



LIFE AS A FARM WORKER, RODMEAD FARM PETE AND WENDY DEAN



Pete: "I moved to the village when I was 19, in 1959. My uncle asked my dad to come up here to work for him, but then, his son returned, so there was no job for him, and no house for the family to live in. After about 18 months, we all moved into No. 35, which we bought in 1961 for £400. My dad knew Mrs. Little who used to live there and helped her in the garden. She told my dad that the owner wanted to sell."

A DODGY BIRTHDAY PRESENT

Pete: "Our toilet at No. 35 was outside, up the garden, at first. We had a 'bucket and chuck it'! It was alright, except in emergencies... When I turned 21, my mum got me some tinned peaches and cream as a treat. But back then, there were no sell-by dates and they had gone off. My mum then stuffed me full of liver salts to get those rotten peaches out of me quick. I can tell you, I went up that garden like a rocket in the middle of the night. And I woke up in the morning as hungry as a hunter!"

WORKING AT RODMEAD IN THE '60s

Pete: "I started work at Rodmead as a farm labourer in December 1959. It was a good job. I was allowed the farm shoot in lieu of having a cottage and we would eat the pheasants for dinner. Rodmead was owned then by the Fitzgeralds, until 1996."

"At first, I drove a Massey Ferguson 35 tractor with a 2 or 3 furrow plough. There was no cab on it. It was always so cold. I'd get terrible chills. Then in 1964/65, we joined up with Newmead and they bought a 4-wheel drive tractor with a cab."

"There were about 100 dairy cows and 200-300 acres of corn planted. When we joined Newmead, we had sheep too. Rodmead had about 700 acres and Newmead also had about 700 acres and both farms were run in parallel."

"My work started at 7 o'clock in the morning and finished very late. Sometimes when I was looking after the corn drier I wouldn't finish until 2 in the morning."





Newmead Farm and Garden





THE BIG SNOW OF 1962

Pete: "There was a big snowfall, in the winter of 1962. There was so much snow that year it was above our front window and the door. I had to dig us out of the front door. Later on, I did the snowploughing for the council. In about 1975, I was asked to clear the road up by the Red Lion pub – the snow was as high as the hedge. I asked if the road was clear and they said yes. But it wasn't – about 100 yards further up, I drove right into a blue mini under the snow."

HOW FARM WORK HAS CHANGED

"Pete: "Now there are fewer workers on farms – when I started out, there were at least four or five men on the farm, and then it was just two or three. So, there had been two dairy men and a relief, and that went down to one man. It was because there were more machines, and also wages went up."

"I always had to pitch the bales which were very heavy because I was the tallest. Even when we got a machine, I still had to load the bales onto the machine. A small bail weighed about 30 kilos. But then later, the round bails were so massive that it needed a loader, so I didn't do it anymore."

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED?

Pete: "The rhythm of the year hasn't changed much. In late May, it's silage making; in June and July, hay making; then the harvest in August; bail hauling and ploughing and planting the winter crops in August and September; bedding down the cattle in October; and then over the winter, hedge cutting and ditching, fencing and feeding the cattle; and then, the same planting and ploughing cycle in the spring. There's still a lot of physical work in farming. Fencing for example. Although it is different now – it used to be all barbed wire and now it is stock fencing."



THE TRAPPED FOOT

Pete: "It was in 1992 that my foot got trapped under the grain auger [a storage bin with a sweep function to shift the grain]. I was shovelling corn that had got damp, which made it heavier, and my foot got trapped underneath the blade. I was wearing a steel toe-capped boot and I couldn't move it. My hands were raw from trying to get it out. Eventually they switched the machine off and I got my foot out of the boot. I was taken to hospital in Bath, but it took them 2 days to find an ambulance to take me to the Frenchay Burns Hospital in Bristol. I got gangrene. They operated three days running. It's always been painful since. They kept paying my wages, but I was back at work after 8 weeks part-time, and then full time after 13 weeks."



a grain auger



THE EXPLODING EYE

Pete: "In the winter, we did a lot of hedge cutting – we'd clear it with a tractor and burn the wood. One day a flint exploded in the fire and it hit my eye and some jelly from my eye burst onto my hand. I thought I'd lost my eye. I managed to walk back to my motorbike, I put my goggles on, and got to Bourton to the doctor. He told me that I'd scarred the eye and burnt it badly, but it was okay. He said I'd been lucky because he'd only seen three people in his life whose eye had survived something like that. I had to wear a patch for a long time, and I couldn't look at anything bright. But my eyesight is fine now."

DISCOVERING AMMONITES

Pete: "One day I had to dig a hole. There was a new corn drier unit which emptied into the centre of the barn, and I had to dig a 14ft hole below the floor of the barn. It was 11ft long and 14ft deep and 5ft wide. But when I got to about 13ft I found a complete layer of ammonites. First there was a layer of chalk, then mushy chalk, and then ammonites of all sizes. I put them to one side, but then I forgot to take them home! When I went back on Monday, a chap had cleared the space with a loader and they'd gone."



THE BURIED GUN

Pete: "There was a mobile phone on the tractor, an enormous old phone. Once, I was up on Mere Down, and I was trying to shoot a crow when the phone rang. I put the gun on the tractor cab and answered the call and, of course, I forgot about the gun, and carried on ploughing, so the gun got ploughed into the ground. And it was loaded! I got a friend to come up with a metal detector but still we couldn't find it. And then, luckily, the next morning, I was ploughing again and I spotted it – just the 2 barrels sticking out at the edge of the furrow."

Pete cutting conifers - and the conifers at the Village Hall





HOME AND VILLAGE LIFE

Wendy: "Pete and I got married in 1965, at Cheltenham Registry office. It was cold in the house as there was no central heating, but we had the Rayburn in the kitchen. Shortly after we got married, we got the bathroom inside the house. It was freezing cold in there, there was a cast iron tub and we've still got it."

"We used to go to the old-time dances at the village hall and take the bus to Shaftesbury for dances too."

"You could get quite a lot locally. 'Brian the bread' used to come three times a week, he brought doughnuts on Tuesdays, and lardy cakes for the weekend too and hot cross buns at Easter. There were two shops in the village, and the prices were quite good, and then there was a wholesale shop in Crockerton. There were no supermarkets back then, just a co-op in Frome. We got milk from the farms, and you could buy vegetables and fruit from the shop, and also a van that came to the village hall on Sundays."



Pete: "There was a cricket team and I remember Mr Kitchen had a Rolls Royce and people piled into the car and then Colin and I were on a motorbike. We played over 60 matches in a year. Once a fast bowler from Frome split my eye and I went to Frome hospital to get it stitched up and then came back and joined in the match again! There was a youth club too and Henry Crabbe built a sports pavilion on the recreation ground. Colin and I also joined the air force Royal Observer Corps and we had night exercises on Long Knoll in the bunker. I remember one night it was bad weather and we camped in Rag Wood and shot a rabbit - it was the best rabbit ever!"



Village Silver Jubilee Event