



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Anthony Betts

Age:

Location: Platt House Farm, Seven Oaks

Size:

Type: Dairy

Interviewed by: Katy Sharpe

Date: 20th July 2015

Katy: Ok. So, would you just be able to tell me about your background in farming? So do you work on the farm here still?

Anthony: Yeah,

Katy: Yeah

Anthony: No, I'm retired now,

Katy: Retired

A: but I do help with the...I do certain things to help, like write out cheques and things like that.

K: Ok

A: But, I'm too old to be working with the cows, basically I don't, I don't walk too well now, I've got...I've had two new hips,

K: Ok

A: but, when I first started farming, we, my father took over the farm because after the war, they needed farmers to produce food because there was a shortage of food after the war.

K: Ok

A: And he had a caterpillar tractor and so he, he was asked by the local agricultural people to, to, if he would, rent, rent this farm from the person who was farming it and he wasn't really a farmer really,

K: no

A: he was he was living here, because he was a friend of Lady Esther



K: Lady Esther?

A: Lady Esther had let, let him to live on this farm at Platt House

K: Did Lady Esther own the farm, is she the lady who owns the land?

A: She did own the land, and we'd actually farmed for a few years before we bought the farm from Lady Esther. She wanted to sell the farm, and we bought the farm, and friends that she had stayed in the farm house, where we, we..., so to start with I didn't have anywhere to live cause the farm cottage had the farm workers, or what we had on the farm, and so when we first took over the farm, because my father had a caterpillar tractor, he grew cabbages for the farm, for they... for the war, after the war, grew cabbages...an old farm, which is not a good thing, good place to grow cabbages up here because the soil is heavy. So it was, but it did manage to grow the cabbages but unfortunately it happened to be about the worst winter and, just after the war, things, the whole country came to a standstill, because of the bad winter, and, most of the cabbages in the country got frozen off except these didn't get frozen off up here on the top of North Downs, because basically it was because it was such a big covering of snow, we got such a big covering of snow that it protected the cabbages.

K: Oh, that's lucky

A: So, we managed to scrape the snow away, cut the cabbages. But the sheep that my father had set up here to graze off any odd bits of grass, couldn't couldn't get back to the farm at Offham, which was five miles away so they were... Sheep had to, when it was bad weather, the sheep all the, in the old farm buildings, and they had their lambing, their lambs there, it was, it was too late to send them back on the road. Anyway, so we had sheep to start with and then in the old farmyard, they had a, a cattle standings for cows, and....we dec- my father decided that when I left Kings School Canterbury, that instead of going to college I should come and work on this farm, and, and I could learn something from the farm workers. That the, the farm worker was here, has been here for many years, and I was quite interested in cows so he decided that a few Ayrshire cows that he had at Offham just before that year of the bad winter, we start up cows at the old yard, which had cattle yokes and cows standings already there,

K: Oh. When was this? If, if you...

A: that was, just after the war....I can't remember what...exactly what year it was. But, erm..... Anyway...

K: So you - the cows came up here and then?

A: And then, we...to start with we, we were milking them by hand and we then, we then bought an Alfa Laval milking machine. We didn't have electricity up here in the old yard, we, we had to make our own electricity with a, a motor torpedo boat



generator, which had to start up in the mornings before we milked the cows. We used to have to start up the generator to make the electricity and then start up a little petrol engine to provide the, the vacuum for the milking machine.

K: Gosh, and how many...how...was the milking machine, quite small at that time? Was it...

A: Yeah, it was, we [inaudible] milk in the machines in those days, we milked them two buckets each used to take a bucket to each cow, but luckily the machines plug the machines on [?] and er, and er we only had 20 cows to start with,

K: Ok. And did it grow?

A: In the cow shed, and we have the..., I did notice in the cow shed they had gas fittings, so I don't know, I wish I had found out in the old days whether they produced their own gas with the... to, to I don't know, it would have been quite interesting to know really, because you can produce gas from those, you know, from cattle dung

K: Yeah, methane isn't it...Yeah... I wonder

A: And I think that's probably very much, have to be, be pretty well off to do that. And I think the farmer must have been, the owner was pretty well off, you know, Lady Esther. Anyway, so that's how I got started really, and I....after a while we found that we needed to keep more cows to make a living, but we needed to, to make the farm produce more milk really, and we decided to build a milking, new milking parlour, which was quite new in those days, a milking parlour to milk, we could milk about 40 cows in an hour and...with our new milking parlour.

K: Was it quite, was it an expensive thing to set up?

A: Well, we had to borrow money from the bank to do it, and the bank actually, and we had to call the bank managers, come along one day to see how we were, see how we were getting on as a village....so you have have to lend, have to lend money to farmers and all that business and anyway, erm, we had a nice herd of Ayrshire cows which we showed at the local Kent Show, and erm, so, at one stage I can remember we were show- showing cows at the Kent show, and on my father's farm at Offham they had pigs, which were shown at the Kent show and sheep and erm, but I never, we never had many sheep up here, we used to have, sheep used to come up here in the wintertime from Offham to, the well they used to graze off the rough grass that was left from the cows in the winter, and so, and then go back to Offham for lambing, and having their lambs and that.

K: So did your father own the farm in Offham and you owned the farm here?

A: Well, my father, we had, my father owned the farm at Offham and, he actually, this farm, he owned this farm as well,

K: I see



A: ...and, we started up a limited company and I became one of the directors who owned this farm and still is a limited company, now in my name.

K: When did you erm, when did you set up the limited company?

A: I can't remember the exact year, I think it was probably about 1956, I think, probably, something like that. And then, so...my father was president of the Kent Romney Marsh sheep breeders association, and sometimes I used to trek over with him to visit farms when we were, when he was judging in a sheep competition, used to go to farms and visit their flocks, and decide who had the best flock for the competition.

K: Did you ever help out, decide which were the best? Or was it just..?

A: It was my father, he was, he knew about sheep, I was a, I just went with him, really and I remember going to Cheverly, the Earl of, ...forget the name now, because he, he left, when he died he left his house to the government or one of the ministers to live in it, and I remember going to his house...Lord Chevening, act- Lord Chevening I think it was, and... we were invited into his house after judging his sheep, he could invite us in for a cup of tea, you know, went up to his posh house, and I do, I always remember when we went to his house because we were, we ha- he didn't have a tie on, he took his tie off when we went, when we were with him,

K: Really?

A: To, to make as if he was one of us, and I I think basically, in 1963, or... just before then, I, when I got married, my father decided to, that after I, after I've married my father decided I should live up here, we should, I should have my house up here... instead of travelling up here.

K: Oh you'd been travelling up here from Canterbury had you?

A: No not Canterbury. No, we lived down at Offham, which was 5 miles away. And I was actually living there at the time that I had the house built here and I, in those days, in the, in the days when we, when I first started farming every-, most farms had a cart horse on the farm, or when I first came to this farm, we had a cart horse here and I can remember getting on it, on this cart horse, and backing it into a trailer and going off to get some food for the cows. I go down to the cow field and load up the load of, cut and load up a load of kale, and come back with the carthorse to feed the cows, and soon after that we, we actually got a tractor, a little grey Ferguson tractor one of the first, when a little Fergie tractor you could, it was a wonderful tractor, because it, it was quite simple to operate you know. I think it had about one spanner which would pretty well, you could use on most of the things on the tractor.

K: Yeah not like, not like today's tractors



A: Nowadays you, nowadays with a tractor you have to get somebody out every month to give it a service

K: Really?

A: Yeah, And that costs money every month just to check all the things are in, I mean it takes more servicing than a car, service a car once a year, and now we've got a big...but you actually need a bigger tractor now because we don't have all the, not so many workers on the farm now, like we used to, I mean the... and once for a long time, I used to employ a herdsman who milked the cows and I used to do the relief milking when he had a day off, at the weekend or that sort of thing. Basically I used to, I used to get two weekends off. I used to work one in three and then the herdsman used to have one weekend off in three and one day in three, extra, during the week. So anyway, that was one thing. We had this wonderful little grey Ferguson that pretty well did all my haymaking, everything, and I used to do all the, used to feed all the hay in those, for the cows, back then, which is much different to nowadays because...so, I actually got, we actually got to the stage where we, where we found it difficult covering the hay up in the winter and fortunately, fortunately, we managed to sell three acres of land to someone who... The money paid for us to have a hay barn put up and we stored all our hay in the barn, right. When I started farming I had a book by the Henderson brothers, I think farming, farming book. I followed that very much and we stored the hay by the barn. The hay barn was actually right in front of the mangers, so that in the winter when the tractors didn't like bad weather. In the winter, very often, the diesel used to freeze up, and the tractors stopped and we so we had to rely on feeding the cows, we couldn't rely on tractors to feed the cows in the winter so, we had the hay barn right in front of cows and it was like, like the Swiss farms. You just threw the bales down for the cows by hand, fed them by hand... I think we had a very dry year, a very dry year in.....50...57 I think it was, very dry and we made some really good hay that year, but... Some modern farmers came over from Holland, and he bought a neighbouring farm and the modern way of farming was to grow, grow new, new grass, new lays which it can produce, which will produce more grass and produce three crops of grass a year for silage making and, unfortunately for him, it was such a dry year that he cut his first crop of grass and didn't, didn't get much else, which was, because it was so dry to grow. Fortunately for me that year, the dry weather was such a good year for haymaking that I had the barn full of hay. Anyway, I think soon after that we then went on to buying a silage machine, which fixed...by this time I'd got a Dexter tractor and you could fix the silage machine onto the front axle of the Dexter and it used to blow cut the grass and blow the grass and I, at the back of the Dexter, used to hook a trailer on the back of the Dexter and the, the forage after you'd blow grass into the trailer at the back, and they used that sort of well and then used to cut the, you know, the silage abs- the silage, make the silage actually inside the hay barn, and we used to cut the silage out by hand with a, with a, long handled knife to cut the silage out and feed the cows, for it to, along the manger, and... I went to a sale one day, and



saw... no, I went for a demonstration one day of a silage machine where you could cl- claw the silage out without cutting it by hand, you could claw it out with a, with the silage machine and pour it into a machine and feed the cows. The machine used to, used to churn the silage out into the manger,

K: Oh that's handy, very useful

A: and we used that, it was a good machine because it, I still think it was a good machine although nowadays they, they...I think my son prefers to have a different method now. So, that went for quite a few years actually, feeding the cows like that because this machine which clawed the grass into, and fed it out the manger, used to feed it, use it for feeding, anything like brewers grain if we bought brewers grain in, and, so that's one way, one way of doing the, doing the.... and then we, we then, I think in the bad winter I'd had a bad, I'd had, I'd killed some grass at Autumn, and unfortunately I went up to see if it had kept growing and it was growing alright and then about a week or two later went up to look at it and found that the grass had all disappeared. And the 'leather jackets' had eaten the lot. You know, and so, I you know, we had to spray against leather jackets, after that, anyway, I after s- s- I then, I drilled some kale in, and that winter, we used this silage machine...after the cows were being, helping themselves to the kale, with electric fence, we used to move the electric fence for them every day, and then, it got to the stage where it was so wet that the cows, it was too wet for the cows to do, to do that, so I bought this silage machine out, to go up to the field with the tractor and cut the kale, bring it back, feed the cows in the manger, and so basically that was a good machine. Now, then we got onto, nowadays its...we've got onto growing maize

K: Oh, so you don't....so what do you grow the maize for sorry, for the cows? Or just..?

A: Yeah for the cows

K: Cows... Oh right ok

A: Feed the, feed the cows. And...

K: Ok. Do they prefer that? Or is it?

A: It's a very good feed for cows, they... Most dairy farmers nowadays are growing it because it can be fed with a machine and got out from the, got out from the clamp in the machine, and you can, you can, harvest the...the modern tractors can harvest a 40 acre field in one day,

K: Really?

A: quite easily. So this year we've got in, I've quite a lot of maize growing this year and we don't grow hay anymore.

K: You don't. And when did you change to grow...from growing hay to growing maize? Was it recently, or quite a while ago?



A: No that was about 20 years ago now. And that's now become quite common practice, now with farming...the maize growing, the, you've got a good...I can remember when we actually grew that crop of kale in the field, when the, when the contractor drilled the kale, he had some, some seeds, swede seeds left in, left in the left in the thing and when he went, when he drilled the field with kale, on the outside of this field with swedes. The herdsman I had working on the farm that time, he used to like swedes, eating them, and he always used to go back, get the cows in from eating the kale, he used to bring back some swedes for himself, eating in the house. He w- he would even fry them for breakfast and anything. Anyway, er, so now we have this method of, at the moment, we, we need some, this has become quite a dry year this year and we've we're now very short of grass for the cows, and all the animals we're having to feed them when we don't normally feed them,

K: Really?

A: and we have to feed them when we've actually got some silage which we've grown early this year. We've actually just had to buy in some brewers grains to feed the animals

K: So your maize hasn't grow this year either, or....?

A: The maize is growing. But we don't, we don't harvest the maize, till, till... it's not growing as well as it normally would, it, it's er, because of the dry. It's a bit too dry this year, but we're going to have a crop we'd only cut the maize, be, probably September time or something like that. So, we, if, we have got some maize left over from last year in case we run short of food. So that's, that's one good thing with growing maize, you can have it in, in reserve for a dry winter, or a dry summer, or normally you do tend to get a bit short of food in the, time of year. And, so, part of the farming is the Henderson book and the Henderson's brothers was really useful to me, cause basically they....I had, they had a design in there for keeping basically a bull pen and I bought a, I bought a bull from Scotlant, and kept him in this pen, which I er, luckily I, I had after the war, I had two German students, a German student come to stay, for holiday and he was very keen to do some work on the farm, building work, and I said well perhaps he could build me a bull pen like the one in the Henderson's book and he did that. I used that pen for the bull, to take the cows, to take them to the bull, it used to be the ideal for that job. All the cows I could lead by hand across the road to the bull pen, but nowadays with the bigger, bigger cows like the Holstein, we don't train them all to lead by halter...

K: H-has the breed of cow, erm...you said you used to have Ayrshires, do you now not have Ayrshires?

A: Don't have Ayrshires now

K: What do you have now?

A: Because, we have Holstein.

**K: Holstein**

A: We don't like to call it Holstein, they're not they're rather, they're not very nice looking animals because they're a bit erm, I prefer the Holstein cross Friesian. Friesian is more of a beefy Friesian that, anyway....there's so many farmers have Holstein's now because they produce more milk and I think we, we stopped, having Ayrshires because at the time, the Ayrshire calves, the bull calves, which used to sell, the Ayrshire bull calves wouldn't make much money, The most they'd make at one time...the most they'd make, maybe about £10 or £20 pounds, whereas the Friesian bull calves used to make, at one time they were averaging £160.

K: Really? Wow

A: And now, and now unfortunately now, the Friesian bull calves are not so popular now, because the bull calves don't make so much money now, because basically they're not so beefy. So in order to get good prices of calves we, we used cross, cross the cows with a beef bull like a Simmental, or a British Blue bull which we wer- sometimes the calves will sell up to 400 pounds for a British blue whereas... anyway, that's a big difference.

K: Yeah, really which, you compared to the 10 or 20

A: Really this is why unfortunately Ayrshires went out of...because it was a such a nice breed of cows to have, they were nice cows to look after, easy cows. When we had cow sheds down the old yard, every cow had its name in the cow stalls, and when they came in from, to be milked, or came in from the fields, they always went to their own standing.

K: Really?

A: They knew where their own place was, and then it all altered when they built the modern milking parlour, it all altered. So, it was difficult to remember the cows name, and they didn't have their own standings, and so it then went to having a number on the back of the cows, you know each cow by a number, and so now we freeze-brand, it's freeze-branding number on each cow.

K: Oh ok, so the number sort of burns into their skin

A: It doesn't burn the skin, it just sort of...well it burns the, it must, it stops the hair growing, where it's...freeze-branding stops the hair growing. And it, and so it stays, the number stays there. But we actually, at the moment, we've actually gone a bit more modern now, because recently we built a more modern milking parlour, because the old one was getting so bad we had to do something about it. The more modern parlour, the cows have a collar round their neck with a number on it, and when they go into the milking parlour, instead of you having to see how much to feed the cows, it's all in a computer; how much each cow should get feed, for feed,



and it's all...the computer will see the collar and put it automatically put the food for that cow in the manger.

K: Oh that's clever!

A: So, that's all very modern now, and not only that but also the milking machine when the cows are being milked, when the cow finishes milking, the machine will automatically be taken off the cow.

K: Ahh. So it knows when there's enough milk?

A: Which, when there's not enough milk coming. So it saves any cow...so it means cow won't be over-milked and get...it helps, helps the cow, and also helps the person milking them as they don't have to keep walking from one end of the parlour to the other to see if there's one of, one's finished milking before another one, and...every cow is then recorded into the little office, which they can see after milking if there's any cow that hasn't given any milk you know, if she's ill or anything you can see, see which cow it is, or...

K: It's very clever. So, did all those changes happen, you know the advancement in the milking parlour, did that happen because you needed to produce more milk to survive as a farm?

A: Well we had to er, do something because you couldn't really afford now in this area. I mean old days, you normally need to provide a house for the herdsman to stay in and the house to rent out round here's quite expensive now. My son and his wife actually do all the work on the farm now, whereas we had to employ a herdsman. His wife milks the cows twice a day because she likes to do it really, milk the cows, and he does all the tractor work, because he likes, he likes driving a big tractor, and also the tractor can do a lot of the work that the, in the old days had to be done by hand, like lifting up big bales, put into the, round, big round bales, put it in the round or, or something. At the moment the cows are actually being fed, I mean being fed extra with food, put into a round, round manger that sort of thing, and we haven't got to the stage of having an automatic feeding system for feeding the silage in the manger, the moment, we have done, we have done but I think my son finds it the best way at the moment is to use Randall's really, and then when they when cows come in in the winter he'll have, he's got a trailer which will feed the...fill up the trailer with silage and it will feed it along the manger, that sort of thing, you know. So he can do all that, which in the old days all of that work was done by hand, like cutting it, in the old days you cut out the silage by hand, and that sort of thing.

K: Yes, and now it's all machines

A: Yes, yeah. We even used to... I can even remember building a hay stack with an elevator, and, the elevator taking the hay up to the, building a hay stack. I can remember the herdsman at that time, he always used to be the head one of doing the stacking, because he was very good at it, and he was up there on the stack one day,



and a stone flew off the end of the elevator, and hit him on the head, and it shook his teeth up really, he had to go to the dentist that day. In the afternoon he came back and wanted to start working again, and so I got him a, I got him an army helmet to put on his head.

K: So if anymore stones hit him....

A: So he was up at the top of the stack with a helmet on. But he wasn't the sort of man that would take a day off work. He wouldn't have two days off if he'd injured himself; sometimes nowadays it would be a chance to sign off for a few days.

K: Yes, yeah some people would

A: But anyway, he was quite lucky because he had two daughters that worked on the farm, as well as himself, and one of the daughters was extremely good worker. She was into the land army during the war, and so she helped me a lot with milking and cows as well when he died. I started to, had to take over from him, when he had a heart attack one day, stroke one day, when he was helping, but he recovered, but he didn't...he gave up after that...

K: So it's definitely changed a lot in the time where you've been at the farm, you've seen quite a lot of changes I imagine?

A: Yeah I've seen the changes from carthorse to big tractors, from sheep farming up to cattle farming, to I mean, cows...we've seen from my father's farm, he used to grow hops, he used to have a hop farm there, for the beer, and that's another thing that changed a lot in the past years, there's not many hops grown in Kent now.

K: No, my dad said...yeah, cause my dad used to live near Tenterden and he used to say there was quite a lot of hops around there.

A: Cause you see all of the hop kilns, people, people are now living in the hop kilns but they used to be kilns, hop kilns like the

K: Oast House...

A: hop farms at Paddock Wood and they had kilns, hop kilns down at Offham, everywhere.... That's one thing that changed a lot really, the hops, there aren't so many hops being grown, they're making the beer out of more different kind of beer, but anyway that's the big change really, also...

K: Does your son still own the land at Offham? Or is that still part of the farm, or is that now?

A: I think basically his farm has changed a lot more than my farm really because their farm used to be hops, and then when my father found that he was losing money he grubbed all the hops out. They were sort of...must have been a big thing to do, because all the hops were, cost such a lot to produce all the poles, all the everything, all grubbed out, and because the hop bine was very good for the soil



when it was all ploughed in, he decided to grow lettuces, and because the hops produced such a good hummus in the ground, he grew very good lettuces and they've been growing lettuces at that farm, at his farm, ever since.

K: Since, so was that, around, when was that, did he, when did he change from hops to lettuces do you know?

A: ...basically, just after the war really. There were hops around during...there were hops during the war because I remember, or just after the war, because I remember we lived, or I lived when I was about....5 or 6 years old, the hop pickers used to come past the house at night, after going to the pub, it was their sort of holiday from London. The hop pickers used to come from London, and the hop sheds to live in, and it was their holidays like the, over at Paddock Wood, it was all everywhere after the war, it's hop-picking. Then it gradually gave way, and now if you were go down to Offham now, you'll find that he's one of the biggest lettuce growers in Kent now. They've got a big packing plant there, they growing... modern ways of growing lettuces, they can grow lettuces like the baby leaf lettuces they grow those, and they can be all cut by machine because they can grow, baby, baby lettuces, by sterilising the ground before growing the lettuce, because basically...so the weeds don't grow, you don't want, you don't want a machine to harvest weeds, with the lettuce so, they do that, and they do everything in a big way down there; they've got lorries coming in most days, big lorries take them all over the country, you know.

K: Yeah. So who was it that owns the farm in Offham now?

A: Well, my brother's, my brother's son is running the farm,

K: Oh I see so it's still in the family, it's just... I see

A: My nephew runs the farm, and they now have about 1000 acres now. Or we- they rent, they rent the farm, they don't own 1000 acres, but they rent quite a lot of land to grow lettuces. And they've got a lot of tractors; they've got their own workshop repairing tractors. It's big now, and at one stage when...in 1980, really the farm was not really in a very good way, because the interest rates went up very high at that time, and the farmer, my brother, had about 1000 pigs on the farm, and he had to have a sale, to sell all the pigs.

K: Really?

A: Yeah. And so basically, now since then they've concentrated on growing these lettuces, and...

K: Is there more, does he...is there more money in lettuces than there is in dairy or, is...are you?

A: Yeah, they do much better than we do on the dairy farm

K: Do you, who do you sell, do you sell to supermarkets? The milk, or is that?



A: We sell, we sell milk to Capital Milk, and they—he was just here this morning—the Capital milk man comes round once a month...once a month he comes round to see how the cows are getting on, and to give us advice on feeding the cows. He also started up a firm, Capital Milk, which sells our.... A big milk tanker comes round takes our milk to I think the Dairy Crest now...he sells most of our milk to Dairy Crest. Now Dairy Crest are selling out to Muller-Weisman, which is Muller, the firm that makes yoghurt...

K: As in the yoghurt, yeah

A: ...and Weisman's a big firm. We're hoping that Muller-Weisman are going to carry on, I'm sure they will carry on. So, we're in the fortunate position, we don't actually sell our milk to supermarkets. At one time we used to sell to Tesco's, and then the price was they used to get was very low, and now the prices are going down again quite a lot, probably due to the fact that...I don't know what's causing it really, but it's not good at the moment.

K: No. So you're quite fortunate that you're, you're not as affected by that because you're selling to Capital...

A: Because Capital milk, have...

[pause]

A: So, anyway, in fact we were talking about farm at Offham, and where I used to live before I came up here, and they're now a much bigger farm than I am up here, erm, really I haven't erm...I haven't really been able to increase up here because er, erm, basically, erm, I suppose we haven't actually made enough money to buy more land I suppose, and trouble is it's probably now even more difficult now buying farms around here, because being near London, and that, prices of land, gone high

K: Yeah, Kent's very expensive now isn't it, just generally

A: So erm, so, erm, I think erm, I'm not sure where dairy farming's gonna be. The best..now the only thing that we can say is our benefit here is that the milk price is higher in the south-east than it is up the north of England, you know, near London we get higher price for our milk.

K: Oh that's lucky

A: but we don't get such.....erm....I've actually, this this farm is really a milk farm, a natural beauty really, this farm

K: Yeah, it's a lovely area, it's very....it's quite close to the motorway isn't it, I wasn't... or relatively close

A: Yes, quite close to the motorway yes, but it's not that close that you can hear the motorway



K: Oh that's lucky, yeah where I live you can hear the motorway, I live erm, sort of near Leeds Castle,

A: Where?

K: Near Leeds castle

Oh yeah

so sort of south east Maidstone, yeah when the wind's blowing in the right direction you can hear the noise of the motorway

Oh yeah

Yeah, but no you don't get that up here

A: Mmm. So....erm.....I mean, I, I often wished that I'd erm, I, now, if I was to say to any student now they would really need to go to agricultural college now because it's so much, so different now and you are only that, you know...picked up my grandson from school, he's only 12 and he said oh they've just been having computer lessons, well we never used to have that in my day, but I don't even, I don't even use a computer now, the only time I use a computer is I've got a tablet which I can get Skype, I can, my, my, my daughter's married to a Swedish man and they live in Sweden, and I get her on Skype which doesn't cost anything, and I can get her most times on that but she's actually coming over to stay here tomorrow and I'm going back to Sweden at the end of this month. Going to stay in Sweden, for a, I've got a month

K: And how long has she been in Sweden, has she been there quite a while?

A: Oh yes, she, she, she she's got two grown up, well I've got two grandsons out there, they're both, one of them's 25 and the other's 23. Football players they are and they've got scholarship to go to university in Florida for their studies, they did, they because they're good football players they, they they could, er, they did er business studies in, in America,

K: Wow, that's exciting, yeah

A: And er, so er, erm....so, you can imagine how long she's been out there, especially if her sons are that age she must have been there nearly 30 years I suppose. About 30 years yeah, and she learnt to speak Swedish, which is a very difficult language to learn and er, she's very, very good at languages, and er, but er, there's two sons I've got here, at the moment I've got two sons here and unfortunately, I was...divorced some time ago but I've still got the er, farm here, and the one of the sons and his wife look after the cows, and my other son couldn't see any future in the cows as well because erm it, it wasn't enough, erm, so he decided to start up his own cheese making business. And er just up the road from here, he built this lovely, he got, he bought this bit of land from the farm, he built, built a lovely erm, oak barn, the old fashioned oak barn, and that's where he produces cheese

K: What's the, is it, what's the name of the cheese business?



A: Winterdale, Winterdale cheese. It's on the computer, if you look on the computer you'll see it on the computer, Winterdale cheese, and they're selling it, he's got, he's won the World Award with it

K: Really? Wow

A: And he's actually sold his cheese at the Royal Ascot this year

K: Oh, that's very impressive, you must be quite proud of him then

A: Yeah, I think. He's done extremely well, but the thing is I can remember most, my son, how they started off with different things and he started off by, when we were in Sweden we went to see a lady producing cheese in Sweden and he asked her if he could have a lesson, and she said if he went back the next day, he could go in and help her make cheese. And that's how he started off really. And she sold her cheese to the King of Sweden,

K: So he learnt from the best really?

A: Well, yeah, and he's done very well, he's got very good Cheddar, mature Cheddar. He's built a cellar underneath his barn for maturing all his cheeses for 6-8 months. Trouble is, it all has to be turned and handled all the time, you can't leave it there, you just have to keep moving it around

K: What happens if you leave it there? Does it...

A: Well, I haven't asked him about that, because I've not actually know much about his cheese making.

K: Oh, that's ok, I just wondered if you knew.

A: I think you might be able to ask him, if you ever get up there, he opens his cheese shop on a Saturday morning between 10 o'clock and 1 o'clock, selling his cheese out the cheese barn just up the road here. He's open on a Saturday, and he's got a few chickens in the field which people...he's got this little shop, where he sells other things like Biddenden wine, and other things like...anyway,

K: Chutneys and that sort of thing?

A: ...apple juice, and things like that, and pick your own eggs. If people want to they go out and pick them out the chicken hut.

K: that's quite handy, yeah. Do you go down there and pick your eggs, or?

A: he's usually sold out by the time I get there

K: (Jokingly) He didn't save any for you? He should save some for you [laughs]

A: Well, I didn't ask him actually, I generally would have thought they...they left home. But anyway, I suppose in a way, when I first started farming, I started with



chickens to start with. But when I was a student, when I was working on my father's farm at Offham, I bought some battery cages which had a bomb had dropped on them, and I straightened them all out and I put them together. They were very old fashioned cages which had a cage for every, each hen had its own cage And the trouble is, as farming went on, the chicken farmers went into making bigger cages, putting 5 birds in a cage – well, it didn't work really cause they tended to peck each other don't they? And you know, so, the thought they would, did pretty well my cages with one, one in each cage. I had 50 cages, and I've, when I was at down on the farm, and I put these 50 cages in a shed, behind the house. They used to lay, in fact I used to go out and used to take a tilly lamp, light up the shed, at night for about an hour, so they could have a little bit extra feeding time. Course that meant they would lay more eggs....I gave up after 1 year, I gave up my chicken farming. I decided that I would sell the chickens. You know, with battery cages they don't usually keep hens more than one year, because they lay well for one year and they don't lay much after that.

K: Oh ok, I didn't know that. No, why do they not lay well after one year?

A: Well, I suppose because they've laid too well to start with I suppose. I don't know really, it's just something I...something I didn't know much about, but I ...anyway, being a student I wasn't all that...I was more interested in the cows really, so I decided to sell the battery cages which I didn't pay much money for because they had a bomb dropped on them, and I decided I wanted a skiing holiday. I sold the hens and the cages and I went for a skiing holiday, in Switzerland, Engelberg, with a group of other farmers, young farmers. One of them happened to be, the wife of, she became the wife of Lord Falmouth, he used to be President of the Kent Show. Anyway, so that was my thing about chicken farming, but it was a very good time to have chickens, because there was a shortage of food after the war, and of course there was a shortage of eggs, everything got rations you know, there was ration...

K: It's all been very interesting

A: I would like to, I did, I did go bit, one step further with chicken farming, because I went to a sale nearby and there were 5 chicken houses, really lovely, wonderful chicken houses, they were very well built, put together, and that way you wouldn't, wouldn't be able to get anything so nice now, the way they were built, built was a bit, bit special, you know. I put in a bid for the – there were 5 chicken houses, I put in a bid and it got knocked down to me, course I bought it and then the auctioneer said to me, as they usually do, do you want the other 4, I said no, I only want 1, and they put up the other ones for sale, and they made more money each of them than the one I bought, so I got the cheapest one, and when I got it back home, I might have, whether it was because of that or not, but when I took it apart, I thought I'd better take it, you know, I'd better clean all the parts, and I gave them all a steam cleaning and that, and the chicken house was actually full of red mite! Red mite...and I said, those poor hens, they must have been really uncomfortable, they didn't lay



many eggs. They must have been really uncomfortable with those red mites in there. So, I cleaned it all out, disinfected it and everything, put it together, and that chicken house, I used to have it, bring it up when I first lived here, I had it up here, with chickens... The only other thing I had when I was down at Offham, I did actually, when I was first married, I lived down there at Offham, and I did go in for pig-farming at one time because I was...in the old days the, the main the fete at Offham they used to have erm, have competition in the fete for catching the...catching the slippery pig, had a little pig, and one had to try and catch it and it used to be one of the things that Offham were, all these people running about trying to catch the slippery pig and the one that caught it was then unfortunately for the poor little pig, everybody piled in on top of the poor little pig, so they decided that the year after that, they weren't gonna have the slippery pig competition anymore, they were going to have bowling for the pig, and my brother's farm he used to give the pig for the competition, and it would be, they called it the runt pig, the smallest one in the litter was always given for the bowling for the pig competition, being the smallest one, and the person that won it at the end, said that er, they didn't want it, the pig, they only bowled, went to the bowling competition to win it, they didn't want the pig, so they put the little pig up for auction, and my father went and bought the little pig in the sale, gave it to me and my wife, then wife, and we lived in Offham, and we took little pig and put it in the back of the garden, bit out of sight. Well it used to be rooting up the garden for a while, it grew grew quite big, I decided I needed to send it to the boar to get it, to have little pigs. So I sent it down to Offham to my father's-my brother's big boar, and she produced a litter of 7 little pigs in the back of the garden, this little runt pig.

K: How sweet...

A: Because he, they, were all... I had a special feeder, which it was. I've never seen anything like it since, but you fill it up with pig nuts, and I've never seen a feeder like it since, but the pig used to, move the ring, the ring, the feeder round with its nostrils its nose and it used to bring nuts down for eating, nuzzling around,

K: Oh I think I know what you mean, yeah

A:...and I used to fill up this thing once a week, that's what I'd do, give them plenty of water and they used to spend their time in the back of the garden and because they were, away from other pigs, they didn't, they never had they were free of virus pneumonia which most pigs used to get, and they used to build up resistance to it, used to build up resistance and so my pig didn't get virus pneumonia, so they grew much better than other pigs. I think my brother was there one day and he had a look. He said, you've got some very nice pigs there, he thought he'd enter, I ought to enter, one of my little pigs, a baby one, into a dairy show at Olympia in London, where they have a dairy show. And at a dairy show, like the cows and everything, they did have a class for pigs, up there....I entered one of my pigs for this competition, and it got 3rd prize. Like everything I kept, after a while, I decided what



to do with the pigs, having sold the little pigs. I went, we went away on holiday and I had the pig, the sow, up to the farm near where we kept some of my brother's pigs up here, we used to keep some up here at one time. When she was up here, she caught this virus pneumonia, and because she'd never come in contact, and she was free of it, she then had no resistance to it, you know. Most pigs, they, they don't have resistance, but she had, because she had no resistance, she was thought, the only thing to do is to take her to the abattoir really, and....it was my job....[voice breaks, and he gets tears in his eyes]...and I can remember, I was going, I was loading her up and I thought, oh, I'll take her back to where I live and put her in the back garden. And this pig shed we had at the back, was sort of corrugated iron like that, and she actually recovered. So then I thought, well I don't want to keep pigs anymore, so I gave her to my brother, to go back to his pigs down at Offham, and because she had had this virus pneumonia she would never get it again, she'd built up a resistance.

K: Well I'm glad she recovered, I'm glad she didn't have to go to the abattoir

A: Yes, but it's certain things in farming where you have to be, you know, you have to send animals away. So it's not very easy erm, farming, really. Sometimes you have to send a cow away because it's ill, or have an animal put down, whatever, and erm, I remember, we, you know, when my brother had all these pigs down at Offham, we, he had, he'd take the pigs into Maidstone market quite often, and we had to give my sister a lift into her work, she used to work in Maidstone, and she used to get a lift in, in the pig lorry, pig trailer, used to be a Landover pulls the trailer and they got into Maidstone, unfortunately, the door of the trailer came open, the pigs got out in Maidstone....and er...they're not easy animals to catch

K: No - [laughs] must have been quite a sight for people!

A: I think they were chasing them through the churchyard and trying to catch them, and when my sister got to work she said she was, they wanted to know, her boss wanted to know why she's late, she said she was, she was late because the trailer of, well pigs got out the trailer. And he said tell me another one, he couldn't believe that, and anyway, then one of the other work people came in and he wondered why she was late, she said, well she was on this bus and the bus got delayed...

K: Because there were loads of pigs running around? Ahh. Did the boss believe them then?

A: Yes. I can't think of anything else I know....I can't remember really, because....there's so many different things like the, like the things like we did, like we used to ride our ponies to hunting and, and everywhere you could ride your ponies but now, now it's too, it's too busy, the roads and everything.

K: Yeah

A: You know? We, in fact, were, we were riding our ponies up the, we used to ride them everywhere a group of us were riding up the Seven Mile Lane towards



Paddock Wood and, it was during the war and we were in a, while we were on holiday from school, we did get back holidays, and we, we suddenly saw two flying bombs coming towards us, towards us, down Seven Mile Lane, and we saw behind each flying bomb was a Spitfire and er, tried to shoot them down. And they got just above us and they shot one down right above us, and we all got off our ponies, lay flat in the, flat on the road, and, the bomb came down the next field, and blew our ponies across the road, and er, luckily they didn't gallop off, we managed to get hold of them, and then, then we had to carry on. But er, that was our lucky escape

K: Yeah, very lucky, wow.

A: And in fact, I think the first flying bomb I heard, I heard it in the night when I was going to bed. I heard it popping along, and I went to look out my bedroom window and it had stopped. And you know what happens when they stop, they come down don't they! And usually they stop and come down in London, but this one must have run out of steam, and the next thing I heard was this whistling noise, and it whistled over the top of the house and came down about quarter of a mile away. That was quite a close one really.... I can't think of much else really

K: That's ok, it's been very interesting what you have said. So lovely chatting to you. It's been lovely chatting to you.

A: But erm, I'm sure there's other things I could say, but that's about it I think

K: Ok, well no that's lovely,

A: Would you like a cup of tea?

Interview ends. I have a cup of tea and a biscuit with Mr Betts, and he shows me photos on his tablet of his daughter in Switzerland, and his grandsons. He tells me about his other son who lives in Italy with his Japanese wife, and shows me photos of their house. He also shows me photos of the barn, and his son at Winterdale Cheese.