

## A LIFE IN FARMING

**Peter Russon discusses the changes he has seen during his lifetime in farming.**



Born into a farming family in South Carlton in 1935, Peter Russon grew up to spend his working life in farming, starting on his father's farm when he left school at the age of fifteen, and ultimately moving to New Farm in Burton where he continues to specialise in dairy farming and contract work with his son Tim. Farming has changed greatly during his lifetime, from the era when horses pulled the plough and agriculture was the main employer in the village, to today where farming is highly mechanized and the traditional small family farm has to diversify to survive in a highly competitive world.

Living with his parents and three sisters at Hawthorne Farm, South Carlton, where they farmed 112 acres tenanted from the Monson Estate, the family had a traditional mixed farm with a small milking herd of 12 cows. Field crops were rotated each year between potatoes, wheat, barley and turnips which provided winter fodder for the cattle, with the land lying fallow in the fourth year. Peter recalls the farm's first milking machine, supplied by a Mr White and installed by a Mr Snow. Just five years of age at the start of the second world war, Peter remembers hearing the bombing of Hull, 40 miles away as the crow flies. Aircrew from RAF Scampton were billeted at the farm in South Carlton and in other houses in Carlton, to disperse the pilots and aircrew in case of an attack on the airfield. The appearance of a green van in the village would sadly indicate that a pilot had failed to return, his belongings being collected.

Peter started his education at South Carlton School, and then went on to Westgate Junior school and secondary education in Lincoln. During his schooldays he would sell rabbits he had caught with his ferrets to teachers at the school; the supplementary food being eagerly purchased at a time of food shortages and a somewhat boring and restricted rationed diet.

After leaving school at the age of 15, Peter worked on his father's farm where he served as a "general factotum". The working day began at 7.30 am, after getting up at 6.30am, working until 5 p.m. Monday to Friday and until 12.00 p.m. on Saturday.

His wages were £7. 10s. 0d a week. During the summer holidays, children from Lincoln could earn £2 a week picking potatoes. Some of the potatoes were retained as ammunition to aim at the bell at the Barracks on Burton Road on their return. Milking was the first task of the day, when it was 'all hands on deck', then it was out to work in the fields.

As a farming lad, he remembers the atrocious winter of 1947 when many of the roads and villages were cut off by huge drifts of snow. The road between South Carlton and Lincoln was completely blocked by drifts, with snow deep enough to cover a double decker bus. Despite frequent clearing, the drifts continued to block the road until eventually an RAF lorry with a jet engine mounted on the back cleared a way through, though badly burning the surface of the road in the process. After the snow had melted, there was severe flooding along the Trent valley and the Fossedyke with the floodwaters reaching as far as the Burton pits.

It was not, however, all work and no play, for there were leisure pursuits at the Young Farmers' Club at Sturton, where Peter met Phyl, who was to become his wife in 1964. The 1960s were decision time for the Russons. In 1962, Peter was invited to manage the farm in Burton owned by John Evens. A prominent farmer and a President of the Royal Agricultural Society, John Evens lived at the Manor in Burton. He planned a six-months' holiday to New Zealand to stay with relatives. Liking life in the New Zealand, Evens decided to remain there, selling his land in Burton to Peter in 1966, thus adding 200 acres to the farm.

With this extension, and following the death of his father in 1966, Peter set up on his own account, building a bungalow off the B 1398, to be named Hallifirs, which was a halfway house between their newly acquired land at Burton, and the holding in South Carlton he had inherited. Whilst the bungalow was being built, Phyl and Peter lived in a caravan in the crew yard - a ghastly style of life that Phyl now looks back on with horror. With the additional land, the dairy herd was increased from the original 12 to 30 cows, and there were also sheep and crops, including sugar beet and potatoes.

The dairy was moved to the farmyard in the centre of the village and the twice daily movement of the cows along the road to the pastures was a great deterrent to motorists taking the shortcut between the A57 and uphill Lincoln.

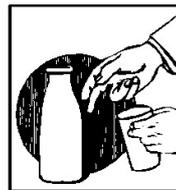
The 1970s, remembered for the high levels of inflation and interest rates, were to be a further time of decision when Peter decided to sell Hallfirs, the farmyard and other properties in Burton to consolidate the farming business at New Farm in Burton. The land in the centre of the village was sold for building and with the money raised from the sale of the other properties, it provided the capital to build a custom built dairy for 100 milking cows and a new farmhouse. As Peter explains, these subsidies and the Government's encouragement of agriculture during the 1970s made for a more prosperous era for farmers, certainly when compared with the depressed state of the industry today.

Dairy herds became larger and there were subsidies for land drainage, farm buildings and a high subsidy on many crops with no limit on production. The agricultural subsidies led to larger and more efficient farming units but the downside was overproduction and the emergence of the wheat, butter and beef mountains within the EEC. As Peter insists, "you had to spend the money before you received these subsidies, so it was not given away".

"Farming is always a gamble", Peter says: a view that will no doubt be echoed by all farmers who have to contend with the vagaries of the seasons and the ever changing policies of governments. Nevertheless, for Peter the gamble was to pay off, especially in the 1980s when he was one of the pioneers in Lincolnshire in the growing of maize - a crop used as winter feed for dairy cattle. This crop "caught on", and it was to see him expanding his operations, encouraged by his son Tim who was now working on the farm after leaving school, to purchase a maize drill and then ultimately increase the expensive machinery for contract work that now extends throughout Lincolnshire and as far as Worksop, on occasions involving the employment of 10 men.

Unfortunately, the fortunes of dairy farming were not to be so happy. Although the Carlburton Herd of 100 pedigree Holstein-Friesian cows provide a million litres of milk a year, dairy farming has seen more and more of the farmers going out of business, the returns being inadequate for the labour and capital involved. In recent times Peter has seen 14 dairy farmers going out of business in this area, and today he only "breaks even" with his own extensive herd.

Following the abolition of the Milk Marketing Board that had controlled and set the price for the dairy industry, this task has now passed to commercial companies which collect and purchase the milk from the farm and sell on to the milk processing industry. There is huge downward pressure on costs from the supermarkets and the calorie conscious public has moved away from dairy products further reducing demand. As usual it is the producer who suffers most, with the dairy farmer receiving 14p - 18p per litre depending upon the season, while the milk retails between 45-55p per litre in the supermarket.



The pinta delivered to your doorstep costs 41p of which the farmer receives just 8p! Someone is making a profit - but not the dairy farmer.

Perhaps surprisingly for a farmer, Peter is optimistic about the future, believing that farming will get better, but he does not venture to say when. He realises, though, that there will be continuing problems for dairy farmers, but there must come a time when supply and demand are in balance and they will get a fair return on their investment. However, he insists that he will never give up his herd, which has been his pride and joy for nearly 60 years. "Over the years the cows have kept me, and now I shall keep them".



It is a sentiment that everybody in Burton will understand and support, realising that the cows grazing in the meadows have

provided the village, so close to a busy city, with the wonderful rural scene that we all hope we can continue to enjoy in future years.

## Burton Club: Summer Events

### *Hog Roast*



The highlight of the summer takes place on **Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> July**, when we hold the annual **Hog Roast**. The event is very popular with the parish, with over 100 people having attended in the past, so book your tickets early. This year, by popular demand, we have moved the timing to start earlier in the day (from 2:00pm) as it can get quite chilly in the evening, even in July!

Tickets are available from the Club costing £8 for adults and £4 for children under 14. We have also introduced a family ticket for £20. The aim here is to cater better for family groups, by which we mean parents/guardians and immediate children.....NOT grandchildren, nieces, nephews or miscellaneous kids that you found in the street!

### *Barbeque at the Club*



Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> August continues the outdoor eating experience with our usual Barbeque. Good food, good beer and good company.....just the way to relax on a weekend in August, with that summer heat still a recent memory.....just kidding, I'm sure it will still be summer !

### *Italian Evening*



There will be an Italian Evening on Saturday 25<sup>th</sup> September – details to be announced later!

On a more general note, if you enjoy the Club but you are not yet a member you are missing out on a great venue for parties etc. There is **no hire charge for members** (just a small payment to cover heating in winter) and a bar can be arranged if you want it. Over the past few months we have successfully hosted a number of children's parties, with a safe environment both indoors and out. So why not join and celebrate your next birthday with friends and family at the Club.

The cost is just £10 per person per year. Application forms from the Steward or from the Secretary on 01522 525502.

## The Burton Cook Book

### **SAMBOCADE (ELDERFLOWER CHEESECAKE)**

A really early recipe, from a manuscript reputedly compiled by the master cooks of Richard the Third, dated about 1390. There are several copies of this manuscript in existence, all differing somewhat. People copying or translating manuscripts usually knew little about cooking. As with all medieval recipes, no amounts were given, the following may be regarded as a guide.



8-inch diameter pastry case, uncooked.  
3 egg whites  
6 oz (150 grams) caster sugar  
1 lb. (500grams) curds from curdled milk, but any mixture of cottage cheese, cream cheese, crème fraiche, and/or fromage frais works well.  
5 heads of elderflowers - the florets should be stripped from the heads just before use, as they quickly turn brown.

The easiest way is to use a comb, and remove as many of the little green stalks as possible. A little elderflower cordial added to the mixture will intensify the flavour.

Beat the curds or cheese mixture and sugar together, fold in the stiffly beaten egg whites and elderflowers. Fill the pastry case and bake at about 170 degrees C for about 35 minutes, until set but not too brown.

Delicious!  
Margaret Sexton

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Neighbourhood Watch**

Over the past few months the parish has been relatively free from crime, but statistics show that we are vulnerable in July and August to the opportunist thief. Don't be complacent – make sure your house is secure when you go out – don't leave downstairs doors and windows open at night and keep your doors locked even when you are in the garden. If you are going away on holiday, get a neighbour to check your property daily. If you see a suspicious vehicle, make a note of the car number and get a description of the occupants. Don't feel embarrassed, your obvious interest with a good stare may just be sufficient to persuade the opportunist burglar to move elsewhere! If you are in any doubt, report the incident to the police control centre on Lincoln 882222.



## County Council News June 2004

Out and about this summer visitors to the County Council's Church Farm Museum at Skegness will now find the newly block-paved paths and resurfaced car park provides much easier access. Great effort goes into many special events arranged during the year and the beautiful grounds are ideal for a picnic. For details of up to date events contact Ruth Walker Tel 01754 766658

For cyclists, walkers and bird watchers a new stretch of path has been completed along side of the River Witham from Washingborough to the Five Mile Bridge. This is on the former Lincoln to Boston railway line with attractive scenery and suitable for both wheelchairs and pushchairs. The project is part funded by the County Council and managed by the Sustrans. Contact Mary Powell, Tourism Officer, Lincolnshire County Council Tel 01533 823438.

### County Council Newsheet

I joined the Editorial Board in February of this year. The paper is on a two year trial period and should eventually become self financing. I would be pleased to hear your views and ideas for the papers contents.

### Local Police and Community Forum

The local meeting will be held at The Village Hall, Wilkinson Drive, Middle Rasen on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> July at 7-30 pm. The forum is open to all members of the public and your questions and comments will be welcome.

County Councillor Ray Sellars Phone 01522-750286  
e-mail [clrrsellars@lincolnshire.gov.uk](mailto:clrrsellars@lincolnshire.gov.uk)

\*\*\*\*\*

### From District Councillor Sarah Anyan-Needham

#### Recycling Centre – The Woodcocks

A recycling site will be available for residents at The Woodcocks, Burton provided by the District Council. There will be three glass bottle banks and one paper bank. I do hope this proves to be a success but if any residents have any queries please contact Mr D J Hill, Area Supervisor WLDC Environmental Services 01427 675122.

### Wheelie Bins

At previous Parish Council Meetings I have had a few concerns raised regarding the new wheelie bin collection service at Burton Waters.

Rest assured all obstacles will be overcome. This Collection Service has been specifically tested for its suitability taking into consideration certain restrictions and storage of the Bins. To allay further fears, if the wheelie bins prove difficult to collect at Burton Waters additional Black Bin Bags will be provided.

On a lighter note I have thoroughly enjoyed my first year as your Ward District Councillor. It has been a great pleasure working with the Chairman John Copeland, Gordon Hickmore and with Parish Councillors and residents. I have without a doubt felt welcome and most of all valued. Let me take this opportunity to show my ongoing support and to thank all those people who work so hard to maintain their local communities. It certainly is a credit to them.

*Sarah Anyan Needham*

\*\*\*\*\*

### From District Councillor David Cotton

Firstly may I thank everyone for their support in the recent elections when I was re-elected as the District Councillor for the Saxilby Ward. I look forward to working with the Parish Council and the people of Burton, Burton Waters and the Ward in the next four years.

### Local Plan

Time draws on with the Local Plan, all the stage two submissions have been worked through and any errors and omissions within the first deposit draft have now been worked through. I attended the meeting when Saxilby Ward was discussed. With only one minor change, the plan was accepted with no further large scale building in Saxilby Ward during the lifetime of the plan.

This does not mean this is still not open to challenge at the enquiry stage and I have no doubt that at least one developer will challenge the decision of WLDC. However, when asked directly at the meeting by myself I was assured that the officers of WLDC have what they consider a robust defence of the position as it will go forward to the second deposit draft.

District Councillor David J. Cotton 702634