

## Notes from Local Interest Group 28<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Present in Hall:** Peter Jennings, John Price, Maureen Lloyd (ML), Margaret Whittal, Maureen Meredith, Rachel Jones, Victor & Cherry Williams, Janet Russell, Carol Sheen, Doreen James, Jenny Francis, Mollie Moore, Alison Duncan, Edwina Griffiths, Ifor & Penny Williams, Paul & Sue Buckingham, Grace Davies, Roy & Avryl Lloyd, Lucy Trench, Robert Collingwood.

**Present on Zoom:** Wendy Ozols, Llewelyn Breese, Elizabeth Passey, Mike & Val Head, Jennifer Lewis, Jane Lloyd, Margaret Price, Juliet Lewis, Richard Thomas, Howard & Ann Dean, Evelyn Bally, Sylvia Illingsworth

**Apologies:** Dainis Ozols, Joan Lloyd

ML welcomed everyone to the Hall and on Zoom and introduced the speaker for the evening, Peter Jennings, who would be talking about his book, "Buckets of Porridge".

### **"Buckets of Porridge" Peter Jennings' Journey to becoming a Farmer**

Peter started by telling us that he had been born in the East End of London at the beginning of WW2. His family were never evacuated, but they spent much of their time during the war moving around the country to stay with friends and trying to get away from the worst of the effects of the war on the city. His father went off to fight and Peter only really "met" him when he was five years old when his father returned home. Peter did not particularly enjoy his primary school days and, in his words, he had "a shaky start to life". When he was nine years old, he had stayed on a farm – a time which he loved – and he thinks that this may be where the idea of his becoming a farmer came from.

He left school on his 17<sup>th</sup> birthday, and this is also when he left home to become a farmer in Essex, an industry about which he knew nothing! Before attending college to learn about farming, he needed to get some experience on farms and so, at 17 years of age, he had to find a farm that would give him the opportunity, as well as lodgings. (This was also a brand new experience for him!) He said that the workers on the farm which initially gave him work took him on board and patiently taught him everything he needed to know to make it to college.

After three years of "work experience" on various farms, he went to college, enrolling on a Town Boys Training Scheme. This was run especially for people who wanted to go into farming, but who did not come from farming backgrounds. He had about five months training in all. Each student would go to a farm to learn the practical skills during the day and then there would be an hour's lecture for the theory at the end of the day. He also learned that relationships with the other farm workers were very important, as was an understanding and appreciation of the "farm hierarchy".

The first farm on which he found employment was owned by "A Gentleman Farmer" and was about 400 acres. The owner did not work on the farm, everything was controlled by a foreman. Peter said that "there was a pecking order for everything". He also had work on a conventional arable farm, with a very good farmer. At that time, the corn that they grew was not sold in bulk, rather it was packed into bushel sacks and so this was hard work and carrying the sacks was not good for Peter's back. This farm had machinery, such as combines for harvesting, but much of the work was hard. However, he learned a great deal as the farmer would take Peter to NFU meetings, etc, and this gave

him invaluable experience. The next farm he went to as part of his training was an arable and pig farm, the pigs were all kept indoors, and so this broadened his experience further.

He moved on to a dairy farm, with a farmer who was not particularly hard working. Peter was one of two farm boys, the other who was 18 years old did all the tractor work whilst Peter did the dairy work. He knew little about cows and was soon in charge of a herd of 32, doing all of the milking in the traditional way. After about 10 months on this farm, he moved on, having learned a great deal about cows.

Once he had qualified and left college, his life as a farmer really began and through his career he has worked on a number of different farms. Initially, the farm manager from the college gave him a job on the college farm as a member of staff and this was extremely good experience for him. He then moved on to take up a farm assistant's job on a farm near Arundel in West Sussex. The farm was owned by a corn merchant, but a relative actually ran the farm for him.

However, Peter felt that he needed to get a job as a foreman or farm manager and so he applied for other positions. His first management job was on a farm run by an industrialist, who had bought the farm as an investment. There was nothing at all on the land – no machinery, no crops and no workers! This meant that Peter had a “clean sheet” to do what he liked, as long as it made money for the owner. Peter got on very well with the owner, who was an extremely astute businessman, and he was able to gain quite a bit of varied experience whilst working for him. Later in the talk, Peter said that his happiest time was when he was working on this farm. Although it was hard and challenging work, it was incredibly rewarding and the wide variety of opportunities he got here was very interesting.

His second job as a manager was on a farm with a bigger acreage, but things did not work out financially for the owner, who needed to release some capital from the farm and so men had to be made redundant. Eventually, Peter took on the tenancy of a farm in Herefordshire, where he stayed for eleven years. This was a very different experience from managing a farm for someone else and he had to manage on very little capital, but it was good to be his own boss and all of his previous experience served him well.

Peter said that he is often asked where he got the title for his book, “Buckets of Porridge”. He said that we all need porridge to get us through the day, especially on the bad days when things are not going the way one would like. A farmer has no-one to fall back on - “the buck stops here” – and many things that control farming are beyond his/her control. “Buckets of Porridge” get us through the bad times. He thoroughly enjoyed his life in farming and he would definitely do it all again, but he is glad that he did it at a time when things were different in agriculture – he's not certain he would want to embark on this career with things as they are at present in the farming industry.

ML thanked Peter for his fascinating talk. She said that many in the audience will have grown up on a farm and so it was interesting to hear about farming from another angle – someone coming into the business from outside. This must be quite a hard thing to do, as everything has to be learned from scratch. She pointed out that Peter had brought his books to sell, and that they would make a most enlightening read.

Refreshments were served by Avryl Lloyd – many thanks to her – and this gave the hall audience a chance to talk to Peter informally and to have a general catch up. Thanks also go to John Price who, once again, made it possible for those at home to enjoy this most interesting evening on Zoom. Well done John – we all thoroughly appreciate your efforts.