



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Kenneth Jenner
Age: 79
Location: Sheephurst Farm, Marden, Tonbridge
Size: 475 acres
Type: Mixed

Interviewed by: Katy Sharpe
Filmed by: Joe Spence
Date: 6th August 2015

Mr Jenner began telling us about the farm before the interview started. Mr Jenner's dog Lily was also in the room, so any rustling noises in the interview are her.

Katy: [So would you be able to] tell me about the farm again, please?

Kenneth: Sorry, you've got to speak up a bit

Katy: Sorry - would you be able to just tell me about the farm please?

Kenneth: Yeah, I'll tell you, [clears throat] where do we start, well I'm, going back to what we took over in 56, was about 163 acres which was just Great Sheephurst Farm, and, as I say within a few, few year, about 4 years I think, we had a chance to buy part of the neighbouring farm down the road and we bought 60 acres of the farm, which added on to Great Sheephurst. It was then, when my brother got married, we were looking for extra acres and we ended up buying Loves farm in 1969, which was two miles away, had a derelict farm house, two cottages - quite nice cottages - and I think we paid £30,000 which is interesting isn't it?

Katy(KS): Yeah

KJ: The cost of things [laughs]. 120 acres, a derelict farm house, and two fif- - 1955 built - farm workers cottages which were quite nice houses. The farm house up at Loves farm was then done up, and we had a big move round, my brother lived up there, I moved in here, where I had been living with my mother because I was married after. And, temporarily we had lived up the road in one of the cottages we had there - well it was a bungalow actually, quite a nice little bungalow but not very



big - as I say, we carried on farming together because the two farms were only two miles away, and we could transport the men and machinery from one to the other very easily. We were then doing fruit and arable, and pigs. We did have some sheep but when we bought Loves farm we got rid of the sheep because there were no fences it was just all orchards and things. Now, we centred on the pigs, we were doing heavy hogs for Walls [sausage company] for a number of years. We had a weiner supplier, it was a small pig farm the other side of the village, and he would supply pigs of 9, 9, 10 weeks old, which we fattened for Walls. And later Bowyers, when they, they changed over - when Walls packed up. That happened up until about 1983 or 4, when one or two of the men that we had began to retire and the pigs were not really very profitable, they were more, more down than up. And of course at the time we were growing a lot of barley and feeding them to these pigs, so it worked quite well till the price dropped. So we decided to get rid of the pigs, spend the money on some new cold stores for the apples, and concentrate on just apples, apples and arable.

KS: Is it still apples and arable that you grow...?

KJ: It always had a bit of arable, quite a bit of arable

KS: Ok

KJ: In 1992, we were able to buy the next door farm to Dodges - that's who - Loves farm which was called Dodges farm. And [clears throat], the attraction for buying that was that there were some cold stores up there, we were having to rent cold stores for the fruit from, from Loves farm, because there wasn't enough storage, but we were able to buy the cold stores and the land there, so that gave us a nice arrangement for storing the fruit and then it's all packed back here, at this, the main packhouse. And what, what we didn't plant up with fruit we were able to sort of carry on with arable. In 1996, we had a much bigger project undoubtedly [laughs] because it was the next door to this farm which was 170 acres with cold stores and hops, and we decided by then my son, my, my brother's son, was joining in, having been to college and everything, wanted to take on, on the farm. My two sons, one had been to Hadlow and done a whole lot of courses there and was very well set up to joining ADAS as a fruit specialist. And he still is now, in fact he's, he became under the wing of Dr Martin Luton, who you probably might know, he is the apple storage guru [laughs]

KJ: And he and, and Nigel, with Martin Luton got on very well, and they, they went from strength to strength, so he's now actually the technical man for Mid-Kent Growers and has been for the last 15 years or so.



KS: And are you under Mid-Kent Growers? Is- Are they the, kind of the organisation you're part of?

KJ: Mid Kent Growers is a fruit co-operative, marketing co-operative, and he actually is employed by Collets, Norman Collets, but they were the marketing desk for Mid-Kent Growers. So no, he actually oversees a lot of their technical work. He does go to some other non-Mid-Kent Grower members, advising on storage and, and agronomy, you know - spray programmes and this sort of...

Anyway 96, he dec- we took the big leap of buying this farm next door and went back into hops. We hadn't been hops since 1956, when Father died. The hops had just been grubbed at that point, partly because we had an awful lot of wilt, and new machines were coming in and we would have had to have invested heavily in hop-picking machines, and a lot of re-planting. Some of the wire-work was getting aged, so was taken, the decision was to sell the quota, get out of hops, in '96 we were back in.

KS: What made you decide to go back into hops?

KJ: Pardon?

KS: Why did you decide to go back into hops?

KJ: Well... they were there [laughs]. They were on the other farm. Added to that he had a very nice modern oast. And very useful foreman-come-manager that was capable of drying and sort of helping us a little bit, getting back into the job. And, we quite enjoyed it, we got it going again, and we kept going for 8 years until the hop job, with the low prices, most people began to drop out from about 2000 onwards, in fact there's been a, a gradual fall out of hop growers really from about the time we took over [laughs] in 96. Hop growers have been you know, giving up, and, and moving over to other things.

KS: Yeah, cause Kent used to be quite well known for hop growing didn't it?

KJ: Of course oasts and everything's been, restored to houses and things, converted. A lot of the nice buildings of that sort, well I suppose because there's a lot of money in hops years ago, and of course very substantial buildings were put, put up for them, for, for the oast houses. So, we took on, we got some cold stores up there as well for the apples and I suppose, yeah, best part of 100 acres of arable, so it all linked up quite nicely. Joined up the two farms. So, in 04 we decided we'd had enough of hops, and I had to get rid of them and put it down to arable. I regretted it, but it's proven the way things are gone. In fact since then, I think there's hardly any hop growers left now, and this was a big hop-growing area -



Marden, Paddock Wood, there was all the Whitbreds over at the hop farm at Paddock Wood. Very regrettable but there it is. I offered the hop machine to the Kent Rural Life Museum – [laughs] they didn't really want it!

KS: No? Oh, that's a shame [laughs]

KJ: It would have cost a fortune to move. It would've taken up a huge area and I don't think it would have got a lot more visitors [laughs]. But it would have been nice to have kept it, but it had to be scrapped.

KS: Yeah. It's interesting – so what kind of other...?

KJ: So that's [sneezes] that's where we are at the moment. Up to 2011, when we decided we were both mid 70s, we better think what we're gonna do. Sadly, in 2001, my son, my brother's son got killed in a motorbike accident, and that did rather upset the plans that we would have originally had, because my two sons by then were both locked into their careers, cause we couldn't have all the boys back here, wasn't big enough. So, they, I think at the time we felt they'd better stay where they were. William, the younger one, was working with Fiolia, and is now a sort of Department Manager with them. He actually lives up the road at Little Sheephurst, in what we converted, where we...we had some hop picker's huts that were rather superior ones. They'd been brick, brick and tile built, they'd been put on the main drainage, they had proper showers and electricity and, that was for the picker, hop pickers and the apple pickers. When the, when the hops, stopped, we- they had no longer need of that, and they got conversion; well in fact they were knocked down and the new house was built in replacement. But he lives up there, and the oast here was converted only 5 or 6 years ago. Previous to that it had been a garage for my vintage cars.

KS: Ahh – [jokingly] do you still have the vintage cars? [laughs]

KJ: [Laughs]. So I had to move them into the packhouse. But of course [clears throat] up to about 2002, we had done nearly all the packing of the apples, but it becomes more and more difficult with supermarket's, specification of packhouses, barcoding and all the different types of packaging that ... more and more fruit packaging has been centralised in one or two big, big farms

KS: Yeah I think-

KJ: I mean everything comes in there.

KS: So where do you send your...?



KJ: Although our stores are still used the pack house itself was shut down, it was getting more and more difficult to get staff too. We'd always had, always had a few women that worked on the farm most of the year round. They packed in the winter months and they would go out on the farm on things like hop training and apple thinning, little jobs of that sort during the summer months. But they began to drop out, through retirement, and various other things. Of course latterly, pickers, a lot of them have been East Europeans, which we've come to rely on - even more so now with the people that we're share farming with, they're almost totally East Europeans - running the picking and collecting in.

KS: Yeah. Who do you share farm...

KJ: Which, I still, my brother and I still make sure we load the stores as much as much as possible, give them a hand. But they bring them into the yard and we put them in [trails off]

KS: So where do you have to pack now? Where, where do you send your fruit now to get packed if you don't pack it here?

KJ: Yes, it goes to one or two of the dedicated packhouses within the group. And they are running pretty well, whole, whole year round, they are a total business in their own right really.

KS: That in itself must have been quite a big- to go...-

KJ: [Coughs] So we used to, we used to start packing when, well into September, some of the early apples used to go direct to market. Once you started building up a quantity of apples they would go into store and then, the packhouse would start and it would run - my brother ran it largely, when we were running it on a, a reasonable quantity of apples from somewhere in the middle of September right round to March or April. They would be non-stop. He would run the pack house, I would see to the outside work. That's how we did it. There was always a few pruners brought in, cause you really have to make sure everything is pruned properly each, each year. There sometimes was grubbing or replanting. I was sent to see to the outside work while he ran the packhouse.

KS: So what kinds of changes, apart from you know, what you've said already, have you noticed?

KJ: Sorry?

KS: What kind of changes, what other changes have happened since you've been on this farm?



KJ: ... well, [laughs]. When we were, going back to [clears throat], course the first arable bit in the 56 onwards, the combine was a contractor came in, and of course we all had bags. The, the combiners were all baggers, pretty well in this area anyway, because of all the big acreages. And, they were stored in bags, brought in on trailers in bags, we had to go round collecting up [laughs] while the combine...and somebody was on the combine doing the bags up. And dropping them down the shoot, and another gang were picking them all up. That's how we started, and there was contractors. In the early 60s we bought an old Massey-Harris, old Massey-Ferguson, combine of our own so we could obviously weren't so dependent on the weather with , with contractors, waiting for them to come in. And all the nice weather going, and then come and getting to us when it's raining. So, we, when we did buy combines we bought a tanker. Well that was a great revolution because all we had to do was put a couple of three trailers out in the field, and go and hook up when he'd filled it, and, and drive in and tip it up, or tip it onto an auger usually in those days [clears throat]. We had a, a reception pit which we could tip into and then it was augered into some bins. ... and also we did, by 63...4, we did, rebuild the old barn, in fact we knocked the old tin barn down - which I possibly regret later because....though it was a bit leaky and it had been damaged a bit in the war with the doodlebug. It was a rather, unpractical bit of barn. We put a, a big grain store up so we could tip onto the floor. But even so we still had to get it up, if you keep tipping, until you wanted to get it up higher you had to auger it, or blow it or something. We hadn't got into buckets like we have now, push it up with a big JCB bucket [laughs]. , but er, there was a great saving then when we went over to tanker combining and tipping on the floor, or putting it into silos. Rape; we started growing rape in the 70s, as a break crop. Prior to that we often had a grass lay or something as a break crop between cereals, or, or peas and beans as other alternatives, which still are very useful break crops. In fact we're supposed to have three crops on a farm now, with any acreage.

KS: I heard that, yeah

KJ: Part of the, rural, the, the regime that we're, we're under, under the single farm payment

KS: How has that affected you, like.. being under, sort of bureaucracy and that kind of thing?

KJ: It doesn't affect us too much, we, we are able to accommodate that. Partly because we have got big enough acreage to, to rotate things round. We do tend to try and make the Loves and Dodges on something similar so we don't have to keep running the combine to and fro. So we have a big crop of rape in one area. Cause we've still got quite a lot of small fields, it's a legacy of the hop gardens and orchards



that are all around here. We did, we did a little bit of amalgamating years ago, to make bigger fields, but of course it's not particularly environmentally green now, to take out hedges [laughs] Make a great prairies [laughs]

KS: Yeah [laughs]. Have you had to kind of change in that sense....

KJ: We had to do it judiciously, but we did it mostly a few years ago, we haven't done any, any grubbing lately of that sort, even though the gateways and culverts that we have to cross over are getting bigger and bigger, the combine gets bigger and bigger, cause the people we're share farming with now, have got the biggest combine...

KS: Oh really? Who, who's that?

KJ: ...that, they can really buy! [laughs] And of course when we had our own [clears throat] we were limited to the size that we could get over the bridge cause we've got two rivers running through the farm, River Tees, the upper and lower Tees, and the bridge we have to get over wouldn't accommodate any bigger machine than the one we had. Course once we get into share farming, they said well we've got to try and reconstruct the bridge - bigger - so we've had, we've done that, it has got a bigger machine there. Of course, another, another section of width was added because it was a bit precario us crossing over actually [laughs].

...

Joe: a lot of other farmers that we've spoken to have mentioned as well, is the amount of migrant labour that's now...well

KJ: it's taken over....completely

Joe: quite interesting to get your thoughts on that

KJ: years ago, because there was sort of several men on the farm, and often a boy or two or something you know, families working on the farm, we had enough people to, to do the picking and, er, you know hop training all that sort of thing. But latterly it's got that because we haven't got much staff there wasn't a lot of people you know, getting in the packhouses. Getting difficult to get reliable people. Now it's very much, well these big packhouses run pretty nearly entirely on East Europeans. I think it started, really from the early 70s, the idea of having well virtually hippies and the like it used to be [laughs]. There was quite a lot of them. They cottoned onto the idea that they could earn a good bit of money, piece work, without paying tax [laughs]. Cause they were only casuals there for you know a week or two. And er.... The er, well the whole thing took off from there. We ended up with, a sort of nucleus of, of



young, youngsters, students and otherwise that would come and do picking. Or the hop, the er, work on the hop machine er, for a week or two, and, as I say worked as casual labour so we were able to get enough and if one or two couldn't come they'd say I've got a friend who'll come. You know and that sort of thing. But, even that's been more difficult now to get actual, people, local people. There's more and more dependent on East Europeans.

KS: Yeah. Has that become more prevalent since you've had the share farms and you've got bigger

KJ: Yeah

KS: You've needed it more?

KJ: I suppose, throughout the 70s we pretty much got students and hippies and the like...But from the 80s onwards, for about 83, 84 we started getting I think we've, even though the, the Iron Curtain was still there wasn't it? But, we, we plumbed into some Czechs, Czech people from Czechoslovakia, and one or two of them came and of course they brought friends and it sort of mushroomed from there. We were able to, say you know, bring, we could do with half a dozen, and what we ended up of course, whereas we originally the people all lived locally or drove or had a car, er once we started getting into East Europeans we had to create sort of a campus of caravans and...

KS: Oh I see so you have a campsite-

KJ: ...while we built pre-fab house, with electricity and bath and hot showers and things so they'd got somewhere to stay

KS: Yeah. So do you have quite a few East European..How many workers do you have?

We used to bring up....

[Mrs Jenner walks in with coffee and biscuits]

(Mrs Jenner) – I'm not gonna be on camera am I?

(Joe) – , no, not if we can help it

(Mr Jenner) – Have you got milk?

(Mrs Jenner, to me) Shall I let you be mother?

(Me) – Sorry?

(Mrs Jenner) Shall I let you be mother?

(Me) I can do, I can serve the tea, yeah [laughs]

(Mrs Jenner) – I'm not, I'm not actually sexist or anything

(Me) No, no it's fine! [laughs]

(Joe) Thank you



[Mrs Jenner leaves]

(Me) Who would like milk in their coffee?

(Joe) Er, yeah, I'd love some...

(Mr Jenner) (very quiet) Yeah

(Me) How, how strong do you like it?

(Joe) - Er.... Quite strong...

KJ: Yeah so we, as I say we had to, make sure we'd got decent accommodation for them. Then of course once...once we'd established that and got a sort of nucleus that came regularly and one or two came for year after year for quite a number of years, we found that it's sometimes difficult to get rid of them [laughs]. At the end of the season! [laughs] They would stay on, you know.

*KS: A hard worker's never a bad thing though is it? [I carry on making the coffee]
(To Joe, jokingly) are you filming me giving out coffees?*

KJ: We did have one or two.... Thank you.... We did have one or two that did stay on and work through the winter with a bit of pruning or, well first of all cutting hop bines. At the end, once the hops have all been picked you usually leave them for a month or two till all the apples have picked and then about November time, cut the bines and burn up, that was a little job that one or two did. After that, we were all gone, finished. All picked.

KS: Talking of burning, is that something you're not allowed to do anymore, sort of burn.....burn the field and that kind of thing?

KJ: Oh we can still burn hop bines. Not burn, we couldn't burn straw. Straw burning got banned about 1996,7.

KS: Was that for poll - pollution reasons?

KJ: About mid-90s. Well there was too much irresponsible burning going on.

KS: [laughs] Oh just willy-nilly everywhere!

KJ: Yeah, they were, smoking out the motorways, [laughs] Massive great fields, and of course it was very...well, it was alright provided you did it sensibly. You had to make sure... so many accidents where it got out of control. The wind changed, and, you know it would burn someone's house or something [laughs]

KS: Yeah [laughs] Ahh. So are there other kind of changes...well...

KJ: We did do, we did do straw burning



KS: I suppose regulations, are there other, other regulations? Yeah.

KJ: , it was quite an art to do that because you had to make sure you first of all got a ploughed strip right round the outside so that the stubble couldn't run across ploughing. And we usually burnt the two backwards against the wind. First row or two, make sure it didn't jump, Cause if you've got a lot of straw and it was, the wind was blowing one way or another, you could jump across a hedge into the next field Burn that...but I'm not surprised it got stopped.

KS: so what do you do now?

KJ: Our neighbour actually did just that. He went out into the field, they, I think they'd done a fire break round. Parked his car out in the field [laughing], and got, lit the, lit the straw and off it went, couldn't find where the car was, and when he did it was burned.

KS: Oh no! [laughs]

KJ: Yes!

KS: why did he park it in the field though, you'd think he'd...[laughs]

KJ: Well he just... I dunno he didn't think. It was down the other end. But I mean if it was, if the wind was blowing and if it was running riot, it would rush across the field as fast as you could run...if it was nice and dry.

KS: So what do you do now instead of burning straw? Do you...?

KJ: We chop it now, so...unless you want to bale it. We used to when we had all the pigs of course we always baled, all the straw, for litter for the pigs.

KS: When did you have the pigs, sorry, was that when you first got-

KJ: But ... now it's.... almost all of it is chopped. You have to have an extra chopper on the combine, make, makes it another bigger thing to do because it takes power off the combine to drive the chopper, but that's all incorporated now in the modern combines. You just disengage the chopper if you're going to bale it.

KS: So, wh- have you had any ... bans on certain things to do with apples or is it just the arable side of it?

KJ: Sorry?



KS: Have you had any regulations brought in for the apple side of farming? I mean you mentioned earlier the, the supermarkets want different sizes of apples and that was why you couldn't keep your packhouse?

KJ: Yes, well, yes, various protocols for, for, grading, and, and packing have tightened up enormously. I mean, and another thing was, with the Bramleys, we were big Bramley growers – we still are. One of the big problems with storing Bramleys any length or time is scald. Which they, go brown, go brown inside, and eventually rot. When we first started, storing, there wasn't really much cure, but, after a few years they developed this DPA which if we had, if we dipped the apples, and put it in the bins before we put them into store, this would prevent the scald – or, promote-postpone it. And that, we dipped for, or, or put them through a shower, we could put them through a shower they were on rollers put the bin on one end, it went through a shower, and drained out the other. So you, when you were loading the stores you have one man on a forklift pushing them in and they would go through, they only had to be a minute or two in there and then out the other end. The other one was taking them off, and loading them in the store. That got stopped only fairly recently cause they started saying that the DPA left deposits and traces that were not desirable.

KS: Traces, what on the apple itself?

KJ: Yeah, yeah. It did stop the, it stopped the scald but it wasn't considered, you know that, that, the residue, the traces there of residue which, the health and safety environment people have decided you can't keep doing this. You mustn't drench the apples, so, but, for the last, what 6, 7, 8 years now, we've been able to treat them with something called Smart fresh.

KS: Ok, and what's that?

KJ: Which is another [laughs], another treatment altogether, but it doesn't drench the apples in anyway. In fact, it was a bit of a bottleneck this drenching, cause you used to get the yard full of apples and all got to be pushed through and taken out. Now you can put them straight into the store,

KS: Oh so with too many apples in the....

KJ: ...without, without all the drenching business. We scrubbed the drenchers and they've been scrapped. But the Smart Fresh, the system there is when the store is full you just get it down to temperature that you're going to keep them at With Bramley's it's round about 38, 39 F, and then they, when you're down to that temperature you then introduce through the, through the hatch at the top or the side this Smart Fresh stuff which gives off a sort of effervescent fog, of smoke [grins]



KS: Oh, very fancy [laughs]

KJ: Or gas, whatever you want to call it. And that, is taken up by the apples, and , eventually it does seem to, to work, to stop the scald developing.

KS: Right. And is that more expensive than the...?

KJ: It's a new tech, it st-, it came from America. It's been going about, I suppose 10, 10 or more years, but per- perhaps a bit longer than that. It's, it's only been widely used in the last 10 or 12 years I suppose. As the dipping, has, has been phased out.

KS: Yeah. Do you prefer using that to using the dipping, or is it...

KJ: Oh yeah. Oh yes it's much... it's more expensive, it always is [laughs]

KS: All these new things are! [laughs]

KJ: [laughs] it always is more expensive, everything! But at least it does do the job, and does keep the apples better. Cause we haven't got this residue...problem

KS: Is it just Bramleys you grow, here on your farm?

KJ: Bramleys, we've been largely Bramley's because it's suitable to this area, the low Weald we are. The only problem with Bramley's of course is they are susceptible to frost. But by and large, we haven't suffered too, too badly. In the years that I'm talking about - we've run it for 55 years, 1956 till 2011, I can only really think of 4 or 5 years when we've been really badly damaged by frost out of those 50. The other thing is hail, of course. That can strike and of course is devastating

KS: Strike at any time as well,

KJ: Yeah

KS: I think we had some hail recently in April/May didn't we?

KJ: A hail, a hail storm in July, or August when the apples are nearly ready to pick Can devastate the whole lot, put them all to cider.

KS: Has that ever happened to you?

KJ: It has happened. It happened our first full or second year. But luckily it wasn't all the farm. We had some orchards up near the village which we sold when we bought



the last farm. We had 40 acres up there, and they got damaged by hail in 1957, and the whole lot were only worth juice. Fortunately, the rest of the farm was alright. And we have over the years been lucky, we've not been devastated on all the farm at any time. We've had little bits, partial damage here and there, but Dodges and Loves are up on the hill a bit, that is where the hail usually follows actually, it follows the contour of a hill, quite often. The people up along the ridge, through Sutton Valence, Ulcombe. They've had hail quite a number of times.

KS: Yeah, we had some, yeah I'm on the ridge I'm... say Kingswood, so...

KJ: Yeah, we, we only had really bad hail....We had a little bit of hail in 95 – here - but again it was back up that end and the orchards tend [laughs], cause hail is extremely local, always, very local. And we have, we haven't...a really bad frost was again our second or first full year with Little Sheephurst, when we bought the big farm up the road. Everybody had a very, very short crop because there were two frosts. There were one, there was one in April, early April, which did quite a lot of damage, but because apples very often can come up with second bloom, and we were, we would've been alright but we had yet another frost the end of May, which took out the second bloom pretty badly. And we did have a very, very short crop that year. But again, some orchards, because of the contour and that, are up on the hill a bit we still managed to get enough to keep the packhouse going most of the winter. But 97, that was the worst one and of course, the old, my father and all the locals around would remember 1935, which is before my time [laughs], even before my time! [laughing]. When there was hardly any apples anywhere in Marden, or the low weald. They really did get blitzed out

KS: Was that hail again? Back in...

KJ: No that was, that was frost. And of course the other thing too, of course nearly all the trees then were standard trees. So they were, above the frost line in some places, but they still got hit, and it is a factor and of course you can get ground frost which will take perhaps, the lower, the lower, lower branches even and you'll find there's a few up the top on a big tree, but of course nearly everything's now on small trees anyway.

KS: Yeah, is that, is that, has that changed as well., you've had to er, change the trees? Why's that?

KJ: Yes, I mean we were all, what we call, standard fruit in 56. There's hardly any small dwarfing type stocks. Now, there's no standards at all. Very last standards came out in the late 90s. I don't think anybody's got...any serious fruit grower's got any standards



KS: Is that because the dwarf varieties... do they produce more fruit?

KJ: Well they, they produce fruit much quicker, become a tree much....used to wait 10 years to get a good crop on a standard tree [laughs]

KS: Really? [laughs] [joking] I don't think Tesco would want that now!

KJ: You can't put up with that now. Now you can plant these little dwarf things, and I mean you'll get a useful little crop year 2 or 3 and certainly break even by 4 or 5. To wait 10 years to get a meaningful crop, would... would, put you.. [laughs] bankrupt I think! Keeping them all this time...

KS: So do you prefer having the dwarf varieties, or do you w- you know, still wish you had standard ones? Do you prefer the dwarf varieties, is it easier to farm?

KJ: They are... a lot of ways, I mean we don't have to have ladders for one thing. For one thing, we always of course had to have ladders and there was, all make inspections and ladders, and very often somebody would break one, or occasionally we had, we had one or two people did fall out of a tree once. Luckily nobody was hurt really badly you know [laughs], but there was always a possibility when you've got people running about with ladders. But, especially if they weren't used to them. You've got to set them up straight, and see that you're in the bough, with something substantial, the top of the ladder's on a substantial bough...

KS: I've heard there's now-

KJ: ...you just put it in anyhow and climb up there and then suddenly it goes down through the tree! [laughs] But yeah that's something we've not had to worry about, ladders lately. Oh it's much easier. That is pruning and picking. One thing we are troubled with at the moment is that all these newer dessert varieties, on these dwarf stocks seem prone to canker, which is a nasty lesion that breaks out in the trunk of the tree and can very easily kill it... We're struggling now with some of the new varieites, with very bad canker. It's, it's a er, fungus thing but it can start in the nursery but of course a lot of the varieties that we're now growing have been bred in places like Italy and on the continent where they're, a warm, a drier climate and they don't get canker so bad as they do in Northern Europe where it's wetter, and colder, and canker does run rife...and....

KS: Do you have to spray against that?

KJ: There are sprays, you can help canker-spread by spraying with copper and various other things, but can only be done really when it's fairly dormant. You can't spray copper at them when they're in flower, or in, in leaf. It is, it is a problem and I



think it's particularly a problem now with, with these dwarfing stocks. They're much more prone to collapsing. An old standard tree you could cut a piece out - it would grow much slower. I think that's part of the trouble; the root stocks and the trees are being propagated and pushed to grow faster and bigger and stronger but they collapse with any, any malaise.

KS: [jokingly] so they're not that strong then are they?

KJ: But it's going if you're, if you're not careful. Yes...ladder work..... and of course the other thing, when I started, er, going back to 56, we were still picking everything in bushel boxes. Bulk bins didn't come in until the early 60s.

Course then, loading, stores all had to be loaded with bushel boxes so we had to have a loading gang - we never did this, because when we built our first stores, we built some of the first stores with big doors so we could fill it with bulk bins. And that was 61...62...61. We were one of the first farms to actually have big doors so we could get in because previously the doors were small, just enough, ordinary doorway, just to get through, and you sealed it all up with gas panels afterwards, and of course you had, to, to load them high you had to have a, a platform and an elevator, put them up on an elevator and stack them up high. You can imagine the job loading stores at night, after picking had all been done, was loading the store

KS: Yeah, must have taken all night

KJ: ...with bushel boxes. We never actually did that ourselves because we- the moment we had stores we, we had some bulk bins. But that was a new thing in the early 60s, to have bulk bins. And to have a forklift to put 'em up with

KS: Yeah. So, you must have had quite a lot of pickers and packers, do... I, I mean the staff-load, did you have.. did you have quite high numbers of people.....

KJ: Yes

KS: Helping out..?

KJ: Yes, well of course. Emptying the bulk bins then was the next question wasn't it. [laughs]. Cause when we were packing with bushel boxes we just tipped the bushel box onto the grader and you could just have a person loading the grader like that. Once you had bins you had to have a way of tipping them onto the grader so we had to have a, a bin tipper. And that has developed into a water flotation scheme now where they can gradually tip and run into, running water so they don't get bruised,.. and that's, still now, the new packhouses state of the art. They still usually have a, a water flotation way of getting them out of the bins onto the grading line. And of



course it has the added advantage of washing the apples a bit too...providing the water doesn't get too dirty [laughs]

KS: No. [laughs]

KJ: And of course it does!

KS: Yeah, must have to change it...

KJ: You have to change it fairly regularly or it would get very dirty. But yes, it's things like that, you forget about when we were having to have ladders and bushel boxes. I mean, picking up the picked fruit out of the orchard we had to have a man running around with a tractor and trailer and he'd make a little lump of bushel boxes, each picker had his own row of course and you've have to check whose, whose lump was who, whose was what – especially when they were backing out, cause somebody they all got down a row and one or two fast pickers would then go back in the top of the next row, of somebody who was a slower picker. Got to make sure they've got their...the ticket on their bin, in their bin or the bushels, and of course humping all these bushel boxes onto a trailer and then going back to the yard and unloading them all,

KS: Must be quite a

KJ: ...is quite a heavy old job.

KS: How many pickers do you have when it's picking, when you're picking, harvesting...whatever you call it- picking season?

KJ: Well, latterly, the last few years with all the farm we've got, we would have something like 15-20 pickers, for the peak period, of probably only 2 or 3 weeks, and then it would be a few less or some of the students would go back to college or whatever, they would drop off. But [clears throat], we would usually end up with anything from 10 -20 at the start of the season and I for the three, three or four pack weeks which is basically the month of September and early week of October

KS: How many?

KJ: it would be 15 or 20

KS: can....that doesn't sound like..how

KJ: Of course with bins now they just have their own label. I've given them a, a pack of tickets and they write down their name and when they, the date they picked



them, and the orchard and of course the variety. So that we can check who's picking badly and who isn't – that's the big thing [laughs]

KS: Cause how many acres is it... of your farm...is apples?

KJ: How many acres of apples/

KS: Yeah, cause 15-20 doesn't sound...

KJ: We're about 120 acres of apples.

KS: And the rest of that is ar- er – other than that it's arable?

KJ: That's, yeah, that was what we had. Course years ago we had far less when we had the other farm, before we had the other farms, its about 120 acres now. The, you know before that we had, I suppose 50 odd acres, and gradually built it up as we bought the other farms, and obviously had less, less pickers in the early days cause we didn't need so many. But, yeah that's something... that.. and of course going back to the hops, and though we didn't have them until 96, 97. Father had hops up to 55, 56, but of course all, it was all hand picking then. The big change over to, from hands to machines took place in the mid 50s, from about 54, 55 onwards. And it got to the point where.... several things happened, I think first of all, the, the Londoners were less able to come down to pick for their fortnights holiday, or they got a bit more money and they started having holidays - you know somewhere else. Up to then it was just their holiday cause it was the only thing they could afford.

KS: Yeah my Dad's mum used to do that...

KJ: And that, you know, that tradition went on for a long time. But, course once picking by machine got perfected everybody rapidly moved over because it was very stressful running the hop-picking with all the hand pickers. You can imagine during the war and afterwards, with all the ration books and everything else we had to have, all the pubs were... had to have a special section for the hop pickers [laughs]. All the grocers had to be, had to register with the grocers all the new hop pickers names, ration books, deal... I remember dealing with all that as a, as a sort of boy when we were still hand-picking under Father's time. It was a totally different world, really.

KS: So did you hand-pick under your father? [Mr Jenner signals that he didn't hear] Did you hand-pick hops yourself or were you?

KJ: Yes, yes I did yeah. My brother had half a bin. I remember, I was away at school, we both were at that time, when we were old enough to be involved. But, I did the



booking one year, one or two years, which was recording all the pickers names and they were measured out twice a day, and you had to record their, they had a book and you had book.

KS: Yeah, check what they said with your thing

KJ: Course then they wanted a sub [laughs] It was... oh it was a fantastic.. [laughs]...it really was. For those two... for a few weeks, it was a, it was a different world. And we just saw it because my generation I suppose were one of the last to see the old traditional hand-picking on a wide scale. I mean one or two kept hand-picking into the late 50s I suppose but er, they either then packed up or went to a machine. But that, that really was a very...well, hop-picking you know, it changed the whole area for those few weeks. Special trains to bring them down and then weekends the fathers and husbands would come down...

KS: Must be quite a hub of

KJ: Weekend.

KS: Yeah..hubbub...yeah. So do you see your farm developing – how do you see it developing in the future? Do you think you'll...?

KJ: How do I see the future, yes a good question. [laughs] I can, it does seem to me that, like it is with a lot of other businesses, the bottom rung is being eroded away in farming isn't it? The farms are getting bigger and bigger, and unless you're a little specialist, I suppose you'll end up, you will - with these massive great farms, run by companies or sort of consortiums or some sort, with all the latest gadgetry and machinery. And at the bottom will be the little, little small-holding specialist who probably only gets part of his living from the, from the holding and has to- some other income, some other job. That's the way I see it, I think. There will always be a few small-holdings, small people, but by and large, the size...I'm going off track, on a scale is the only way to keep your costs down isn't it?

KS: Do you think more people will have to join groups like MKG, or whatever, they'll have to b- you know, sort of join forces with... Because you're part of MKG, so do you think that's something that other farmers will kind of be forced to do in the future if they want to survive? They'll have to join some kind of group like that?

KJ: I think, yes, I think more and more if you've got a little fruit farm, and you've got no storage, and , obviously you wouldn't be allowed to pack probably because you wouldn't be able to supply supermarkets, they won't have you unless you pass a certain standard of throughput and operation, they won't take from you. So, yeah, you're, you're, you're gonna struggle [laughs], if you've got no storage as well. You



will struggle. Because they, they charge a lot for packing, throughput, you can't control exactly when your fruit's marketed. It's got to go into a programme and they say well we'll do that variety for the next 6 weeks or whatever, and then we wanna do something else, or something...it's, it's very regulated now.

KS: Yeah that's something that's definitely...

KJ: The supermarkets do dictate....almost too much really, as to what, what we can do. I don't know why, how we've allowed them to get like that. Cause if they wanted apples, they should be able to talk to us a bit more instead of that. They tell, they tell us what they're gonna do, or what they're gonna sell them for, which is the wrong way round. You say well if you want them you- they're that much price, that's the price. They say "no, no, it's got to be a pound a bag" or something, [laughs] whatever it is. Whatever it is. No I think, as I say, as in a lot of business, the big players, the bottom rung is being eroded. I mean, I can think going back 50 years down this lane there were 4 or 5 farmers, that had, total income was from their farms and , and they were, well we were one of them. Was what we did, and, and we , we presumably had a living. Now, there's really three of us [laughs]

KS: [Misinterpreting what he said] So who's the three sorry? You your wife and...?

KJ: We're one of fortunately. [laughs]

KS: [Realises what he'd meant] Oh

KJ: The others have been amalgamated or just, just a few fields, which they kept, and they share farm with somebody else, somebody else runs it. But they're not, they're not dependent on their income totally from those farms it's just.

KS: Which, sorry, which farms is that, that's now changed to?

KJ: Yes, well I mean, as I say, we've, we've swallowed up Little Sheephurst. Across the road has sold for 5 years ago, the farm who bought that has got another farm at Staplehurst and he's bought all the land, the house has gone to a city tycoon. The oast, the two oasts and the barn have all been converted into houses. And, the farm is just, well just a block of land being farmed by the chap from Staplehurst. Down the road, there's a farm there that's been... a lot of the land was bought by another farm who lives the other side of the village, and what's left is, is rented out I think again to somebody who's got a bigger farm. And there's John Adams down at the bottom, he's still going at the moment. But he's got, hun- another, he's got his father's farm, over at the, the other side of the village again. And he's still running, he is, pretty well totally fruit, he does it very well. His son's just come back into the business, hopefully it'll work out alright. He's , he's not been very well lately, , he is,



he's older than me so [laughs]. It does need, you know, Andrew's come back from Japan – he's, he's taking it on, think John's sort of in the background keeping an eye on him. But you do wonder whether it'll run long term. It'd be a shame to see it bought up, but I think possibly that might happen, be bought up by somebody else. And of course a lot of these farms have cashed in by selling off buildings that were converted to houses. So the farmyard becomes a, a sort of little enclave of houses rather than a farmyard. And of course the people that buy these houses are not, not, country-people [laughs] and they don't like the noise or the smell, of some of the farming activity [laughs]. If you're not careful, we've had a few cases of that with the hop machine, when they were fully hop-picking, course the bine chopper makes a big rum- noise, running all day for two or three weeks while you're hop picking And all this complaint about this terrible noise. That's the hop-chopper. Well luckily, it has happened there's not many hops left now.

KS: No, they won't have that to complain about, then at least.

KJ: That, that won't. Well the latest thing is some of this organic fertilizer that's being used, being -making smells! [laughs]

KS: [laughs], like manure?

KJ: [laughs] that's the biggest problem now!

KS: Yeah. Ahh, right

KJ: Right well I think you've got quite enough...

Joe, myself, Mr Jenner (and Lily) go round the farm and Mr Jenner show us his classic car collection. Joe films around the farm, including capturing footage of combining in the field. We say our goodbyes/leave after that.