents.

These islands of the United Kingdom really are a wonderful place to live, but it is being spoilt by some of the masses of people who now live here. If we go back to the days when life centred around villages and farms, water was a great source of power to drive the corn mills and the wind powered the wind mills, wood was used for heat and tallow for light, the horse was the mode of transport; although they were days of hardship they were also days of great contentment. Most of our problems are man made, the plain fact is that these little islands are now over populated and the plans are to build ever more houses which in turn means more roads, more cars more sewage to dispose of, need for more electricity and water, and still we allow an unlimited number of immigrants to come here.

In my limited life span I realise it only too well being a farmer that death is inevitable, something that can happen at any time. Only a few months ago a cow came through the parlour, I washed and milked her, she ate her feed and she left the parlour as

normal. I went on working in the parlour and became aware of a disturbance outside in the cattle yard; I went out and found that this cow had just died in the yard.

I know only too well to just be very grateful for the blessings that every day brings, that is one reason why I only sleep for the very minimum period, and life is meant for living, sleeping is just a waste of time. I just wonder if anyone will ever read this or even be able to understand the writing and if they will maybe think me a bit of a religious crank. But to be honest I think a lot of people ask too much of our Creator, going back if God intended man to fly he would have given us wings, and if he intended us to smoke he would have made him with a flue. I think God created man and gave him brains to use in whatever way man chose to use them.

To give man credit air travel has developed to a stage where I find it hard to understand, bird flight I can understand and this understanding was helped by the television programme, (Life of Birds). But I am not able to really understand how those huge aircraft with all that weight can lift themselves off the ground and propel themselves and their cargo over such long distances is to me quite remarkable. Especially to someone like me who has never flown, it is quite rare in people of my children's generation to find someone who has never flown. In my memory of the times I grew up in ordinary people if they were lucky went to one of the seaside holiday resorts for a week in the summer, now these days it is quite common for just about anyone to drive to the airport and fly off to all parts of the world, and not only in the summertime, winter holidays are now quite popular and I suppose if one stops to think about it why should that not be so. It all comes down to the type of person that you are and what you expect out of life, because in the end we all end up just the same.

There are those with itchy feet who have to be always going places and seeing things other than those sights and experiences which are near at hand, and providing that they have the necessary finance honestly acquired there is nothing wrong with that and air travel has made the world so much smaller. Yet as with all aspects of human life there is a downside. Aircraft can be used in warfare and over the years they have and still do cause terrible devastation and suffering, if only people could live together in peace and harmony with each other and all this wasted effort put to the benefit of everything. Then we have the wonder of the hot air balloon, what would the cave man have thought if one of these craft appeared to

him, he would probably have regarded it as some sort of monster and he would have been terrified, there would have been a similar reaction if a helicopter had appeared.

We accept all of these things because we grew up with them. We are now into the craze of the mobile phone and here again this is something which is beyond the intellect of the countryman to understand how it works. Not all that many lifetimes ago to get a message to someone meant an athlete had to run with it or it would have been taken on horseback, now with the mobile phone messages can be sent to and from almost anywhere in the world and it is instant. Now the mobile phone is a great comfort for a lady driver out on her own to able to call for help if she needs to, or to send messages in an emergency, this really is to me a wonder of telecommunications. But when school children take them to school and their parents ring them up during lessons that is plain gross stupidity. Mankind is a dissatisfied mortal, always looking for change which in itself is good in that that is how we progress and what changes have evolved from the life of the family in the cave dwellings.

As I have written before I own part of the ancient village of Runston and the remains of the foundations of their primitive houses are still visible and this often leads me to wonder what their lives were like. In my job I have been very cold and very wet yet eventually I was always able to return to the house where there was warmth and dry clothes and comfort. In earlier days there was an abundance of clean air and wildlife but there was the down side. I have tried to imagine what prehistoric life was like and it does not bear thinking about. Simple things that we take for granted today were just not available, they were not able to turn on a tap not even for cold water, the time pieces we have today the battery operated clock, we can pick up a pen and paper, write a letter and place it in the post box and it will in time reach its destination often in some far off land. As the natural light fades we are able to press a switch and the room is filled with artificial light, we have glass for our windows to let in the light and to keep out the wind, the rain and unwanted natural intruders. All these simple things we take for granted without appreciating how fortunate we are to live in this world of ours, and I give thanks at the end of each day for my good fortune. I am saddened when I see the stupid destruction by vandalism and warfare of houses and property.

The latest is the curiosity of mankind with outer space now that is marvellous in its way yet quite beyond my comprehension. There are indeed some very clever people living today, they are I suppose the equivalent of Columbus and the like who respond to the challenge of the unknown whether it is sensible or not is another matter. If all the time effort

and money put into space travel could be used to enable the under privileged to live a better life this would make more sense to me. But how do you reconcile the thoughts of a countryman such as me with someone with ambition who wants to walk on Mars.

Our journey we could say as we get older is coming to an end, there are scores of very able people who probably think along these lines because after all that is written, no matter what the subject it is just ones thoughts put down on paper some of it is factual and some imaginary.

We are in the age of the robot where many tasks are done by robots. This is fine for repetitive jobs in a factory which in the past have been sheer drudgery, but the introduction of the robotic cowman milking cows is to me very dubious. A robot driving a tractor and guided by a satellite way up in the sky is all very well yet I wonder sometimes if the people who have been replaced by these developments would not have been much happier doing this work.

Maybe I have exhausted my thoughts on this subject, but once I have started there is no knowing how much will be written detailing my thoughts and observations. I have written I feel not for the benefit of my generation, this is not new to them, but we are fortunate to have ten grandchildren and maybe one or more of them may happen to come across these writings one day and they might be interested enough to read them.

We are all different, some like to delve into the past, others live just for today and some look very much to the future. If one of my grandparents had written about life in their day and given their thoughts I would have found that very interesting reading. I never saw my fathers parents, but I do just remember my mothers father when I visited them at the Mardy Farm at Coedkernew west of Newport, I also remember by mothers mother but we did not have much to do with them and I wonder if there was some family friction caused by my father remarrying after his first wife, my mother died.

Although interested in the past I have tried in farming to be forward looking, my own father was a pioneer in some respects quite unprofitably. In farming to take on board all the new systems and equipment would cost a fortune? There are a few apt sayings that sum up the situation; one is, "Be not the first by whom the new is tried nor yet the last to cast the old aside", and another is, "Let your eyes be the judge, your pocket your guide and your money the last thing you part with".

At this point in time March 2nd 1999 I have recently had x-rays on both my knees having been troubled with arthritis for a number of years in both of them, the result is that I may have to have a replacement right knee joint, at present this joint is quite painful and the most annoying part is that it is slowing me up and making certain tasks quite difficult. The reason for writing this last passage is not to expose my personal problems, but it has set me thinking that these days life on the farm is so vastly different to what we endured years ago. For my part I have probably walked thousands of miles, take farming in the 1930's with horses, the first time I was left in charge of a team of horses was when I was about fourteen years old. I was left to chain harrow some grassland in the springtime, incidentally a job that I was happy to be doing. Naturally you walked behind the team holding the plough lines, these light weight ropes to control the horse team that worked abreast, in those days there was pride in how straight you could leave the pattern of the harrowing on the grass and there was a skill in this especially on side-land fields, turning at the headlands had to be done with care if you turned too short then the harrows would turn upside down. The work was very similar harrowing on ploughed land the only difference was that the harrows were drag harrows not chain harrows, drag harrows were designed to break down the clods of earth to prepare a fine seedbed, rolling again was all walking behind the roller to control the horses, the only implement in arable farming that had a seat on it was the spring tine cultivator, it also had a lever to lift the tines when you turned at the headland.

Strange to say most of the work dealing with haymaking used implements that had a seat on them, the exception was the hay sweep and the carts and wagons used to haul the hay with a team of horses working in tandem and the lead horse would be led. Most of the work when growing potatoes or root crops involved walking behind the implements and controlling the horses with the plough lines. The bouts these are the rows in which the potatoes were planted were made with a bouter with the man walking behind similarly with the horse hoe to cut out the weeds between the rows the man walked behind controlling the horses with the plough lines. Farmyard manure would have been placed in the bouts from a dung cart before the potatoes were planted, the potatoes would be planted and the bouts would then be split back to cover the potatoes. All this work involved walking. Similarly when hand hoeing root crops you walked to the field and if it was not too far you walked home again for dinner walking back to the field for the afternoons work, if the distance was long then you would take your lunch to the field and walk home at the end of the day.

No matter what the job was you walked there summer and winter. Quite often in the winter there would be a rick of hay that had been made in the summer on a sheltered dry lying field to be fed to out wintering store cattle, and you would walk out to this rick and cut out enough hay to feed the cattle using a special hay knife and then carry the hay to the cattle, these would be the fields that would derive great benefit from chain harrowing in the spring to level out the hoof marks. If these store cattle were beef stores twelve to fifteen months old that had been out wintered come the spring these are the cattle that beef finishers would pay a good price for, as unlike yarded cattle they could be turned straight out onto grass and would not suffer a setback even if the weather changed for the worse, that is wet and cold as they were used to such conditions.

A job that I did a lot of walking whilst doing was using the seed fiddle. For its purpose it was a wonderful piece of equipment, you carried the contraption strapped to your chest, it had a hopper to hold the seed which flowed through a variable aperture onto a metal disc, this disc was spun using a bow with leather belt which was wrapped around the spindle of the disc and this bow you moved in harmony with your walking. As your right foot went forward you moved your right arm away from your body and the spinning disc would spread the seed over a five yard width, then as your left foot went forward the right arm was brought back to your body and this again would spin the disc. Marking sticks were placed at five yard intervals across the field to guide you and the system worked quite well. We also sowed kale and rape seed in the same way.

On one occasion we ploughed a fourteen acre field on Caldicot moor and father decided we would plant it with rape and as the amount of seed is quite small my father said to me, "you had better sow it double cast". This means that you sow half the seed walking in one direction and the other half walking at right angles to the first line of sowing, by this means all the land would receive some seed, now that means walking a total of twenty eight acres at five yard intervals, that is a heck of a lot of walking.

In the days of the horse, in the winter time they were kept in stables but in the spring and summer you would have to walk out into the fields and catch the horse and bring them in to harness them up ready to go to work. When any sheep and cattle that were out in the fields needed attention then you walked to them. Also no matter what the job was if it was laying or trimming a hedge, thatching a rick or erecting a fence then you walked to your work carrying the tools and the materials you would need.

So you will see from all this that the knees were called upon to do a lot of work and this work eventually takes its toll, and in my case has given rise to the need for joint replacement surgery, a marvel of modern medicine.

I write these notes if the weather is such that I am not able to work out of doors. Today is March 3rd 1999 and I thought maybe the following account could be of interest in the years to come. It has affected my writing which is obvious. Earlier I wrote about thieves taking my hay, they returned last night and took six more bales valued at £2.00 each. I own a block of land, part of Runston farm where I keep a small flock of ewes. So as not to have to worry either of my sons I erected a small shed where I keep a small tractor and a pasture topper and a few odd bits and pieces, I also have a wooden shed, ten feet by six feet in which I stored about a dozen bales of hay in case the lane became blocked with snow so that I would still be able to feed the sheep. I renewed the lock after the first theft but then the latch was cut with an hacksaw and they stole another six bales, after the very difficult weather for haymaking last summer small twenty five kilogram bales of hay are worth about £2.00 each, so any one reading this in say fifty years time will realise how disgusting some folk in this country have sunk too. This was not the only theft, I had been sawing wood at Runston using a saw bench mounted on the tractor and this I had parked in the shed, when I returned next day I found that one of the front wheels of the tractor had been stolen, I have a fair idea where it went but thankfully the people concerned have now left the district.

To return to the subject of walking, the shepherds on the hills did their share of walking and I would think that the introduction of the A.T.V. (all terrain vehicles) has made an enormous difference to their way of life. In this day and age walking is advocated for a healthy life and I have tried to analyse my own case. There is no doubt that during my life time I have done a great deal of serious manual work and yet my hands and arms are completely free from any form of joint trouble. As a young lad I did a lot of hand milking which involved a lot of use of the hands and the arms, also in the days of the surface milk cooler the milk had to be lifted to a height of about twelve feet or three and a half metres from the ground which was quite strenuous work. I also did a lot of hedge trimming by hand using a hook and crook and a long handled hook, hedge laying was done with an axe before the days of the chain saw and a lot of driving in of posts using a sledge hammer.

This is not written to glorify my ability but to try and explain why the joints of my knees are in a bad way with arthritis and yet my hands and arms are not affected. But to put

the case into perspective I have done an enormous amount of walking. From an early age I used to walk several miles to school and back each day and then from the age of fourteen my father began taking on more land away from the farm, on the Caldicot moor, at Rogiet and in Shirenewton; we always kept a lot of livestock and these animals would be moved to the various fields by walking and we followed on foot and then walked back home. We were also at one time tenants of the Caldicot Rifle Range, (now moved to a new site), and during wartime it was used a great deal by the army and they were in the habit of leaving the entrance gate open and the stock would get out onto the moor road and it was my job to walk and find these animals and return them to the range. Also in those early days of Tuberculin Testing of cattle we seemed to have to test quite often and this involved a lot of walking to get the cattle to the point where they would be tested. I well remember walking twenty three miles in one day driving cattle from location to location. Another factor that could explain the problems I am experiencing with my knees was when we changed from hand milking when most of the time was spent sitting down, to machine milking when this was all done standing up with the extra use of the knees. Even in this present day once I arrive at the farm usually at about 6.10 am I am on my feet up and down the milking parlour so again the knees are working. It is still surprising that walking is advocated as healthy exercise.

But there again I have noticed nowadays that a lot of people when they are at work spend very little time actually walking, many people now just use their fingers working at a keyboard. There are two factors which may have some bearing on the damage to the knees and not to the hands and arms, firstly the knees have to carry the whole weight of the body, although in my case this has never been more than about 9½ stone. The second factor is that in my youth we did not have the lightweight waterproof clothing that is available today. Even though a lot of time was spent out in the elements working on jobs by hand which took much longer than they would today with the labour saving devices that are now available; even the early tractors were made without cabs. In the 1930's all animal feed arrived at the farm in Hessian sacks and some of these were very thick. These thick sacks were often worn as a cape and when they got wet through they were just hung over a beam to dry and another one was used.

Another part of farm wear was ex service men's uniforms especially army great coats. In our town of Chepstow there was a shop run by Victor Ash and he specialized in cheap clothing and he had a display outside his shop which offered "Everything for the

workman and his family". It was a matter of pride not to be seen going into this shop in Moor Street, but I did go there and it was quite an experience, there was very little room as the shop was crammed full of items for sale from floor to ceiling with everything from socks to watches at the same time the lighting was quite dim so you had to be careful of items you bought, the cramped conditions and lack of light made it difficult to check the quality.

This was in the 1930's and at that time Chepstow was quite an autocratic place and the powers that were did not really like Victor Ash, even less so when he hung a huge shirt out in a very prominent place in the street and the Town Council ordered him to take it down.

It is a fact that my father was a tough man, I never saw him wear gloves and when you got wet you just kept going until the job was finished. I do notice that there are a lot of lame farmers of my age at any rate. Would this be because of the over use of joints and exposure to years working in wet and cold conditions, it is difficult to say. When present day farmers get to my age in thirty or forty years time will they become lame. Present day farmers do not have to walk the distances that I did and they have the added protection of tractor cabs and they have very effective lightweight waterproof clothing. But I do notice that there are some young men who are over weight, what will be the effect of this extra weight on their joints?

Progress is a wonderful thing in human life but I wonder at times if man is becoming too clever for his own good.

Another factor of country life that has changed since my youth is the social side of country life. Before the days of the internal combustion engine, to travel anywhere you walked, went on horseback or rode in a horse-drawn vehicle, the other option for those who could afford it was the stagecoach. I would think that it was when I was about eight years old that a bus service began to operate on the main roads. The A48 main road from Chepstow to Newport was the road that we used most frequently, and in the early days to go on a bus you just went to the main road and waited until a bus arrived. I have remembered, whilst writing this, that we had two rival bus companies operating on the A48. There were the Red and White buses that we called the "salmon tins", and there were Fisher's buses. Fisher's buses gave up after a few years and the Red and White Company did, in all fairness provide a very good service especially for the country folk.

It occurred to me only the other day that the road we walked along years ago from the farm to the main road is the same road that is used today, and in those days we would set off in decent clothes and polished shoes and they would remain clean even in the wettest of weather; nowadays to walk along this lane in wet weather you would need to wear Wellingtons, the lane has been ruined as a country lane no doubt as a result of the heavy vehicles that are now used, both lorries and tractors and of course there are more cars that now travel much faster along the lane. Our son, his wife and their four children still live and farm where his grandfather farmed but nowadays they never walk anywhere, when they go out it is either in the car, the pickup truck or on the tractor all causing wear and deterioration of the lane. It was only this morning that I noticed that the banks had been further eroded, probably due to wider lorries or farm implements or maybe careless drivers.

David our son has just had some of his slurry spread by a contractor using the umbilical system, the slurry is pumped through pipes to the field where it is spread by a tractor with dual wheels which are very wide, the result is that the fields are not damaged to any great extent even after all this rain as the weight per square inch is quite low. These dual wheels make the tractor quite wide and liable to damage the banks at the side of the lane.

Almost without exception when man aims to make life easier there is a price to be paid. There is no doubt that life in many respects is much easier and more comfortable than it used to be and I believe that it is only when you have lived through the hard times that you can really appreciate the improvements that have been made. I can compare walking to school each day, a distance of over two miles in all weathers with just a few sandwiches in a box to sustain you all day and being in a poorly heated classroom with the resultant chilblains and only cold water to drink, with the situation today, the children being collected by bus or taken to school by car with hot meals and drinks and being taught in centrally heated classrooms. The fact that we walked meant that we could observe and see nature, the plants and wild animals and birds and as a result we learnt a lot and appreciated the marvels of nature. For pastimes at home we played ludo, snakes and ladders and card games all by candlelight. I had a Meccano set and a model farm. We went to bed by candlelight into a cold bedroom and washed in cold water. Now there is television, videos, electronic games, electric light, central heating and warm water to wash in, also hot showers and warm baths.

On the farm much of the toil has gone, hydraulic systems do the lifting, farmyard manure is now moved by mechanical means where years ago it was all moved and spread

manually with a dung fork, this meant hard physical work, but then if you were fit and well fed and had the companionship of others it was a happy life. Now most of the time people on the farm work alone and this can be a lonely life and quite stressful. I really think that a man in charge of a herd of eighty cows and with herds getting larger has to endure far more stress than those who looked after twenty cows fifty years ago. Sitting down hand milking was really quite free of worry providing that you were reasonably clean, did not add water to the milk and there was no one to bother you; and once the M.M.B., (Milk Marketing Board) came into being in 1933 life became even more stress free because you knew how much you would be paid for the milk you produced without having to negotiate with the dairies. In the old days mastitis was a minor problem fortunately as we did not have the antibiotics in those days to treat it.

It is very different nowadays, most of the work in the dairy is done by pressing buttons, even so a herdsman has to be fit in mind and body, the people who buy the milk to deliver to the public or for processing in some form or other, the public who get good value for money; all benefit from improved methods of production. There is concern that the gap between the price the producer gets and what the public pays is getting wider. This means that the producer is being exploited and the middle men are getting more money for far less work than the producer. This fact is mirrored in many other items that are sold to the public, of course the consumer can also benefit from this.

As I look through the study window I can see Itton Church and Itton Court and this makes me think how life around here has changed. The Curre family who owned and lived at Itton Court also owned quite a lot of farms and they also owned the Curre pack of foxhounds. This was in the days of those that had money and power and those that did not, and it was a known fact that employees and tenants were expected to attend church and there had to be a good reason for your non attendance. In most cases you walked to church, in these days despite most people working just five days a week with the weekends free and having motorcars to travel in the congregations are quite small.

We have made a long journey from the cave to the supersonic rocket and really speaking this is not a literary masterpiece. One thing that does concern me is that so often I repeat things that I have written before, but then if it is the same it must be truthful so that is a consolation and in a way a justification of this repetition.

There is a fact worth airing I feel, which in spite of modern methods of providing the consumers with ready to eat convenience foods in the Supermarket there are alternatives. I would like to single out fruit ready to eat or cook; now our my eldest son Geoffrey who grows fruit for his livelihood and runs a “Pick Your Own”, business where the consumer has to come and pick their own fruit, of course this means the consumer has to travel to the field and then make the effort to pick the fruit they require, and this is quite contrary to the modern way of life these days. Yet despite having to make the physical effort themselves most seem to enjoy it and really there are advantages to this system, a the grower is saved some work and also the consumer gets an appreciation of the effort that has to be made to provide the food required, also the consumer enjoys time in open air which is much purer than the air they breath in their centrally heated homes and offices or in the town centres and factories, and then you can add to this the pleasure of being in the pleasant British countryside and the fact that they are taking some exercise. Geoffrey who has studied fruit growing for many years grows the crops in a special way for the “Pick Your Own”, market so that the consumers get what they want and the freshness is guaranteed; so here we have a marriage of the modern method of growing the food and the age old tradition of the humans gathering their food, the fruits of the earth so that must be good.

So yet again the title of these writings has been aired and if you have read this far I hope my thoughts and experiences have been of interest to you.

Nature and Farming.

It is September 29th 1999 and so far this month we have had a lot of rain, 153 mm (6 Inches), which is a record *for this month in the time that I have been keeping records*, although I have been down to the farm for morning milking I am now back home indoors at Merrylea because of the rain so my thoughts turn again to writing. It is strange how events change the way one spends one's life, today at this moment in time I was booked in to Standish Hospital in Gloucestershire to have the joint of my right knee replaced owing to it being badly affected with Arthritis. However I decided against having the operation, mainly because in the whole of my life I have never been confined, and as awkward and as painful as it is I know that I can deal with life. I do not doubt the skill of the surgeon and for some one able and willing to spend most of their life sitting in an appropriate chair and watch the world go by the operation could be highly successful, but not for me.

Perhaps in time I may be forced to change my mind that remains to be seen, I write this bit of information just for the record. (Note I did however have the operation carried out privately on November 1st. 2001).

Nature, this word can mean so much to so many different points of view and it is very topical at this moment in time, there is a conflict between some aspects of modern agriculture and the traditionalists. I feel sure that I have written on this subject previously and I hope I will be forgiven if I repeat myself.

Having been a farmer and a countryman all my life I have lived very close to nature. I also feel that as machines have taken over a lot of the manual work and this has resulted in the labour force being reduced, those left working on the land in some instances have moved away from nature, and I will try and illustrate what I mean.

One of the first occasions when I was put in charge of a team of Shire horses at about fourteen years of age was to chain harrow a grass field in the spring and what a thrill it was. To drive straight was the aim, to see the straight stripes across the field of contrasting colour caused by the direction in which the grass was left lying, was not too difficult on a level field, but a lot of skill was needed on a sloping field to produce the same straight lines.

As with all horse work we worked in the open air and on a warm spring day walking behind the harrows the smell of fresh grass, very little noise just the occasional clink of the harness and nature all around you. Today farmers still chain harrow their fields, but the acres harrowed per day is far greater with the modern tractors, but sitting in the tractor cabs

there is not the same direct contact with nature. The principal winter feed for all livestock except pigs and poultry, was hay and this at one time would have been cut by hand using a scythe, but my recollections are of a mowing machine pulled by two horses, there was a seat for the operator and I remember sitting between my fathers legs on these machines, and being very close to nature with the unforgettable smell of newly cutgrass and the sight of the grass falling over as it was being cut. The whole process was very dependant on good weather and demanded a lot of manual work. It was quite pathetic to see someone not used to the work trying to use a simple pitchfork compared to those trained and experienced in the work.

Of course silage is now the main source of winter fodder these days but some hay is still made, but the method with modern machinery is so different and does not give the same intimate contact with nature. As children on the farm there was a great thrill in riding home on the top of a load of hay, we were made to take care and not be reckless and so any danger was avoided. The cider jar was very important at haymaking time in those days as there was a lot of manual work and the fluid lost through sweating had to be replaced.

Even in winter the feeding of hay was a manual operation and we were in contact with the hay, again keeping us close to nature, and make no mistake about it was hard manual work. If the hay was stored in a hay barn or in a hay rick in the field it was quite an art to use the large hay knife to cut the hay out in slabs which then had to be carried to the livestock. Most stock farms kept some cattle outdoors in the winter and on a dry frosty morning to cut a truss of hay from the rick in the field and to feed it to the stock was a pleasant enough job, but on a wet and windy day it was a hard and unpleasant task, but under either of these conditions it kept us close to nature in quiet conditions, so different in comparison to the mechanical feeding of livestock these days.

Then there is the arable side of farming and here we have a transformation in the methods used and the conditions experienced. With the ploughing, cultivation of the land and the planting of the crops, in the days of the horse we worked in contact with the soil and in most operations we would walk behind the horses and the implements treading on the earth; one exception was the spring tined cultivator that had a seat on it, but at all times we worked in quiet conditions in direct contact with the elements and as always close to nature.

Two aspects that come to mind when comparing life in the days of horse power with highly mechanised arable farming, these were the low wages for the workers and the low output per man hour.

In arable farming it is in the growing of root crops that the biggest change has taken place and where possibly there is a conflict with nature. In the days of the horse there were no precision drills or chemical sprays and sprayers. When root crops were drilled be it sugar beet for processing or root crops for animal feed as they grew the plants would have to thinned out by hand so that the individual plants had room to grow to their optimum size, we called it chopping out; and also the weeds would have to be cut out with the hoe; it may look idyllic to see a man or a gang of men, usually from May onwards out in the fields with hand hoes, but it was back breaking work and if there was a fair acreage and only a small workforce then it was quite a soul destroying job; because with most crops there was an optimum time to get the chopping out done and if this time was past then the work was very much harder, but here again this work was carried out in quiet and peaceful conditions, in very close contact with nature. Those methods compared to the modern use of chemicals were far friendlier towards nature. As I have written elsewhere, to grow cereals on a regular basis there was a need to grow root crops as part of the rotation to keep the weeds under control as there were no chemical sprays to control weeds in cereal crops and it was not very practical to try and hoe the weeds out in cereal crops, this was all part of the jigsaw with nature and was helpful in preserving bird life.

The growing and harvesting of crops was labour intensive, my father was really a stock farmer but he did grow sugar beet on several occasions. The sugar beet would be harvested or lifted from October onwards but would be completed in December and as a lad I recall that a man and his wife and a child in a pram called at Green Meadow Farm to pull sugar beet, the beet had to be pulled by hand, the tops cut off and then left in heaps. I remember as a lad helping father throw these beet into a cart and taking them to Portskewett station to be thrown by hand into a rail truck; this was really hard manual work. The man his wife and child lived in the meal house whilst they were with us.

Mangolds were also pulled in November; this rather easier as they were not so deep rooted as sugar beet and they were much larger, they were handled numerous times before they were eventually eaten. First they were pulled the tops were cut off, then the tail and any surplus earth was removed and they were put into heaps, then they would be thrown into

tipping carts and taken to the farm yard and they were then tipped out. Next they would be put into a clamp where they were covered in straw to protect them from frost. When they were required to be fed they were sometimes fed whole to the cattle or the sheep, but they were often put into a pulping or slicing machine, this was usually hand operated and the cut pieces were then carried to the livestock as required. Swedes were grown and treated in the same way but very few were fed whole because of their much harder nature than mangolds. Quite a common practice was for sheep to eat swedes straight out of the ground at the same time improving the fertility of the land.

With potato growing it was much the same story in that it was very labour intensive. They were planted by hand into rows made by the bouting plough, it was one of the easiest crops to grow the hoeing was much easier as they were already individual plants and they did not have to be thinned. When it came to harvesting a horse drawn potato digger would leave most of the potatoes on top of the ground to be picked up by hand into buckets which when full would be emptied into sacks that in turn were loaded onto a cart and taken back to the farm. This again was hard work but there women who went with any children that were available to pick the potatoes to earn some extra cash. In these days it is quite normal for both the husband and wife to go out to work, but years ago most women stayed at home to look after the family, so potato picking was a chance to earn a bit of spare cash.

It is easy to see and to understand how farming has changed; I would say the change started about sixty years ago in 1939. This was when the standard Fordson tractor was sent over from America for the ploughing campaign that is when things began to change when a few years before that a skilled farm worker was paid 32 shillings (£1.60) for a 48 hour week.

If we pause for a moment and realise that there has always been change and it is not any good being a Canute and try to stop change, but we should not accept change just for the sake of it, we should give change consideration and then decide if we wish to accept it, but how far do we go. I milked my first cow, a Shorthorn called Tiny nearly 70 years ago, and to sit and milk a cow by hand with that smell of fresh milk as it hits the bucket and the art of getting the froth on the milk this was necessary so that when the bucket gets fuller the milk does not splash. When you are sat there milking away once your arm muscles are toned up you and the cow are all very peaceful, you are not dependant on anyone just your own ability you then consider the problem of who will pay you a decent price for the milk produced. In those days the average herd would be about twenty cows for two people to milk; now we

hear of one man looking after two hundred cows and then there is now the robot milker, where will it all end? Down at the farm where I milked my first cow our son runs a herd of about eighty cows on an all grass farm and the cows have what could be ideal grazing in a fertile valley with gently sloping banks. Even in these ideal conditions some of the cows come in with clean udders but others are very dirty and I wonder how a robotic milking unit will deal with this, and even in the unit with one man looking after two hundred cows this would be a problem.

In all systems of keeping livestock be it horses, cattle, sheep, pigs or poultry there is the inevitable by-product; manure; and here we could be in conflict with nature. In the days of the horse slurry as we know it today did not exist, all the manure was solid and every farm had a manure heap, a mixture of manure and straw bedding. At one time although I have never had to do it and I have not seen it done the whole manure heap was turned; that is a new heap was started a few feet away from the existing heap and the whole lot moved resulting in air being let into it and the decaying process would be speeded up.

In my day all the manure from various stock yards and buildings was built into a heap and come the spring we would take it out to the fields, we would use a dung cart and two horses, it was loaded manually using dung forks and then taken either to the potato or root ground or to the fields to be shut up for hay, we used two horses because a load was quite heavy, and once in the field we would use a dung drag, a fork with the prongs bent at right angles to the shaft and drag about a barrowful off leaving it in one heap and then move forward about four yards and drag off another heap and so on until the cart was emptied. The dung cart was also a tip cart in that it was possible with the aid of two steel pins and a flat rod with a series of holes to gradually tip the cart to make it easier to drag the dung out of the cart and leave it in heaps in straight lines across the fields. After the dung was hauled to the fields the heaps were spread evenly onto the land using a dung fork. It was a method that helped bird life in that they would forage for worms and slugs in the manure, but it was a very labour intensive operation and quite hard work. These days with more of the farmyard concreted and larger herds we have slurry, not that I have anything against the system it is one of the changes necessary in today's conditions. When the slurry pit is emptied it is put on the land, it could be a field destined for maize or for silage, this is quite easy to say but the weather in this as all farming operations can make it difficult to carry out the best of plans.

Anyone reading the press these days would come to the conclusion that there is a conflict between farming and nature! If we look back we can find a reason for this; throughout history man has had to try and overcome the burdens of life, two prime examples of this are the wheel and water from a tap, most of these inventions have been greeted with gratitude but not all. There have been occasions when farm workers tried to wreck harvesting machinery for fear of being deprived of employment. We have reached the stage where modern methods in farming have replaced many tasks that were carried out manually. It is chiefly a matter of economics, if it is cheaper to invest in equipment and reduce the labour costs then that is done and we have the state of affairs now instead of for instance putting a gang of men to hoe weeds in a crop then one man is sent in with a crop sprayer to get rid of the weeds. The result is healthy weed free crops, but it stands to reason that wild life is bound to suffer.

There are a lot of people in high places who I really believe would like to see this country of ours go back to the horse and cart days and for us to import most of our food from wherever there was a ready supply and where it is cheap and they really are not worried about how it is produced or under what conditions the animals are kept. This is very similar to the textile industry where some over-seas producers use child labour in the most inhuman conditions and then pay them a mere pittance so that they can produce low priced goods which they can flood onto the market place. Now if that is how the policy makers of this country think the country should be run why don't they just say so and then farmers would have to decide how best to operate.

I happen to be able to foresee what would happen, in 1972 I purchased 35 acres of land that was part of Runston farm because the man who owned it was not able to farm the land properly; there had been a few years of neglect and at one point the roadside hedge was 30 yards wide, mostly brambles, there was quite a lot of ragwort and many small trees, all because the land had been under-stocked and not properly managed. However with the help of my two sons it was brought back into good order but it did involve a lot of hard manual work. At the present time it is a joy to see with good clover rich pastures, good fences the roadside hedge is trimmed and the cattle and sheep are grazing quite contentedly. The owner in question kept about 40 acres near the farm at Runston much of which is now abandoned to nature and as a result there is a dense growth of bracken, brambles, thorn trees,

thistles and ragwort and it is becoming almost impossible to walk through the dense growth, it is just a home for birds and rabbits and is most unsightly.

That is what would happen to vast areas if ever it became uneconomic to produce food in this country, I hope I do not live to see this happen, it would upset me very much as a countryman who has always respected the countryside and good farming.

That which I have just written is the crux of the whole situation; in nature without man to manage the land then the land would revert to natural vegetation eventually becoming wild forest areas, quite a good home for wild animals and birds but totally unproductive in catering for man's need. If the food supply for the wild animals runs out they either move to another area or they just die out or they fail to reproduce and just die out, so then nature is totally in control.

Then man comes on the scene and because in most instances he is intelligent, he starts to fashion the land and changes it to produce to meet his needs. Back in history in the civilised world nature still controlled mans numbers by disease and man always fought each other again this affected the growth of the population, and in all fairness nature is very clever in maintaining a balance. In nature any form of weakness in individual man or animals means they fall by the wayside and only the strong survive. In nature the food supply also had an influence in regulating the population.

I don't know how far back in history we would need to go to find how many people this island could support without any imports; there must have been a beginning from the first cave man and from then man gradually took control of the land.

I myself am old and my memory goes back over seventy years but that is nothing as history goes and yet I have seen many changes that have revolutionised the way we live. Now I just wonder when our youngest grandson William reaches my age will he write of his experiences and the changes he has seen?

At this point in time, today is November 1st 1999 are about to start a new millennium, something which if I am honest I am not very worked up about, to me it is just the start of another year, and a big change is that we now live in an age when man can travel and explore parts of the outer space.

Now to me the sun the moon and the stars are part of the universe, they have always been there and that is that. The sun to me is the key to all life on the whole and without the sun life would be quite awful. After a long winter when the sun has hung low in the sky and

then the spring comes and the sun shines on both sides of the hedge and it breathes life into grass and the crops. There have been occasions when even here in the United Kingdom we have had too much sun as in the drought of 1976 when the only green to be seen was the trees. One of the great joys of working on the land is to be able to see the sun rise and then the glory of the setting sun. Then on a clear night I wonder at the marvel of all those stars. I was never bothered as to what they were, I regarded them as just part and parcel of God's world, they were not something for mere mortals to worry about. Then the moon, although part of the mystery of the sun and the stars there was always that ghostly atmosphere about the moon, with the face of the man in the moon. As children it was a very loose phrase, the man in the moon, we never thought that there was a man in the moon it was just a semblance of a face, and the theme of the nursery rhyme to us, and to my simple country mind to have actually had a real man on the moon is quite incredible, not that I agree with space travel; it would be more beneficial to spend that money to improve on all the poverty and strife here on earth.

The aim should be to learn to control the growth of the population with proper birth control and to learn to live in peace with each other and to provide the basic needs of life for all human beings, when this has been achieved then if so wished we could explore space. There is no doubt in my mind that the U.K. is over populated, there are too many people crowded together and if it was not for the benefit of vaccination against many of the ravenous diseases nature would soon redress the balance and sort the matter out.

There are a lot of immigrants, some lawful and others here quite illegally and it would be much better to get them educated in birth control and to help them raise the standard of living in their own countries where the climate is more natural to them and where they could practise their traditional religion without fear.

When one stops for a moment and examines man's stupidity and questions some of the events that have taken place it is hard to understand man's motives. In recent years and even at this time there are and have been some devastating wars, when instead of wrecking their countries raising good houses to the ground, killing young men, women and children that energy would be better used to improve their countries and to make life better for all concerned. This seems too simple for words and yet during this century the terrible waste that has been the result of wars and the really awful waste of human life cannot be justified.

When the women of this world become pregnant, I as a mere male know nothing of the ordeal that this is. There is no doubt that there are certain joys in motherhood but also there are some real hardships to be endured. After bringing the boy babies into the world, then to give them all the loving care and to provide all the work and to suffer the many heartaches in bringing them up to manhood, for them then to be used as cannon fodder it beggars belief of the thinking of human beings, especially the politicians.

As a countryman I have spent the whole of my life working and making my living by farming, it has been my work, my recreation and my great interest, and I have noticed that non country folk can be frightened by night time in the country and in churchyards. I go to our local church here in Shirenewton to unlock the church door on certain mornings and then to lock it again in the evenings. During the winter it is quite dark and the churchyard is very quiet and peaceful and I have no fear at all of the departed people who live there, one need never fear the dead.

As a mainly livestock farmer I spent much time at night with calving cows and lambing ewes, and I would say that from midnight to about 3 or 4am is when the countryside is the quietest, and in fact unless a ewe is in trouble they give birth to their lambs before midnight or they wait until the dawn. One of the sounds that I like to hear are the owls hooting, perhaps at times a little eerie but I know it is a natural part of the countryside and nothing to be feared. Perhaps one of the most frightening sounds on a moonlit night, usually from November to the New Year is a vixen fox calling, it is like a terrifying scream and it is usually answered by "Reynard" the dog fox by a gruff couple of barks.

As far as the British countryside is concerned there is very little to be afraid of. Perhaps one of the most dangerous in some parts are adders, I am scared of any snakes. There is far more danger from human beings in our towns and from the various forms of transport that they use, perhaps I am biased but by and large but if the countryside was left as it used to be for the real country people to look after there would not be much amiss.

The Pudding Stone.

As there are several parts to this writing of mine perhaps I should turn to the Pudding Stone. To some folk land is simply open spaces that grow trees, crops and grass areas to play on. But to the real gardener and the farmer that is a very loose term. The soil in the U.K. is very varied indeed and it is only by working on it and with it that you realise how different it can be and the best way to find out is with the plough and the spade. In my youth at home working on the farm and on the land, and on eighty acres that we had on Caldicot moor, that is an area of land between the Bristol Channel and the main London to South Wales railway line, this area is very flat and very good land for grazing beef cattle. However during the war that started in 1939 we were ordered to plough part of it, I have a feeling that I have written this somewhere before, and I do hope that you will excuse this repetition. As I was writing Caldicot Moor was all grass, some fields perhaps better than others but on the whole it is good grazing land and it was only when we came to plough it that we found that it is mostly a clay type of loam and it could be difficult to work as arable land with the implements that we had in the 1940's.

With most forms of livestock farming there is a need for fencing and in my youth that meant holes had to be dug with spades for the gateposts and the main fence posts and on Caldicot Moor after a depth of eight to ten inches the soil would turn to a blue clay and at certain times of the year water would start to seep into the holes.

In the 1930's Caldicot to the North West side of the railway line, because it was adjoining the Severn Tunnel it was the home to a lot of menfolk who were working on the railway in one form or another and they were good gardeners, the soil here was lighter than on Caldicot Moor and really was very good soil. In fact we had a farm in Caldicot, Court House farm part of which we used to plough. Then of course there was Green Meadow farm where the soil was different again and most of this farm I have at one time or another ploughed and I also had a garden at Green Meadow. This soil I would call a heavy loam, a good type of soil that could be used in many ways. Here again with livestock that meant fencing and digging post holes and maybe where the secret of the Pudding Stone may lie.

On digging a hole after ten or twelve inches of loam then the soil changes to redder and more like clay and then you came to a layer of clay with pebbles mixed in it, like on the seashore and this was quite difficult to dig through, and you might encounter a Pudding Stone, they are usually quite large boulders fairly round in shape and made of a pinkish

granite like stone with these pebbles mixed in it, as if it had been mixed in a pudding bowl hence the name and I have often wondered how these pebbles got where they did. There is also another type of stone that I have found especially around the land at Runston, they are quite ornamental, in fact I have used quite a few here at Merrylea as features in the garden, the characteristic being that they are honey combed as if at some stage they have been washed by the sea and the softer particles have been washed away. I notice that I do not write the letter “a” properly very often as in washed, I think I should learn to use a word processor and printer.

A theory I have of the Pudding Stone is that at some stage pebbles, some clay and some sand became small balls and some upheaval caused them to cascade down a slope and increase in size in the process and then they were subjected to a great weight and pressed together, just a thought. The Pudding Stone and how it came to be is rather like the mystery of coal, as I understand it coal was or is derived from trees or forests, how come then that it is that far under the earth, I must look that up sometime and read what the experts say. When it comes to stone we in this part of Gwent are very lucky as far as stone is concerned in that our natural rock is limestone, a bit of a bane to arable farming yet for any building work it is very hard and durable and quite pleasing to look at, one only has to look at our churches, barns and stone built houses and walls to see the skill of the stone mason and the durability of the stone. Some people call the Pudding Stone “Waterstone”, I prefer Pudding Stone.

Feeding the Dairy Cow and other Stock.

As I have exhausted all my thoughts on nature and the Pudding Stone I have thoughts on stock feeding since I have spent a good deal of my life doing just that and I will put these thoughts into print.

It always amazes me how people will carry out a task in the way that they have for years without thinking about it until something jolts them into seeing that there is a better way. In nature baby calves would be born in the spring and they would suckle their mother who would have abundant milk due to the plentiful supply of good grass at that time of the year and before man started to breed cows with large udders it was easy for the calves to find the teats. On a dairy farm where the main purpose of the cow is to produce milk for human consumption in one form or another, the calf is often taken from the mother within a few hours of being born, and it is sometimes the case that the calf for various reasons has not been able to find the teats and hence the milk. The cows in most cases are milked by machine and the first milk or colostrum is kept for the calf as it is rich in vitamins, minerals and antibodies, also it is not saleable and has to be kept separate from the normal milk. For quite a number of years even as quite a young lad the method to feed the milk to the calves was to have 4 or 5 pints (2 litres) in a bucket and to get the calf starting to drink this milk a finger to imitate a teat was placed in the calf's mouth and the head was forced down into the bucket so that the calf would suck the milk on the finger but what battles I have had when doing this because if one stops to think about it you are trying to get the calf to accept a quite unnatural position for a baby calf to drink with its head down quite the opposite to the position when suckling the cows teat.

Some few years ago I was in Newport market and being always interested in dairy cows I wandered into the dairy cow auction section and I noticed a dealer who regularly brought cows to the market to sell and I noticed that he had a teat on a wine bottle which he filled with milk straight from the cow to feed to the calf. This I realised was a good alternative to the calf suckling the cow in that the calf could feed with its head up in a natural position. It is only in the last twenty years that these rubber teats which can be attached to a bottle have become available. There was some years ago a feeder called a "Little Mother", which was a teat attached to a metal container rather like a saucepan, I did have one but I did not find it very successful. Copying the dealer in Newport market the system I now successfully use is a teat on a wine bottle, I get the calf into corner and if they are hungry

with a little patience they usually start sucking and get the milk very often better than if the mother has a large udder and the teats are low down. I like to feed the calves on the bottle with the mothers colostrum for five days, it is a bit time consuming, but if you try to get the calves to drink from a bucket too soon there is a danger that the milk can go up their nostril and then into their lungs. Then after five days with a little more patience they will learn to drink from a bucket. If the calves are given two feeds a day morning and evening of four to five pints at each feed they usually do very well. There is the risk of the dreaded white scour which can be avoided to a large extent by home breeding, not bringing in disease from outside the farm, and after each batch of calves the calf pen wall and floors and equipment are all washed with a power washer and disinfectant. If a calf does scour then put it on warm water for a day and use a calf scour treatment remedy as instructed.

With healthy calves they can be weaned on to special calf pellets by 35 to 40 days with clean water and some good hay available to them. It always amazes me the number of people who offer small calves too much hay, all that is needed is a small amount teased out in a calf hay rack. Even when the calves are a few months old their hay should be teased out and the racks should be empty at least once a day, many people make the mistake of putting a wad of hay straight from the bale into the calf hay rack. It is good husbandry to allow all animals to clear up their food be it in troughs racks or mangers once a day and any uneaten debris should be discarded; how would we humans like to have the same food left in front of us from day to day getting staler and becoming less wholesome.

Then there is the all important bedding, there is a saying in livestock circles that “the bed is half the feed”. As in all aspects of stock farming, common sense is a virtue. Straw is the ideal stock bedding but using too much is wasteful and not only that, at some stage it will have to be cleaned out, use just enough to keep the stock reasonably clean. Some stockmen use very little straw near where the calves feed as it can become quite wet and mucky, for myself I do not like to see this because I maintain it is not good for calves feet to be standing in wet muck to feed, the horn of the hoof gets quite soft and pappy, that is my opinion. But as with all aspects of this very diverse subject of farming one must try and keep an open mind and always be prepared to try a different way, but before any major change is made it is advisable to make sure that the new way is really better than the methods that have been used over the previous years.

Keeping and looking after farm animals is like so many things in life if you are interested in what you are doing and enjoy doing it the results will speak for themselves.

At this point in time I am very mindful that in forty days time we will be into another century and for someone like me, growing up on a family farm where a batch of twenty calves was the norm, we are now into the age where the economics of scale is the necessary order of the day, the numbers game and the bottom line are the prime considerations.

We always reared our heifer calves because we knew their mother and had faith that they would be as good as she was or may be better. That is what makes the breeding of livestock very interesting. Since the advent of Artificial Insemination (A.I.), the process of improvement has been speeded up. There has to be a beginning and at home in 1930 my father had a red shorthorn cow called Sally who for some reason would not allow any woman to milk her by hand, the point that is not appreciated today is that the hand milker was very vulnerable when sat on a stool very near to the cows back legs and I know from bitter experience that you could end up, bucket stool and yourself on the floor sometimes badly bruised or worse.

Mr. G.L. Stafford who farmed Bradbury Farm at Crick went to a cattle sale at Bristol and bought a Friesian bull, very progressive for that period and my father took this cow Sally to mate with this bull, she had a heifer calf who grew up and we called her Violet and later Violet had a bull calf and although Violet was mostly black the bull calf had the true black and white Friesian markings and father kept him for breeding. These few facts are to try and show how long it took to prove the worth of a bull. Having got the cow in calf and the bull calf arrives and trusting he survives for 1½ years he is used on a selection of cows who eventually produce a number of heifer calves who eventually calve down and join the milking herd, you then need three lactations from these heifers to prove themselves and the bull and this all takes a total of about five or six years, and if they are not up to standard then you have to start all over again with another bull. It is rather different today when we are able to use semen from a proven bull which can be frozen and stored for later use.

When I was a young man we used to rear some pedigree Friesian bulls to sell as young stock bulls, and one day a commercial everyday farmer called at Greenmeadow to buy a bull and as a young man full of enthusiasm I was reciting to him the full pedigree of one of these bulls and he turned to me and said, “All I want young man is something that will fill the bucket”, that brought me down to earth quite quickly.

It would be true to say that I am fortunate in that I have been involved in the business of dairy farming for the last seventy years and just for the record I will chart the changes. I will use 1930 as a start date and the main breed of cow in Monmouthshire was the dairy Shorthorn, a very useful type of animal, quite hardy with a good temperament, a mature cow would weigh about ten to eleven hundredweight (500 to 550 kg). Some were all red (brown) and some were roan a mixture of red and white. These Dairy Shorthorns when crossed with the dominant Hereford produced off-spring with hybrid vigour and these were very popular animals for beef production. These animals would do well on good pasture or in the winter in straw yards where they would be fed on hay, swedes and a bit of ground corn, and when these animals were killed their meat did have a very good flavour. To some extent some breeders spoilt the true Dairy Shorthorn by crossing it with the Beef Shorthorn to produce a dual purpose animal, it was a good type of animal but it lost the ability to produce a good quantity of milk. The majority of the dairy farms in this area at that time kept the true Dairy Shorthorns.

Mr. J.W. Price who eventually founded the Cophill Herd of Friesians kept Shorthorns; he had the farm at Oak Grove, St. Arvans besides Cophill before the family moved to Home Farm at Itton. I know because I milked a cow in the milking competitions at Oak Grove and they were dairy Shorthorns. On most of these farms usually in mid April depending on the season and the weather the cows were turned out onto the permanent pasture to graze at will, there were no electric fences or fertilizers in those days and later they would graze fields after the hay had been made. By October the cows would be brought in for the winter, they would be tied up in the cowshed with a special cow chain, each cow kept to her own stall, on a lot of farms they would be turned out onto a nearby dry lying field during the day, in the cowshed they would be bedded on straw and there was a gutter for the dung. The feed which would be placed in the manger in front of the cows was usually the best hay available and whilst the cows were being milked a ration of dairy cubes the quantity depending on the amount of milk each cow produced would also be placed in the manger, on some farms this feed was supplemented with mangolds. The system worked quite well, no one bothered about the milk content of butterfat or protein providing that the buyer was happy with the keeping quality of the milk then all were happy.

There was no testing of the milk until the Milk and Dairies Act came into being in the 1930's about the time of the establishment of the M.M.B., (Milk Marketing Board) in

1933. As for quantity of milk, if you had a cow producing at her peak five gallons (23 litres) a day that was equivalent to about 1000 gallons per lactation, if you could average that then you had achieved something. With the average herd of 20 to 25 cows dairy farming in those days was not as stressful as it is today. Before the M.M.B., was established it was at times difficult to get paid for the milk that the dairy farmer produced, and also getting it to the dairyman was not easy. We used 17 gallon churns which at first were sent by rail from the nearest station on a special milk train, but later the milk hauliers with lorries collected the milk and delivered it to the dairies. The milk had to be taken to the main road for collection and there was no red tape and providing that you got your milk to the collection point by the allocated time the system worked well. In the summer the cows would be driven in from the field as they are now, but then you would get your bucket and stool and sit and hand milk the cows, in the winter the cows would be in the cowshed but you would need to light the hurricane lamp to have light to be able to do the milking. The size of the herd was governed by the number of people you could get to milk the cows seven days a week, twice a day, a trained milker could on average milk six to seven cows per hour and twelve per person was enough.

In those days if you bred and reared your own heifers you did not get any problems with the cows, you avoided mastitis and foot problems were very rare, one of the surest way of keeping out of trouble was a self contained herd. When I was a young man we usually had a lad living in that is until I became old enough to be able to do the work.

It was the milking machine that brought about the biggest change in dairy farming. The first machines were of the bucket type, a vacuum pump with power provided by the famous Lister 1½ horse power petrol engine that was a little gem. Milking was done in the existing cowshed, there was a pipe line from the vacuum pump fixed along the cowshed and the milking units were attached to this pipeline by a rubber pipe and the units were taken from cow to cow. The next development was the milk pipe-line where the milk was taken from the cow along this pipeline straight to the dairy. By this time we were into milk recording so recording jars were installed which collected the milk from each individual cow before it passed along the pie-line to the dairy and then to speed things up a purpose built abreast milking parlour was developed with feed stored overhead with electronic feeders, warm water to wash each cows udder and paper towels to dry them off. We then had Automatic Cluster Removal (A.C.R.), units which to my mind were wonderful but it needs

to be worked by a keen stockman keeping his eyes and ears open to anticipate trouble before it became a problem.

There is a herd of cows now being milked at Greenmeadow farm by our son David, he is the third generation on this farm, the farm that his grandfather had but now he has a larger acreage, his grandfather had about twenty cows but David now milks about eighty cows. One of the reasons that numbers have had to rise is that the cost of buildings, equipment, land and labour has risen dramatically and has to be spread over a larger number of animals to make the operation viable financially. Whereas my father could make enough good hay for twenty cows without fertilizer, the amount of grass required has increased with larger herds this has meant that fertilizer has to be used to grow this extra grass. Also this greater amount of grass has to be conserved as silage which in turn means a different feeding system. Whereas my father carried enough hay on a pitchfork for two cows tied in a stall, now it is mechanised feeding and the cows are housed loose in cubicles with the ever present slurry.

I suppose that if I was asked I should be able to say if our son David as a dairy farmer in the year 2000 is better off than his grandfather was when he was dairy farming; to be perfectly honest financially I do not know but he certainly produces better quality milk but life for David is far more stressful. How do you measure what a family gets or expects to get out of life, not only do you have to put a value on the physical and mental effort involved, but also you have to get a return on the capital involved in the business, there is also the risk element as cows from time to time can and do die.

So what of the future, to an old man such as I surely life has taught me something, but I really do not know with herds of three hundred plus cows, robotic milking units and the need for quality food that is now demanded. To be honest and I have written this before how on earth they can expect a robot to milk a herd of cows and for the milk produced to be fit for human consumption I fail to see this as a practical possibility. To prepare the average cow's udder to be fit to apply the milking cluster is a job that calls for thoroughness and strict attention to detail. To watch as I have done on television the robots in a factory is quite incredible and I take my hat off to the inventors, they are indeed very clever, but in a factory it is possible to produce the like of cars or fill bottles on a conveyor belt in a standard environment, where the conditions are not affected by the weather and there are no living animals involved each of which has its own characteristics, these conditions do not apply

when milking cows. Even with a bunch of heifers each sired by the same bull and from closely bred female families these heifers are not identical, especially the size and the position of the teats and above all their temperament varies considerably.

Electronics can and do play a very important part on a modern dairy farm but there are limits. For my part I would prefer to be working amongst the cows, to be talking to the cows and to be forever watchful of their behaviour, they may be coming into season or perhaps to spot the early onset of mastitis, much better than if I was stuck in an office watching a screen, that I believe is a recipe for a stockman going insane. I have made a study of cows housed in winter, summer is no problem providing you have the ability and the conditions to provide the right sort of grass, fresh water and can milk the cows at regular intervals. When I started to keep cows the norm in 1951 was the same as when my father kept cows in 1921, cows in winter were chained by the neck bedded on straw with a gutter behind them for the dung and urine and a manger in front of them for their feed. At one time my father used sawdust from a local saw mill in place of straw. One drawback to the use of sawdust was that it was not easy to keep it out of the milk in the days of hand milking into open topped buckets. One thing that did happen occasionally was that the odd cow would lie back off the stall and as a result she would be soiled with the dung in the gutter. I used to go out to the cowshed last thing at night and shovel the dung out of the gutters and this as well as helping to keep the cows clean also allowed the water to drain away.

Then the herd grew and in 1961 I built a 60 yard by 30 yard covered yard with the cows bedded on fresh straw daily. I also used to go into the shed with a barrow and shovel up the dung pats to help keep it clean and to reduce the amount of straw that had to be used. One of the problems of this type of housing was that if one of the cows came in season during the night the resultant activity would churn up the bedding. The cows were very happy with this system and we used to run a herd of about 40 and these cows were batch milked through the old cowshed, where we had installed pipeline milking with glass measuring jars as mentioned earlier.

Then in 1979 I decided to increase the herd with cubicle housing and parlour milking. A real effort was made to scrape out the cubicles and the feeding area three times each day; the scrapings were pushed into a pit. There is no doubt that there are some cows that will use cubicles ideally and I did install "Enkamatts" in the stalls, but then there are those cows that don't conform and are not happy and these large Holstein cows need more

room. I just wonder if one had a concrete floored covered yard bedded with chopped straw, lime and sawdust with a reasonable slope for drainage and cleaned out once a month if this would be an improvement.

The modern dairy cows most of which are Holstein are under greater stress in that in my early days in dairy farming the aim was to breed a herd of cows to average 1000 gallons of milk at 4% fat every 365 days. In the days when we hand milked a cow that would give five gallons a day was regarded as a good cow. Down at my son's farm this morning I milked a cow and glanced at the jar and she had given 48 lbs of milk in one milking, this same cow when I milked her again in the evening there was 38 lbs in the jar, this makes a total of 86 lbs in 24 hours (this is about 7 gallons). There is no doubt that the cattle breeders have bred animals to give very high yields, I was reading an account of Bridgetts ADAS farm where the herd average is 12,300 litres (2,700 gallons) and Dr. Drew has set a target for 2002 of 15,000 litres, 1,00 kg of fat and protein and a life span of 5 lactations. This yield is something in the order of an average of 9 gallons a day for 365 days which is something in the order of three times what we thought was a good yielding cow.

At the present time, Feb 2000 the price of milk to the producer here in the U.K. is 16p per litre, I am writing this for the record as the reason for the fall of the price to the producer from 24p per litre to 16p per litre is the strong £ and the over supply of milk in the E.E.C. Now if we all try and aspire to the Bridgetts Farm target I just wonder where we will end up. At Bridgetts they have a total of 650 cows and their aim of 15,000 litres per lactation is for an elite herd and if this is the shape of things to come the future of the family dairy farm does not look very good.

We all get notions of one sort or another and I have often thought that getting a cow to produce high yields of milk is like driving a car very fast when stress builds up and weaknesses show.

Cattle breeders should pay more attention to the feet of the cattle and how well the leg joints stand up to life on the ordinary farm. There is no doubt that lame cows do suffer and to deal with lame cows is not only a very difficult job, but also it can be quite dangerous. It does beg the question, are breeders on the right track breeding for ever higher yields. Just for the record as a humble dairy farmer I would like to record the fact that it was 69 years ago this year (I can not remember the exact date) that I milked my first cow, and I am pleased to say that I still enjoy milking cows. My idea of a good dairy cow even now in the

twenty first century is a fairly compact animal weighing about 12 cwt that is 600 kg with a lactation yield of 6 to 7,000 litres at 3.75% fat and 3.4% protein with good feet and sound joints, she should have a good temperament and should calve every 370 to 380 days, and if for some reason she was mated to a beef bull the calf produced would be worth rearing on, or if the veal trade was restored would also be suitable for this market. My gut feeling is that the pure bred Holstein Friesian has done more harm than good. Milk is I think a wonderful product, but to produce it properly calls for attention to detail and that does not have to mean spending vast sums of money, but put a good man to milk a herd of cows in just ordinary conditions and the milk will be fit to drink. Put a slovenly person in a parlour and it can be frightening to see. I know that what I would like to see is that no milk was imported, that the rules of hygiene should be vigorously enforced, and anyone producing sub standard milk should receive a lower price.

The price the farmer pays and the price the housewife pays should be subject to scrutiny to ensure that each gets a fair reward for his efforts and investment, and milk for children in schools should be re-introduced. It would be an advantage if the numbers in a herd could be controlled but that in a democracy is not possible, but there are greedy people that believe in the numbers game and providing the milk they produce is of good quality who can quarrel with that.

So it seems that I have set down my views on dairy farming as I see it in February 2000.

Other livestock I have kept.

As there are still some spare pages in this little book I thought I would write a little on the other stock that I have kept over the years, these are sheep and pigs. With dairy and more so in this day and age it is more important than ever before to have a farm that will grow grass over as long a period of the year as possible, because grazing grass or feeding conserved grass is the cheapest way to produce milk. That grass is actually money which is in the bank by the end of the month following the month in which it was produced and by and large the business of producing milk is much the same, either with a small or a large herd, producing summer or winter milk and in the north or the south of the U.K.

With sheep farming the situation is rather different, more so at this point in time as the State pays out aid in the form of Sheep Annual Premiums (S.A.P.) at a level which varies depending on where you farm. For my own part I have only kept sheep on the lowlands which is very different to hill or mountain sheep farming. There are a lot of dairy farmers who dislike sheep, I have even heard them being referred to as white lice. One of the most important things with sheep farming especially on the lowland farm is to have good fences, it is possible to turn sheep into a field and for them to be contented but they do love to have a change and with poor fences they will find this change. Sheep can be very useful to follow the dairy cows to clear up the grass that has been left and because they graze the grass very short they are the best animals to clear ragwort. If you pen sheep on the field they will hard graze in February and March and they graze and take all the strength out of the ragwort rosettes.

There is a marked difference between sheep and dairy farming, with milk no matter whether there is sunshine or storm once the milk is collected, in bulk from the tank these days you have sold something. No matter what happens or whatever day it is or how one is feeling those cows have to be have food and they have to be milked twice every day. With sheep there are long periods when there is no income and also there are periods when there isn't much work to be done with sheep and you are not tied to a daily routine. The critical times is at lambing when the hours can be very long and on our farm we always had cows to milk so it was at times hard going although I had a wonderful wife who had a lot of experience and we worked well together as did all of our children who were able to help. A real family farm is a joy to behold because we had a family farm where everybody helped automatically.

The more lambing you get involved in the better you get at dealing with all of the problems that can arise, it is an advantage to have small hands if you have to assist a ewe when she is lambing, complicated births are a challenge, but the most unpleasant situation to have to deal with is when the ewe has dead lambs inside her and if these lambs have been dead a while and the ewe is not able to lamb, this is a really awful thing to have to deal with. Ewes with a prolapse are a problem as also is the situation when a ewe has given birth to twins but does not like and rejects one of her lambs. Another problem are foxes, we usually keep the ewes with new born lambs penned to protect them for a couple of days.

Foot-rot of sheep can be quite a problem, walking the sheep through a footbath containing a suitable curative does help but there are always those that seem prone to the disease and they have to be treated individually. Another unpleasant Task when keeping sheep is dagging; this involves the removal of soiled fleece at the rear end of the sheep a particular problem in spring as a result of the laxative effect of the lush grass, the sooner this is done the better as the soiled fleece does attract flies and this can lead to maggot infestation.

The annual job of shearing the sheep is hard work suited to fit shearers the young shearers being better able to do this job. Shearing is easier if the sheep are in good condition and the natural grease has risen into the wool and if the sun is shining this is most beneficial. The price of wool at the present time just about covers the cost of shearing but it has to be done in any case for the welfare of the sheep, if they were left unshorn then they would be very uncomfortable in the very hot weather and a long fleece would increase the risk of attack by flies with the resultant maggots that can be very harmful and painful to the sheep. One of the pleasing sights at shearing is at the end of the day to see the ewes all white and clean and the ewes and lambs trying to find their respective mothers and offspring.

Another satisfying time is to have a pen of good fat lambs in the market that attract the buyers and with some competitive bidding you get a fair price. Then in the autumn when the lambs have been sold it is time to turn the rams in with the ewes so that they can mate and the yearly cycle will start again.

But like the coin which has two sides there is another side to keeping sheep, one of the problems can be the fact that sheep at times do die quite suddenly, you go out to the flock of sheep and find one, or more, dead for no apparent reason, also lambs can be victims

of the fox when they are young and there have been cases when roaming dogs have attacked and killed adult sheep.

Lambs can be born in December or January but as the weather can be unkind and there is no spring grass at this time they have to have special treatment to get them ready for market early in the year where they will command a higher price. This higher price is necessary as they have to have supplementary feeding with a special lamb feed fed in a creep, this is a feeding device that only the lambs can enter, because of their size the adult sheep cannot get into this creep, but due to the shortage of grass this early in the year then the ewes have to have some supplementary feed to promote milk production, the economics of this style of management have to be watched carefully due to the higher costs involved.

My experience of keeping sheep has only been with a small flock on a lowland farm. Keeping sheep on a hill or mountain farm is a different job altogether and this is a life where it must be an advantage to be born to as conditions are much harder, the areas covered are much greater and the weather can be much more severe.

There are some flocks that are kept with the main aim of producing ewe lambs which will be used for breeding. Now this is something that has changed over the years. In livestock there is such a thing as hybrid vigour, and it is a fact; this is where sheep of different breeds are mated and the resultant progeny perform better than would normally have been expected. One crossbred ewe that was popular in this area was from the Forest of Dean, a Welsh Mountain ewe was mated with a Suffolk ram and the ewes from this cross were very good and they were put back to a Suffolk ram and the lambs produced did very well. The Mule cross ewe is very popular at the present time; this is when Welsh Mountain ewes are crossed with a Blue Faced Leicester ram. We have had Welsh half bred ewes for some years, these are the progeny of Welsh Mountain ewes and a Border Leicester ram, these ewes cut a very good fleece but I think the Forest ewes kept their teeth better and they were a tougher and smaller ewe. With all breeds of stock it all comes back to stockmanship, and that hinges on whether you like the job or not and if you are prepared to make the effort to do what is necessary even under adverse conditions.

Our Family Farm.

The farm I had was a truly family farm, we had dairy cows and they took priority as they brought in the main income, we reared our own dairy replacements to guard against accidentally bringing disease onto the farm. We kept a small flock of ewes and they helped to spread the workload and to add interest to the farming system. We kept a sow in a paddock to eat up any household waste and to take any spare colostrum that the calves did not want. The small flock of hens was kept mainly to provide eggs to supply the needs of the family but we were able to sell a few surplus eggs, we also fattened a few cockerels for the table.

Gradually farming has changed and the family farm is under threat as economics today tend to mean that if you want to survive then you have to keep ever increasing numbers of livestock and this is leading to large business style units.

With pigs I had one sow and she would produce two litters per year and these I would fatten for pork or bacon, now sows are kept in units of several hundred, the piglets are weaned at a much earlier age and the sows now produce more than two litters per year, they are just breeding machines, this is big business. Our free range hens have mostly gone over to flocks of several thousands kept in battery cages; these really are egg producing factories although there is a move back to the keeping of laying hens in free range conditions but in far larger numbers than we kept.

I have once again exhausted my thoughts to put on paper. The family farm that I was born on is still there, my childhood was not typical in that I lost my mother before I was old enough to know her. My wife and I have five children we never took a holiday abroad but the children would go if there was a school holiday abroad. My wife and I were always at home our family never came home to an empty house. It is strange really but I have never asked any of our children if they had a happy childhood, I just assume they did but that is wrong assumption to make really, but then maybe if I did ask them they would say they did to save embarrassment, it is a funny old world. History is repeating itself again at the same family farm where our son has four children, but the village school that I went to is now closed, they have taxis to take their children to school in Chepstow. When I was a boy we had just one cold water tap in the whole house, no radio or gramophone a candle to light our way to bed and no central heating. Hot and cold running water in several rooms, central heating, electric lighting, radios, television and modern electronic games and the like are

basic essentials for our grandchildren, but that is progress and all to the good, we only pass this way once so why not make it as good as possible.

Over the years I have written many pages of words and I have reread much of it, or perhaps most of it and most of it is about times past and really speaking putting one's memories into print is a good thing as I have noticed in a lot of elderly people that they do very much like to talk about the past and that is what a lot of my writing is. The point about it is that it does not cost very much and I certainly do not write for monetary gain and I do marvel at people who write fiction, it is much more of an art than writing fact.

Ernest E. Jones.