

NOVEMBER  
IN  
MAIDEN BRADLEY



The Duke and Duchess of Somerset congratulating Mr. Derek Stevens on winning the one way working class trophy at the Ploughing Match held at Maiden Bradley recently.

Photograph by John Frapwell.

# FARMING AT PRIORY FARM, DANGELLS AND KATE'S BENCH DEREK AND DIANA STEVENS



## GROWING UP ON A FARM

"I started farming when I was 15 in 1958, I milked the cows with a bucket that we carried around and we had to empty out the milk between each milking. On a typical day I worked from 6 in the morning until 6 at night (in the winter) and then until it got dark in the summer."

"When the Estate sold land in Witham Friary in the 1950s to pay death taxes, my grandparents and uncle bought their farms there, but we remained tenant farmers in Maiden Bradley. My parents made a living on just 72 acres. Then, in 1961, my parents were offered Kate's Bench as tenants, and we moved there from High Street. We also farmed Dangelles as a family. In 1963, we were offered the tenancy at Priory Farm and I moved there when Diana and I got married in 1966. Diana was from Trudoxhill and we met at Frome Young Farmers Club."

## THE DAIRY HERD

"Our family started off with about 30 dairy shorthorn cows, then we had Ayrshires, and later, Holstein Friesians because they produced more milk. A cow has to be more productive these days – in the past, a cow that produced 4,500 litres a year was considered productive; now they're expected to produce at least 9,000 litres a year. That's all possible because they eat better food all year round. In the past, we relied on hay and that in turn, depended on the weather, so you might have less food or worse quality food one year. Now we feed the cows on maize and silage, which is less reliant on the weather and more nutritious."

## LESS LABOUR, MORE MACHINES

"When business improved in Frome, they took labour away from the farms because the wages were higher – you could earn 1.5 times more at the plastics factory than as a farm labourer. But also, farming was becoming more about machines."

"The arrival of the combine harvester had a big impact. Before, we used a horse and binder, or a tractor and binder, to harvest the grain and then piled it in stooks to dry. Then it was put in a rick to dry it further. So it was handled at least three times before it was threshed. When the combine harvester arrived in the late 1950s, it did all this work."

"We get bailers in now to bail up the hay – before it was all swept up to a rick and in small bails which we had to lift. But now they are massive so it needs a machine."

*Derek's parents in the 1960s*





### **FARMS ARE BIGGER**

“I think you need bigger farms today to survive. My parents could make a decent living with just 72 acres back then, but now it is hard even with 300. My parents had 72 acres, but now Richard [brother] and Jeffery [nephew] farm 350 acres at Dangells, and Graham [son] has 350 acres at Priory Farm. Farms had to get bigger to be viable.”

### **KEEPING COWS HEALTHY**

“TB is now a problem - we were clear of it from 1950 to 1995, but now it is back. Obviously, you can't sell your cattle until they are clear. And that means no income.”

“We were lucky during foot and mouth and there was no slaughter here. In 1958, Perry Farm had some foot and mouth and they slaughtered about 70 cows, and then 20 cows at Baycliffe dairy. We had to leave our heifers in the field by the pub as we weren't allowed to bring them home.”

### **LOSING YOUR DAIRY HERD**

“In 2009, I had to sell my dairy cows. We decided to concentrate on beef and cereals... It was a very hard decision... very hard. I had a breakdown. I had to go to hospital.”

### **SOME THINGS DON'T CHANGE**

“The rhythm of life is the same when you manage cattle – they still need to be fed, watered, looked after.”

“The weather still affects us – we know more about what will happen because of TV and all the Apps, but it still rains!”

### **WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THE FUTURE?**

“Perhaps in the future, we'll have driverless tractors. They are already incredibly accurate because of GPS. There'll be bigger and more efficient machines doing the same jobs, and they'll be more expensive.”

“Also, I think the tradition of passing farms down the family is probably going to change, moving from succession tenancies to farm business tenancies. Changing the connection to land.”

### **BUSY VILLAGE LIFE**

“The village was very different. There used to be a village post office and telephone exchange at the Locksmiths. Waltons of Mere ran the General Store at The Manor House, and there was a bakehouse where the last community shop was based. The school had two classes with about 20+ children in each class. Opposite the school was the blacksmith shop run by Edgar Howell.”

“There were only about a dozen cars in the village, mainly owned by the farmers. There was a bus company run by Basil Leather, taken over by Donald Newbury in 1960 and continued until 1998, run by Len and Sylvia Cooper, when they retired. Maurice and Len Newbury ran a vehicle repair garage from what is now Dean Press and they served petrol from a pump by the Locksmiths.”



*Derek on his Fordson Major*

“Most of the villagers either worked on the Estate or on the farms. There were probably 20 Estate employees and about 30 or more farmers and farm workers. The Estate yard was where the disused Sydenham’s timber store is located. They had an operational sawmill, and a carpenters.”

“The village hall was also owned and maintained by the Estate before it was gifted to the village in 1956. The Knapp was unfenced as the iron railings around it were taken to make munitions for the second world war.”

“The bus shelter was built around the time of the Queen’s accession by volunteers, mostly masons and carpenters who lived in the village, all estate employees. All the bricks were second hand and came from the ruins of cottages at the Mill below Mill Pond, by Priory Farm.”

“The pub back then was run by the Barnes family. There was also a petrol pump, presumably installed by the Estate or BP as they sold BP petrol whereas the Newbury brothers sold Shell.”



## MAIDEN BRADLEY BUS SHELTER



Volunteers at work on Maiden Bradley bus shelter which they have been erecting this summer, working on Tuesday and Thursday evenings whenever weather has permitted. As can be seen, the shelter is nearing completion. From left to right are: Messrs. R. Seal, H. May, J. Dowson, H. Curtis and E. R. A. Hutchings, the latter being chairman of the Parish Council.



Harvest Supper 1958-59



**THE HOME GUARD  
POCKET MANUAL**

BY  
**A. SOUTHWORTH**  
R.S.M. SEVENOAKS BATT. HOME GUARD  
Ex Warrant Officer Instructor  
Small Arms School, Hythe, 1922 to 1938.

FOREWORD BY  
**BRIGADIER J. S. DAVENPORT, M.C.**  
Commanding Home Counties Area

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**CAPABILITIES OF A GOOD INSTRUCTOR.**

1. A thorough knowledge of the subject to be taught.
2. Must be able to impart that knowledge in a clear and concise manner.
3. Able to give perfect demonstrations. It is much easier to learn by the eye than by the ear.
4. Quick to detect and correct faults. This should be done by force of example.
5. Be patient and avoid sarcasm.

WESTERN DAILY PRESS, WEDNESDAY

*Deep Stevens*

*Graham Stevens 2nd prize*

**Plough champs  
mudlark is  
heavy weather**

By Mervyn Hancock

A GROUP of young farmers became stuck in the muds when they fought for honours at a ploughing match yesterday.

But that did not stop a record entry being achieved by the Frome group at Clay Hill Farm, near Warminster.

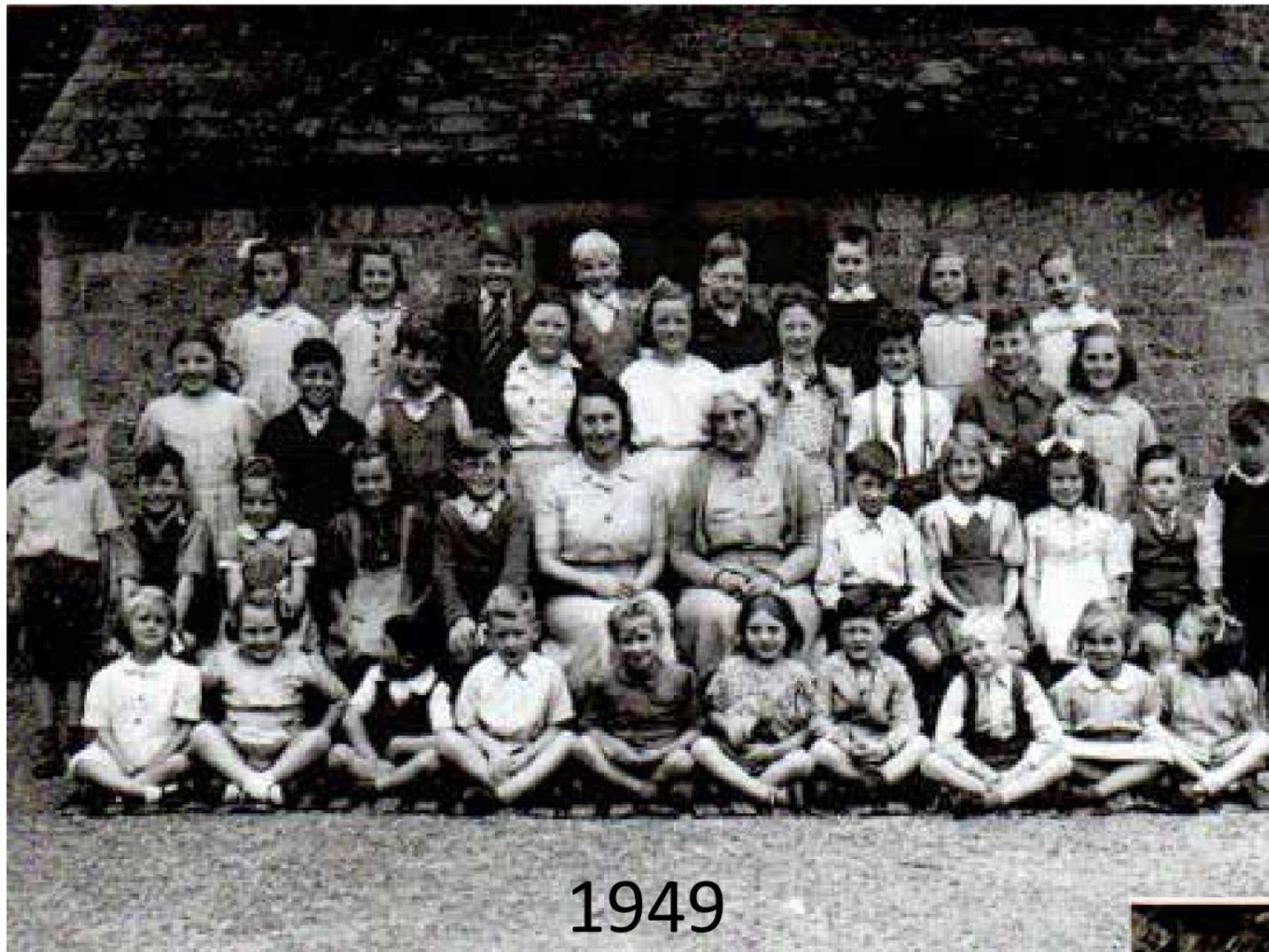
There were 68 mechanical and 10 horse drawn ploughs on the muddy fields, where conditions caused more problem for the spectators than the contestants.

The prestigious open high cut match was won by British champion Mervyn Vowles from Barrow Gurney.

He said: "It was a bit wet but not too bad really."

**RESULTS.** Class winners — high cut: M. Vowles, Barrow Gurney; one-way work: A. Francis, Henington; two-digger: R. Hooper, Hardington Mandeville; general purpose: V. Marsh, Horningham; whole furrow and semi-digger open: A. Pugh, Marlton St Philip; whole furrow and semi-digger, under 25: A. Hoskins, Upton Noble; vintage: J. Osborne, Rode; horse ploughing: C. Coffin, Salisbury.

Ploughers with Wendy Bovey, right, chairman of Frome YFC



1949

Scouts outing 1964/5



Andrea Gatehouse  
 Ann Hooper  
 Barbara Love.  
 Reggie Hembury  
 Derek Peck  
 Fred Travers  
 Peter White  
 D. J. Stevens.  
 Bryan Trimm  
 am Sabkane  
 R. Benny  
 Joan Coward  
 Michael Hoskins  
 Thomas Lanfer  
 Brenda Trimm  
 Shirley Duxter  
 Brenda Peck  
 1015 B  
 Brenda Simpson  
 Mrs. Hodgson  
 Mary and Burfett  
 P. J. Jones  
 B. Travers  
 Mrs. G. H.



Mere School 1953/4