



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Leslie Pilcher Sr. & Robert Pilcher Jr.

Age: 87 or 82 (1928 or '33?) & 65

Location: Rycoft House, Staple, Canterbury

Size:

Type:

Interviewed by: Anna Durdant-Hollamby

Date: 6th August 2015

Anna: So I'd just love to know about both of your experiences, how it all started, why engineering?

L. Pilcher: Well I started work when I was 14, an apprenticeship and I was in Sandwich until I was 16 years, wasn't I in Sandwich?

B. Pilcher: '58, you moved to Ash.

L. Pilcher: I wanted to start up a business over there, not my own business, a business with somebody else, then I packed up when I was 62.

Anna: Brilliant.

L. Pilcher: I've never done anything else, all my life. Even when I were little, I was always on a farm.

Anna: Yeah, was it because you were on farms or were you living on one as a family?

L. Pilcher: No, didn't live on a farm, but I was always on the farm, working with the horses. So I was at school in the war and the war broke out in 19...

B. Pilcher: In 1939.

L. Pilcher: In 1939, well I was 11 then, so I went up to secondary school when everyone was evacuated but I didn't go, so we were on the farm. And we used to go with the horses, two horses. Old Captain and the mare, tame one for myself, used to take turns because the mare was a bit low and the Captain wasn't. Used to have



stand on the binders to put the collars on. Throw the collars up into the and jump up and put the collars on. And, we mucked about on the land.

B. Pilcher: So what did you do with them?

L. Pilcher: The horses?

B. Pilcher: Yeah!

L. Pilcher: Everything!

B. Pilcher: Ploughing?

L. Pilcher: No we didn't go ploughing with them, we went shimming and rolling with them and that sort of thing.

B. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah, so it was more on top of the ground.

Anna: Okay, yeah, that's so interesting!

B. Pilcher: How many would've had horses then?

L. Pilcher: Everybody had horses, beginning of the war. Tractors didn't come along until - well hardly anyone had a tractor before the war, the odd one or two farmers.

[pause while Margaret, Leslie's partner comes in and hands out tea and biscuits]

L. Pilcher: In the Saturday mornings, we used to go and cut the chaff up for the whorls. And we used to have what they call a paise in the corner. And we used to cut so much chaff, well fodder it was then, not chaff. and you never grew hay like you do today, it was always fodder. And that fodder was loose in the clover and all that, you made stacks of them. They used to put so much, so much, chaff....oh what I say? [Fodder]. Fodder, and then you put corn on the top, then you put pulped up wurzels, all that sort of thing.

B. Pilcher: Do you know what wurzels are?

Anna: Oh can you remind me actually because I've heard that expression before [laughing]

L. Pilcher: Wurzels, they're for the cattle.

B. Pilcher: They're like a beetroot.



Anna: Oh yeah, they're huge aren't they?

B. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah, like sugar beet really!

Anna: I remember

B. Pilcher: Yeah, someone called them mangles.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, mangles.

B. Pilcher: They're all the same family, all brassicas really, you know, they're like a swede that gets big.

Anna: They're just really big aren't they!?

L. Pilcher: So another thing round here was shock-it up corn, that's when you cut the corn in the barn and you shock it all up like that, [*making gestures with his hands*] and someone will say 'stookin it up!'

B. Pilcher: Stookin' it up.

Anna: Stookin' it up, good expression !

B. Pilcher: But this area, as I said, would have, everyone would have been a mixed market garden.

L. Pilcher: Oh yeah, most of it was all vegetables, big rows of vegetables grown! And I always used to get half a crown of for puttin' in plants by hand.

B. Pilcher: By hand!

Anna: Wow!

B. Pilcher: So yeah, you had to make a hole in the ground. Put the plant in, roll the soil back in.

L. Pilcher: Before the war, a farm worker got about 30 shillings for about 55 hours a week, and the waggoner, he got 38 shillings, because he used to have to get up early in the morning, about 4 o'clock, go and feed the horses, then go and have his breakfast and then go out in the fields with the horses. Then they'd plough from about 6 o'clock in the morning until 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Then they would come back, give the horses something to eat and then they'd go and have their lunch.



And they go back, and then in night time, they'd have to put the horses to bed about 8 o'clock, every night of the week, 7 days a week.

Anna: 7 days a week, it's so different, it's so hard to imagine now isn't it!?

B. Pilcher: My other, *my* grandad, we call my dad grandad as well, my grandad on my mum's side used to work on what was a farm across the road. But he went as a waggoner didn't he?

L. Pilcher: Yeah, he's always been a waggoner all his life.

B. Pilcher: So obviously he used to go ploughing and everything with horses really, there is a picture somewhere at home of grandad with his horse at our local flower show. Yeah, but there would have been a farm every few yards down the road.

L. Pilcher: Hundreds of farms.

B. Pilcher: I mean how many would have been in Woodnesborough?

L. Pilcher: 18!

B. Pilcher: 18 farmers in Woodnesborough!

L. Pilcher: Well 18 market gardens.

B. Pilcher: Market gardens and that's only where we just driven through!

Anna: Yeah exactly, that tiny little village!

B. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah

L. Pilcher: And years ago, used to plough with the horses, if you had a single furrow field, you had 2 horses but if you had a 2 furrow field, you had 4 horses. And then we'd use what they called a balance blade, you used to tip the plough over and go back the same way. And we used to shim with the horses, everyone went shimming with the horses.

B. Pilcher: Which means hoeing between the wheat.

L. Pilcher: Yes you know, between the plants.

B. Pilcher: You need a glossary of terms!



Anna: [laughing] yes exactly!

L. Pilcher: Even when I was 8 or 9, I used to go up to the Lashes in Marshborough, they had horses. And the old bloke would harness em' up and I used to go harrowing and rolling and that, with the horses, that when I was 8 or 9. So I've always been interested in farming, yeah.

Anna: Aw yeah, sure. Did you enjoy working with horses?

L. Pilcher: I did, yeah! I used to like it yeah.

B. Pilcher: You're not a great animal lover though?

L. Pilcher: No, I'm not cruel to animals, I just don't like animals.

Anna: Just not a big fan?

B. Pilcher: You used to have a dachshund that you and mum inherited didn't you?

L. Pilcher: I've had an interesting life and I'd do it all again!

Anna: Yeah? Excellent! And what was it, after the war ended and you went into your apprenticeship, where was engineering at, when you started?

L. Pilcher: Sandwich, I started, at King's in Sandwich I started, in 1947, when I was 14. We used to start at 7 o'clock in the morning and we used to work until 5 o'clock. On Saturdays, we started at 7 and worked until 1. So we used to do 51 hours a week for 12 shillings [*chuckling*].

B. Pilcher: So, 60p! [*chuckling too*]

Anna: [laughing] whoa, 60p!

B. Pilcher: But Engineering wise then, it would have been then, what we call blacksmith engineering.

L. Pilcher: Well, yes, we used to do blacksmithing, everything back then. Wheelwrighting. Not much I haven't done in the agricultural line.

B. Pilcher: But when did things start getting mechanised?



L. Pilcher: In the war, because in the war, the farmers never had any money and then the war aid came along and they supplied all this machinery for the farmers, who borrowed it.

B. Pilcher: So they never owned it, this war aid stuff then?

L. Pilcher: No, war aid just lent it to you.

B. Pilcher: But who would've, they wouldn't have lent it to smaller people though would they?

L. Pilcher: Anybody!

B. Pilcher: Anybody!?

L. Pilcher: One used to have three binders.

B. Pilcher: But who had them?

L. Pilcher: Well we used to go round with them.

B. Pilcher: Oh that was contractors who had them.

L. Pilcher: Yeah we used to travel round with them.

B. Pilcher: So that's how Uncle Cyril got started then?

L. Pilcher: Aye, they'd been going years.

B. Pilcher: What, as contractors?

L. Pilcher: Contractors, yeah, because years ago, at threshing, the old thresher and the steam engine, you never called corn by the ton, you called them quarters. So you wouldn't go and say to a farmer, how much have you got by the weight? They'd say 8 1/4 by the acre, which would be about 18 hundred weight. A sack of wheat was about 200 weight 1/4, the sack of barley was 2 hundred weight and a sack of oats 8 hundredweight and 3/4s.

Anna: Okay, sure.

B. Pilcher: You know what a 100 weight is?

Anna: Oh God!



B. Pilcher: 112lbs! ... 'bout 50 kilos

Anna: 112lbs, yeah, yeah! I knew that from school years ago, we did old fashioned measurements, thank you.

L. Pilcher: Roughly, 4 acres of corn would make 1 stack, and they used to thresh 1 stack in a day, roughly.

Anna: Wow!

B. Pilcher: But then the stacks had to be thatched.

L. Pilcher: Not for very long, but when you stacked the stack, you always get the bin lies so when the sheaves are like that all the way round and so when it did rain, the water did, you know...

B. Pilcher: Butts to the outside.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, butts to the outside

Anna: Ah, interesting, I'm just trying to build a picture in my head, it's so different.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, anything you want to know, take my number ring me! Don't be frightened.

Anna: Ah brilliant!

L. Pilcher: And the Land Army Girls, they've done a lot of the work, didn't get enough praise for what they've done.

Anna: Yeah they did amazingly!

L. Pilcher: They used to have to go thresh and carry all the chaff on their back. Yeah it was hard work.

B. Pilcher: Had a couple of aunties who were Land Army; Aunti... Aunti... married an uncle of mine, godmother married a market gardener. Another aunt married...

L. Pilcher: You see, market gardens were different. You be livin' off 2 acres once upon a time. Lot of these Kent ... they was 2 acres, cos you ... holdings you could rent them off the council. Only about two acres...



Anna: Okay, I see.

B. Pilcher: But they started off in the First World War didn't they? Council holdings?

L. Pilcher: I don't know when they really did start, but they've all gone now haven't they?

B. Pilcher: Yeah, they've all been sold on now. But I mean, my colleague Phil, his dad farmed up by the church at Woodnesborough and he managed to put 2 boys, on 90 acres, through private school, and I don't know how much work John did himself, but he was...

L. Pilcher: Ah, he used to work hard. His father

B. Pilcher: But obviously his brother's now farming it, and on 90 acres, and ok, it's difficult to make a living.

L. Pilcher: Look at Bill...130 acres, all to private schools. There's more money based in the war. In the war is when all the farmers made the money. They couldn't go wrong. They didn't know what to spend their money on. You couldn't buy new machinery 'cause the machinery wasn't there.

Anna: So yeah, you started out with really general kinds of engineering, blacksmith type stuff?

L. Pilcher: Anything. Blacksmithing, bladeturning, repairing tractors, repairing lorries, greenhouse heating, anything to do with agriculture, we used to do.

B. Pilcher: But if you look at a syllabus for an agricultural student or engineering student compared with say a car mechanic or a student of automotive engineering, well basically a car's an engine, a gearbox and axle-wheeled steering; a tractor is all those things plus the fact that it's got hydraulics on it that lifts the implements up and down, and loaders up and down. But that's only one facet of it, the next facet is you have a combine and that has an engine, a gearbox, transmission, steering, threshing mechanism, a separating mechanism. Then you have a sprayer, a path sprayer, so that's an engine, a gearbox, transmission, steering, plus pumps, you know for moving water around, plus jets and that's all what an agricultural engineer has to do, to the same standard as a car mechanic. I mean when I first started you were always taking engines to pieces, in those days they would have been you know, Fergusons, the old grey Fergies, Massey Fergusons, Ford and dad would go back even further, we'd have an engine to take to bits every week when I was an apprentice.



L. Pilcher: Dozens, yeah.

B. Pilcher: Now, you never take an engine to pieces, you repair them but very seldom would you take an engine to pieces and rebuild it, because obviously they last that much longer.

L. Pilcher: Yeah they do!

B. Pilcher: And then you're into soil-engaging implements with ploughs and cultivators and power harrows and all these things. I mean most of the implements in dad's day would have either been what they called troughs, so they would sat on the ground and you pulled them along on the back of a tractor, until Mr Ferguson came along and decided to put the hydraulic lift on the back so you could carry the implement. And I think dad's favourite thing, "never catch on."

L. Pilcher: And years ago, we used to ploughing with steam ploughs, so you had a steam engine at each end of the field and it would pull 4 or 5 ploughs [on a winch] on a winch.

B. Pilcher: On a wire rope!

L. Pilcher: [*pointing out things in the books and pamphlets that he got out*] see and there's a tractor with a training plough on it, all on hydraulics.

B. Pilcher: What tractor's that then?

L. Pilcher: Standard Ford.

B. Pilcher: When would that have been built? late 1950s?

L. Pilcher: About 1936.

B. Pilcher: As late as that, rather, as early as that?

L. Pilcher: That's not a blue one, should have been orange. Then lots of Chalmers, a lot of came over during the war from America. There used to be hundreds of them about.

Anna: Oo, I've never seen ones like that before.

B. Pilcher: They would have been row crop tractors...because they look a bit skeletal.



Anna: Yeah exactly, very skeletal.

B. Pilcher: But a lot of American row crop tractors, 'cause obviously they grow lots of things, had double wheels at the front so it was like a trike.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah.

B. Pilcher: But obviously the Ferguson hydraulic system was the first and originally I think he went on a Ford, he put it on a Ford tractor, dad, didn't he?

L. Pilcher: Yes, he did.

B. Pilcher: And then they fell out.

Anna: Did they? I was going to ask what your experience of Massey Ferguson was, because my grandfather was Special Operations Director for them.

B. Pilcher: Really, up in Stoneleigh?

Anna: I'm not quite sure where he was based, he travelled around a lot, I know that much. He's been dead for some time unfortunately, can't ask him about it now, but he was with them at least 30 years. He was really high up actually, he went all round the world.

B. Pilcher: And was he the same surname?

Anna: No, he was Boon, Leonard Boon but well, he was born in 1913

B. Pilcher: You've googled him?

Anna: No, because it goes back quite a long time.

B. Pilcher: So he'd be well into his 90s now then?

Anna: Yeah he'd be 102.

L. Pilcher: *[pointing to more pictures]* And that's an old Marshall, they used to use that for threshing, you can borrow these if you want them.

Anna: That would be amazing or I can take photos of them with my phone, whatever you can spare really.

L. Pilcher: Or you can take them home with you if you want.



Anna: We're definitely looking for stuff to go on the website so that'd be brilliant.

[pause]

B. Pilcher: When are you back to college?

Anna: End of September, so ages away yet!

B. Pilcher: Are you back by the 30th? Because just outside of Canterbury, will be our local ploughing match, it's between Wingham and Bridge. And there will be more vintage stuff there than there will be modern stuff, because obviously, when dad was talking about, the big farmers would have had you know, 3 or 4, 4 or 5 tractor plough-men, all plodding up and down with three furrow ploughs.

L. Pilcher: See the David Brown tractor! *[points in book]*

Anna: Okay, yep

L. Pilcher: They were the first ones to come out quite modern really, because there's an old Ferguson and David Browns used to make Fergusons.

Anna: Oh really? I didn't realise that

L. Pilcher: Then they fell out and they started making their own. There's another old Ferguson *[pointing in book]*.

Anna: I'm always surprised when they're not red! [laughing]

B. Pilcher: That's why they're called a grey Fergie. There are some earlier ones with spring seats, that's what they call a triple D, they made a lot of them, it just gave you more traction, which is everything. But that was the problem you had with tractors, implements become bigger.

L. Pilcher: Like combines, when combines first come out, they were all training combines. They used to have them behind the tractors. You can have them. *[hands over several booklets]*

Anna: Oh thank you!

L. Pilcher: Oh here's a farmer ploughing with the horses.

Anna: With the horses in the 1940s.



B. Pilcher: So that's an early combine and that one is self-propelled, and that one's being dragged along by a crawler. What's that one there? That's another international one, so they dragged them along the side of the tractor, that's an old sunshine, they're American and then they started making them self-propelled. What would the width of the cover? 8ft?

L. Pilcher: No, about 21.

B. Pilcher: 10?

L. Pilcher: About 12-21, I think.

B. Pilcher: That's what they call a rat-realm one so you'd take the tractor out once you'd finished combining [F done one] and then you can see how antiquated, you know, and a lot of these had mechanisms on them, because were quite heavy you needed to disengage the implement from the ground. So you'd have a lever and you'd pull a string which would put a catch in it, which would wind itself up to a ratchet that would lift itself out of the ground.

Anna: I see, okay.

B. Pilcher: You can see that a lot of this material would have been cast because there was no welding then, so it would have been cast and bolted, and bits would have been forged. And then obviously round here they used to grow and collect grass to make silage (to his father), yeah there was a binder earlier on...

Not sure what Mr Pilcher Sr says here.

B. Pilcher: No, because you didn't have enough power to chop it all up. And like potato spinners, they were pulled by a horse. And they used to row around and throw the potatoes out to the side. And that's one of the first...that's a standard isn't it? And you know round here even when I was a boy, potatoes were picked up by hand. We used to be predominantly new potatoes on Thanet, they'd be up there when there were probably about 3 or 4 ton to the acre lifting up marbles like this and they'd just been dug out the ground. There were lots of women from...

Anna: I was gonna say, there was lots more human labour wasn't there?

B. Pilcher: Yeah there was, yeah and most women went on the land picking potatoes, in those sort of times



L. Pilcher: All the corn you'd pick up with a binder. And you'd always cut oats first and carried them last.

B. Pilcher: well then you'd cut them greener.

L. Pilcher: well you'd cut em green, but then..... There's the old binder, I've repaired 100s of them, literally 100s.

Anna: Wow, God that looks quite the complex thing to have to put back together, or rather take apart and then put back together. So what were the kind of things that used to go wrong with them?

L. Pilcher: Often because it wouldn't tie up.

B. Pilcher: Because you had the string bit that you had to tie.

L. Pilcher: All sorts of things you know, when it was dry season, you never had many breakdowns but it was the wet season that you got all the troubles.

B. Pilcher: And obviously you had the knives together at the front so can you imagine a hedge-cutter/trimmer looks like? Similar to that. So you had fingers going through it like that and then you had this knife going backwards and forwards across the front and that was a similar sort of knife whether you were cutting grass or whether you were cutting straw. But obviously if you've got something going back and forth and you get a stone jammed into it, you break the sections, little triangular sections....

L. Pilcher: I can tell you how many links that used to be on that chain, 96 on that one. And there used to be another, you used to have to have 14 knees between 1 and 2, the next two, to get the arms tied, is that right? I've literally done 100s of those in my time.

B. Pilcher: You know, when I started my apprenticeship in, well I went to college in '66, binders were still on the syllabus, but I've never worked on one.

L. Pilcher: It's not many years ago that a farmer's binder broke down and I got it going, I got a photo of it somewhere.

Anna: Brilliant.

L. Pilcher: Margaret, just a minute please?

B. Pilcher: That shows an army of horses pulling a binder.



L. Pilcher: That's a combine!

B. Pilcher: Is that a combine?

L. Pilcher: A combine with a binder on the front.

B. Pilcher: So it must have had an engine on it.

L. Pilcher: Yeah they did.

B. Pilcher: Yeah you see they had a stationary engine on it, but binders would have been driven from the rear wheels, especially the one under there would have cleats on it okay? Like a tractor cleat, metal.

L. Pilcher: And I got this old binder going, cause all the boys at the shed hadn't seen a binder before, everyone come down to see this binder going.

Anna: Came down to see it, yeah definitely.

L. Pilcher: Yeah they love these combines without engines.

B. Pilcher: See that's a mower so that just cuts the grass, but that would have been driven off the wheels you can see they've got the cleats on there. And obviously the corn drills were the same.All these bits would have been cast iron, so they would have been cast, rather than welded and fabricated and then they would add wooden hoppers on them.

Anna: That must be quite brittle to work with? Must be quite inflexible.

B. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah...is that a corn drill?

L. Pilcher: That's a day turner.

B. Pilcher: Oh so that one is. I thought they was harrows on the back, I take my glasses off.

L. Pilcher: Its totally different, like putting cabbage plants in. Russell's bought a planter and you had to have 5 people to put 1 row in.

Anna: Really, wow?

L. Pilcher: And then the Russell's bought one, used to sit on the unit, you just kept dropping them in. But now you just throw plants in like that..



Anna: Now it's just 1 person isn't it?

B. Pilcher: It's like combines now, they've got 500 horsepower engines on them. Ah crumbs, they've got cutter-bars on the front, 35-45ft wide, that's 10-12 metres, and when I was young, if you had a 16 ft header on a combine that was pretty big.

L. Pilcher: Another thing that we used to do was make up things like that, see that old car with a hay sweeper on the front, you don't do things like that today.

Anna: No sure, so you were actually customising things?

L. Pilcher: Yeah I was always making things up in my day for farms.

Anna: Aww that's so interesting.

L. Pilcher: And that..... would load them into the trailer, as I say you're welcome to take these home with you.

Anna: That's really kind, thank you.

B. Pilcher: I mean when you think about it, you know that's what you used to sow seeds. You actually put them in

Anna: Yeah that's what you did isn't it, actual people planting them!

B. Pilcher: Yep and the same with fertiliser, it wasn't until you got a bit later.

L. Pilcher: Oh we didn't use that, not until later.

B. Pilcher: Yeah you used homemade stuff from your own dung maxel.

L. Pilcher: You know what a dung maxel is?

Anna: No I don't think so! Something for spreading the muck?

L. Pilcher: No, no no! When they clean out the bullock yards with the bullocks in that.

B. Pilcher: For winter

L. Pilcher: When they clean that out, they use what's called a dung maxel and they used to use it for the straw too when they stacked it

Anna: Ah wow okay yeah.

L. Pilcher: So you used to get a big pile



Anna: A big pile of dung

L. Pilcher: Which would depend on how much you've got in the yard.

Anna: To then put on the land to fertilise it?

L. Pilcher: That's it and then they'd have to spread it by hand. Then they used to have what they called a dung cart, that's a 2 wheeled cart and you'd have the horses and you'd have to stop and make a lump there, and then you'd go a bit further and make another lump there. And it was all spread by hand.

Anna: Oh wow, just amazing!

L. Pilcher: Then they brought out a machine that could smooth out the top of these lumps to spread it, then they brought out manure spreaders and all sorts of things. These old farmers they used to work hard.

B. Pilcher: Yeah they did, there's a chaff cutter

Anna: Okay?

B. Pilcher: So that's got a big handle and a blade and you put your chaff in there which is straw and one thing and another, then you turn the handle and as you push it through it just chops the end off it and then there on the next page is a wurzel cutter

L. Pilcher: Pulper.

B. Pilcher: Pulper, chopping turnips they are there, so they look more like swedes than wurzels. So you put them in the hopper and it's a bit like a food processor really, there's a blade that would whiz round and chop them up in to chips...

L. Pilcher: A bit like woodchips.

B. Pilcher:.. because obviously sheep would gnaw on them but they couldn't pick them up if they kept moving away.

L. Pilcher: They got all this animal food ready now, they throw a into it....because years ago they used to cut it all up. There was dozens of those different sort of, there was one they used to call a monkey box. But all it was was like a trough with a blade that used to come down and chop it off like that, grandad (blank) used to have one of them.

Anna: I see yeah

L. Pilcher: So I've seen a lot change in farming.



Anna: Yep it just must be huge, especially as you're involved with the technical engineering side and it amazes me how speaking to farmers, theres only the farmer and then maybe 2 or 3 people that he employ and they've got a 1000 acres or so to manage. It just seems like complete reverse of what was going on years ago.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, years ago, they'd only have 5 or 6 acres but 2-3 people working on it. I used to go to a farm and...., and that don't mean much, and he used to have 26 men on that farm and when he packed up he had 1.

Anna: Wow! How many acres was it?

L. Pilcher: Well he probably had about 300 acres, he used to grow a lot of vegetables.

Anna: Wow that's amazing isn't it? 26 people, 300 acres. And now the average is 1000 acres and 2 or 3 people employed.

B. Pilcher: Well as I say, when nanny and granddad lived in the village, they move out of Staple, they lived just down the road from where I live, granddad worked just across the road. As a little boy I probably knew most of the people living in Staple, because they all worked for the various farmers. Quite a few would have worked with granddad, nan used to go hop picking and they used to have a cherry orchard, and then in the autumn, with the fodder beet, they'd have been picked them up at the tops and knocked together and chucked on the floor in a heap. And then they would have come along with the horse and cart and picked them up. But hop picking was quite an arduous task wasn't it? I mean hops.

L. Pilcher: A lot of hops round here.

B. Pilcher: I mean everywhere you see an oast house.

Anna: Yeah exactly, that's Kent!

B. Pilcher: Yesterday I was driving Maidstone way and round every corner there would have been an oast house. I mean how many places would have grown hops round here when I was a boy in the 60s?

L. Pilcher: Tony Coleman, Smiths, Moat, Tom Coleman, Marshalls, Petlers, a lot.

Anna: It was so common wasn't it? I'm interviewing Mr Redsell...

B. Pilcher: Tony Redsell?

Anna: Tony Redsell yep, over in Faversham, Selling on Monday.

B. Pilcher: You are gonna see Tony?



Anna: Yep on Monday morning. So hopefully will hear about it all then, because he's hop man. Nice that we've got him actually because obviously hops are much more rare in Kent now.

L. Pilcher: Funny you should say that, over the road a friend of mine, he's a Londoner, he used to come hop picking down here when he was a boy, and he wrote a book about hop picking.

Anna: Oo did he?

L. Pilcher: I'll try and get it for you.

Anna: Aww, thank you!

L. Pilcher: Everything he had in that book was perfect except one thing, he said that they used coke to dry the hops, used anthracite, but they didn't, they used coal. But a it was good to read.

Anna: So that was a fact that he got wrong or he'd forgotten?

B. Pilcher: Well he probably didn't know

L. Pilcher: I didn't like to tell him but I did tell him – that's another thing with hops, they used to dry them in the oast house, but they don't do that anymore.

B. Pilcher: Well 1 or 2 do.

Anna: Oh yeah what do they do?

L. Pilcher: They dry them in big trays.

Anna: Oh that's what they do. I wondered as everyone seems to have converted oasts into posh houses and they're not used in a practical way.

B. Pilcher: They still use an oast house, the Redsells.

L. Pilcher: It's funny how many changes there have been in farming

Anna: Yeah definitely.

B. Pilcher: It's just that everything has come along, the changes are all due to the fact of labour being expensive, because most farm workers had a tithe cottage, at minimal rent. it meant you was close to the farm, so that was an expense. Nearly all the improvements that have come in agriculture over the past 60 years have come through labour-saving. And as labour saving has come on, they've needed more power. If you think about it, in the 50s you'd have had a 50 hpw tractor and in the



60s you'd have had 60 hpw and in the 70s, you went for an 80 hpw tractor. When I stopped working for Massey Ferguson dealer 20 years ago, everybody wanted 100hpw tractor, well now they're 200hpw plus! And the implements have got wider, before you'd have something that was 60 inches, 5ft, 1.5metres, and then they'd gradually got wider and wider and wider to cover more ground, less passes.

L. Pilcher: The old horse ploughs were 6-8 inches and they didn't go more than 4 inches deep, so...

B. Pilcher: But you didn't need to because

L. Pilcher: The ground wasn't being pound down.

B. Pilcher: The ground didn't get pound down. The more you drive over it, the more you poach it by driving over it, the more you have to go down deeper to improve your soil structure.

L. Pilcher: And then years ago when you went to put subsoil on it. You know about subsoiling?

Anna: No I don't think so?

L. Pilcher: They do it on tractors now with big (blank) but years ago with horses, you'd have 1 horse making the furrow and then another horse would come along, and all it was what they called a pan, it was 2 prongs going down maybe 2 or 3 inches.

B. Pilcher: But that's probably all the depth of the pan was

Anna: And now it goes?

B. Pilcher: Depends on what sort soil you've got.

L. Pilcher: That was another thing, potatoes years ago had to be arranged by rows. And first it was 8 then it went up to 30 and then 36.

B. Pilcher: Yep 36, it only went up because tractors have got bigger and to get the power of the tractor down, you need bigger tires and you can see in the pictures in here that some of the tractors had little skinny tires.

Anna: Little tires, I was thinking that.

B. Pilcher: This looks modern at the front but if you look at some of the older tractors in here, they would have had 10 inch tires and then as they got bigger, they got wider and wider to get the power down. And one of the ways they used to get the power down to get greater power and less compaction, you would have a



crawler on a tractor to spread the load and to increase the power that you could pull. But most tractors in those days would have had 10 inch tires and you can see there a normal tractor being converted to 4 wheel drive, there's another one there and the tires have gone up to 18 inch wide tires, that's where you need wider wheels, for potato wheeling.

L. Pilcher: A wagoner, years ago used to walk 11 miles a day.

Anna: Wow, really! (Exhale). That's a lot in a day! Presumably for a small amount of money as well presumably.

B. Pilcher: The trouble is when we were little kids, grandad was so used to striding out, we'd have to nearly run to keep up with him all the time

Anna: [laughing] good work-out for children, tire you out for bed.

B. Pilcher: Well yeah, yeah. You got dragged along by your hand. But, the only reason agriculture has changed is for profitability, same it doesn't matter what type of agriculture, it's just changed to make it easier but as I say, a few years ago, around here, all the market gardeners would grow a few beans. There would be lorry people round here, marketers, they'd called it. They would go round in the late afternoon, collect all the veg up. So they'd take runner beans from you, tomatoes from someone else, potatoes, some courgettes or marrows, cauliflowers, and they'd have a mixture of stuff on the lorry and trundle off up to the London markets in Covent Garden or Borough.

L. Pilcher: That was another thing, in the war, all these tiny tractors come out.

Anna: Really wow!

B. Pilcher: Quite small.

Anna: I was gonna say, they just don't look like tractors, that's really interesting.

B. Pilcher: They would have had a 2-wheeled tractor, an iron horse or something like that, which had a rotavator, so you walked behind it.

L. Pilcher: With the iron horse, it was 2 wheeled and you could walk with it.

Anna: And did you find both of you that your training set you up well enough to deal with all the changes.

B. Pilcher: It just evolves doesn't it, yeah. It just evolves, I mean...

Anna: Learn on the job kind of thing?



B. Pilcher: We're now getting into computerisation and that does throw some operators out. And I often, some of the new operators don't get the best out of their equipment because they're not quite au fait with setting it up on computers. Now a tractor will have a satellite receiver on it and that will drive it straight and it will pull out and pull you into the next row, and if you have a 6 metre implement on the back, it will move you over 6 metres so that the join between them will be exactly the same, providing you've programmed it properly, whereas years ago, you would have had an arm out the side of the implement scratching a line in the soil, and you'd have to drive through it.

Anna: Manually.

B. Pilcher: So that's when you know the tractor drivers were sorted between the mice and men, really, by how straight they kept their furrow! The straighter it is, the less energy you use, because when you start going round corners, you put extra loading on the implement and it wants more pulling, so it's less efficient.

L. Pilcher: That's another thing when someone couldn't drive straight, you used to say if a hare run down there it'd break its neck. Another thing they'd say, more crooks, more crops.

Anna: [laughing] good expressions!

L. Pilcher: I've got more books here.

B. Pilcher: Where you going, upstairs?

L. Pilcher: No, no, just in there, you talk to her while I go.

B. Pilcher: Well it's all evolved. And development has come on. In '72, we had a machine, a potato harvester that separated the stones and the clods from potatoes, using an x-ray. You know a potato isn't very dense and an x-ray would pass through it and you'd pick up a signal. And when the x-ray beam was broken, it sent it through a mechanism with 2 fingers in it and the stone or the clod dropped through and flicked back. And that was the bee's knees at one time for Scottish farmers and people who were farming on stony ground.

Anna: Yeah, stony ground, exactly!

B. Pilcher: But now, we come along and we sieve the ground now for potatoes, put the stones to one side and plant the potatoes in nice conditions, because according to the supermarkets, the housewife wants a potato that's uniform in shape.

Anna: Yeah, God forbid they should look slightly like potatoes.



B. Pilcher: Yeah, yeah, in the autumn you should probably go look round a pack-house or somewhere for potatoes or apples.

Anna: Or carrots.

B. Pilcher: Yeah we don't grow carrots round here, but because they're the wrong shape, wrong dimension, the amount of potatoes that were thrown away because they're too small or too big or the wrong shape. Whereas years ago when you had potatoes, you ate them all. And now you don't, people want to get a pot from the supermarket and tip it in now. My grandchildren, Sandy's grandchildren, were down at the weekend and said 'these are my beans I've grown in the garden'. and I took them outside, and they come from Derby, and I don't think they knew how runner beans are grown. They're only toddlers and they walked though a field, and came back from with some field beans, you know animal beans, still waiting to be combined, and they were about only 3 or 4 inches long, and they thought they were peas, because you could shell them like peas. They weren't, they were like broad beans or field beans or tick beans. You know, farming has changed, everything to try and make more profit as the customers, farmers are being squeezed by it. You only have to look on the news now to see dairy farmers only getting paid 23p a pint for milk and it's costing them 32p a pint to produce it.

L. Pilcher: (Returning to conversation) Another thing you never done any baling years ago, it was always done loose. So you always make a fodder stacks, as I said earlier, you didn't grow hay like you do today, it was all clover and lucerne (alfalfa) and that sort of thing.

B. Pilcher: Was that because it kept better? Dried better?

L. Pilcher: Kept better. We had what was called a toss-knife, we used to cut it in squares.

B. Pilcher: Ah yeah when it was in a stack. I thought there might be a picture in there.

L. Pilcher: Margaret's just bringing some pictures.

Anna: Oh that's very kind....

B. Pilcher: Don't worry? He's not gone up the steps. But ditching would have all been done by hand, hedging would have all been done by hand. And you needed all the workforce in the summer to grow the crops and in the winter, you gotta find them something to do... [to his father] you're not making her go up the loft are you?

L. Pilcher: No I'm not going up in the loft.



B. Pilcher: No but you're making Margaret go up the loft?

L. Pilcher: No, they're in the cupboard in the toilet that you can't reach without steps.

B. Pilcher: Ah, okay. [Points to something else in the books] this had a big saw in it.

Anna: And you're more specifically in the irrigation side.

B. Pilcher: Now, yeah. I mean again, irrigation came on, I suppose in the 60s really. You could get a grant in for putting in irrigation. And initially, people would have laid out aluminum pipes and then moved them after every 2 hours of watering which would have put about an inch of water on the crop. So they would let that stole up for a little bit and then move them over to the next distance and that would have probably been every 18-24 metres, depending on what size pipe and nozzle they were using. And then people tried to mechanise it with booms and guns and winding up hose and one thing and another. Then one of the first real irrigators was a French one, which was brought over locally from France and that's still going, and that was brought in 1979. So that was a reel that you pulled it out and the mechanism as the water went through the mechanism, it wound the hose up and pulled the gun in and then you'd move it along and pull the gun out, and then we tried over here the centre pivots. Have you ever been to America or the South of France?

Anna: Yeah yeah sure.

B. Pilcher: So you've seen the big gantries going across the fields. It didn't really work over here because our ground was too undulating and our fields weren't square and now because water is becoming more precious.

L. Pilcher: You better tell your mum you won't be going home tonight [chuckles]

Anna: Oh wow, look at these, they're lovely [looking at the large pile of books that Mr Pilcher's provided] amazing!

B. Pilcher: And now we're trying to preserve water so we're going into drip-irrigation with booms to stop...

Anna: Oh look at these! Ah wow.

[pause while we look at the picture book]

Anna: How is it now with water being a more precious commodity?



B. Pilcher: Well we're quite lucky, because we're fairly flat here, we've got a lot of marsh ground and most of the farmers were putting irrigation in before would take it out the river. 1 or 2 put bore holes in, the further away you got. But now with drip irrigation, you don't need a license, farmers were issued with a license years ago and they could extract a certain volume of water out of a certain stream to water a given area. And the licenses were silly really, because they were so large, people were getting millions and millions of gallons when they only wanted thousands and thousands. I mean to put an inch of water on an acre is 22,500 gallons and that's an acre inch. Most farmers on potatoes would put an acre inch in, but when farmers got irrigation, they thought 'we're gonna use it, we're gonna use it' [*chuckles when he sees his father bringing yet more books in*]. Have you got a carrier bag?

Anna: Oh my goodness! That's a library! [laughing]. Wow!

L. Pilcher: You can borrow these if you want!

Anna: Aw thank you.

B. Pilcher: She's got to get them back to Ardingly

L. Pilcher: Where do you live?

Anna: In the Ashdown Forest.

L. Pilcher: Oh you're not local?

Anna: I'm at university here, the University of Kent.

B. Pilcher: Alan Bicker is her lecturer.

Anna: Yes, he sends his best.

B. Pilcher: You remember Alan Bicker? The chap that had the trees at the back of us.

L. Pilcher: Well you can't have all this lot then, can you? You're welcome to borrow them.

Anna: Sadly not! But I tell you what, we are doing a display thing in early September and we are looking for resources.

B. Pilcher: Where are you doing that?

Anna: Because the project is for the university's 50th anniversary, they're looking for various things they can put on display, I actually can't be there sadly because I'm away.



B. Pilcher: Gallivanting?

L. Pilcher: There's lots of tools you can look at in here.

B. Pilcher: Obviously the bigger they got. Dad was tugging a horse that could do one furrow, how many can that do? 8? From that picture there.

L. Pilcher: Well you're welcome to borrow them, take them to university if you want to but I'd like them back. You're welcome to borrow them though.

Anna: Thank you, of course, that's very kind!

B. Pilcher: So that gives you some contrast to what they did, that's how they were cultivating, they were just ties that they pushed in the ground and when it was bunged up, they'd pull a lever and it was just flipped up. And then obviously you went to power harrows and then bigger power harrows and various other things that people come up with.

L. Pilcher: We had one of those in stock at one time.

B. Pilcher: And obviously power harrows came over, they were a Dutch machine here and they were very popular. That's a sub-soiler, but that's trailed. So on here, there would have been a cab and a mechanism, and you'd have pulled a lever and the key would have been in here and you'd have pulled a lever and you'd have dropped it back down. So there's all sorts of weird and wonderful designs like power ploughs. Someone said the other day, and corn drills, and these are for rolling.

L. Pilcher: Years ago, we planted potatoes by hand, we used to have to plant them a foot apart, so you'd open a furrow out, and used to have to what you called split it, and you'd do that with a horse.

Anna: Ah I see right, yeah.

B. Pilcher: And again basically they get uniformity, this is a planter that you put in a cup and you gear it up and do it at groundspeed and then it puts it in automatically, yeah yeah.

[Inaudible when Margaret appears.]

B. Pilcher: Dad was on about a cabbage planter earlier, well that one you just sat on and a bell went ding and when the bell went ding, you just put a plant in.

Anna: Sure, a little alarm.

L. Pilcher: So she comes from the New Forest?



B. Pilcher: No not the New Forest, the Ashdown Forest over near Ardingly.

Margaret: Anyone want a drink?

Anna: I'm very near Ardingly actually yeah exactly. Thank you that's very kind, I'm actually okay.

Margaret: Are you sure?

Anna: Yeah yeah.

B. Pilcher: She needs a few beers, clubbing tonight.

L. Pilcher: See this planter with tithes on it, that was a robot that went sideways.

B. Pilcher: It went sideways?? I've never seen one.

L. Pilcher: Well it went straight along, but yeah, take that book home with you tonight, well do what you want to do, we're here to help you. *[blank/inaudible]*

Anna: Thank you, that's really appreciated. Yeah exactly, it's important, I think there's loads of stories in this area that don't get told really enough.

B. Pilcher: I think it's like all these things now, years ago people used to sit down and talk.

L. Pilcher: Oo there's a Ferguson tractor.

Anna: I'm definitely interested in the Fergusons.

[pause when looking at books and pictures]

L. Pilcher: All through the country years. Chap doing the hedge there, used to cut hedges by hand, you just cut it through and right off, otherwise it won't take root again.

B. Pilcher: Down in the West Country, in Devon and Cornwall, they have competitions for it.

Anna: Is it like wattling?

B. Pilcher: no no, wattling is made from coppiced wood isn't it? So hazel wood or whatever and then you split it and weave it into wattles or .



L. Pilcher: You see years ago, before fences came round, you'd have to make a sheep pen with what you called wurdles, they were about 6ft long and you'd have to put them all round the field. Then they started using netting and driving stakes in.

B. Pilcher: Then they started using electric fencing.

Anna: Electricity, yeah.

B. Pilcher: Otherwise pigs keep getting out. I've got 3 pigs in my garden.

Anna: Have you? How do they get out ? [chuckling]

B. Pilcher: By climbing over the wire.

Anna: Do they? That's kind of surprising in a way, because they are less mobile so you wouldn't really think they would...

[inaudible]

L. Pilcher: Now they've got one that gives them shocks.

Anna: I love this picture, looks like a scene from a Thomas Hardy novel or something doesn't it.

B. Pilcher: Yeah yeah.

[pause, inaudible again]

L. Pilcher: That's what we called a dung cart.

Anna: Oh I see, so quite small really?

B. Pilcher: Yeah because it depended on weight, how much would it carry?

L. Pilcher: A ton

Anna: A ton cart yeah, wow.

B. Pilcher: But I can remember my grandad who lived just down the road where we lived, cutting the corners out of a field with a scythe, they must have been going in with a binder.

L. Pilcher: They used to cut the corn *[inaudible]*

Anna: Sure, that's amazing.



B. Pilcher: Not sure how old I would have been then, I can just remember them using a scythe.

Anna: I saw that in Kenya, they were using machetes and stuff to hack, it was amazing.

B. Pilcher: Where did you go in Kenya?

Anna: I went to the foothills of Mount Kenya.

B. Pilcher: Ah up Nakuru way, Nanyuki.

Anna: Yep that's it, yeah, Meru, do you know it?

B. Pilcher: I've been there yeah, trying to sell them corn drills. That's where they grow a lot of peas and green beans.

Anna: Yeah I think so, that sounds right.

B. Pilcher: What were you doing?

Anna: I was doing some volunteer work for 3 months, yeah it was very interesting.

B. Pilcher: So you've stood on the equator in Nakuru.

Anna: Yes we did.

L. Pilcher: Do you want to go right through the ages?

B. Pilcher: We can't go that far dad.

Anna: We're going in particular for the last kind of 50 years to tie in with the anniversary, if we can go a bit before that as well, it's brilliant, so having stuff from the wartime, that's brilliant.

B. Pilcher: Do you know Nick Swinford?

Anna: Nick Swinford? Who?

B. Pilcher: Swinford.

Anna: No, I don't think so, he might be on the list. Is he a farmer?

B. Pilcher: No, he's in charge of the property up at the university.

Anna: Oh, no I don't.



L. Pilcher: This is another thing they used to do years ago. You know they put used to put potatoes out by hand, they used to make clamps out in the field, put the straw down and cover them up, if there was a sharp frost, you can see the clamps all going out like this, to stop them from going rotten.

Anna: Oh I see, is that how they're protected?

B. Pilcher: They're wurzels, turnips, or it might be beetroot even, I can remember when I first went to Peterborough and driving from Peterborough to Wisbeech, they had, they called them pise (spelling), they'd have a pise right on the edge of the road and all through the winter they'd be stood there with a little stationary engine riddle, man there with a fork forking them in. And at the end of a day, then a lorry would come along and load the bags and take them off to London.

L. Pilcher: *[inaudible]*. They're beetroot there.

B. Pilcher: Beetroot, yeah, but it still sort the same.

L. Pilcher: Well you're welcome to borrow them.

Anna: Thank you.

L. Pilcher: Here they're doing what's called harrowing, we used to drill the corn and we used to sell 100s of them that are in there.

B. Pilcher: Well everyone used to pull a harrow behind every drill, they used it to get a fine till, it's like dragging a rake across the soil. Whereas the other things are bit more aggressive.

L. Pilcher: 50 years...Ah there's a binder and there's the old boy cutting round the corn to start the binding. You cut the corn and binder guy start cutting the corn. And then once you've cut all the corn, you get a rake and you rake all the odds and ends up.

Anna: Wow, what a process, it's amazing isn't it.

B. Pilcher: And you can see why...

[inaudible while looking at more books]

B. Pilcher: throwing loose hay up into a hayloft. And that's obviously a small stack.

Anna: I love those big haystacks, they're so different.

B. Pilcher: And that's one that's been properly thatched



Anna: Oh I didn't realise they thatched them.

B. Pilcher: Yeah yeah to keep them dry.

Anna: Yeah that's really cool.

B. Pilcher: To keep all the rats and the mice out too. Rats used to get most of them and farms used to have several..

Anna: Cats?

B. Pilcher: Cats, yeah, I can remember you know, when you had a cat...

L. Pilcher: And when you had a threshed stack like that, you had to put netting around the outside to keep it from all the rats and mice.

B. Pilcher: Here they are spreading hops thinly over netting, that's on a slatted floor, so the sulphur driven air will drive up in between them and dry the hops

Anna: Oh I see

B. Pilcher: And that's still done the same really, except the hops that were picked by hand, they're now picked by a machine and basically all that does, is that if you've seen a hop-bine....

Anna: I'm just trying to think, I don't think so, maybe I have and if so, not for ages.

B. Pilcher: And then it just thrashes all the leaves and the hops off it and then by blowing the air over it, the leaves get blown away and you're left with the hops.

[inaudible]

L. Pilcher: you know I was saying about the potatoes and you split them, there's the old boy doing it there, *[inaudible]* he's come along and done the furrows and he's going in to split them.

Anna: Look at those horses!

B. Pilcher: But then they probably only would have been getting 8 ton to the acre, would they?

L. Pilcher: Bit more than that.

Anna: I love the photo, he looks like he's almost wearing a suit. A typical gentleman farmer? [laughing]



B. Pilcher: No, no, I mean people did go to work in their tweed jackets, because that's what you had.

L. Pilcher: I always wore a tie to work.

B. Pilcher: You wore a tie for a long time!

Anna: That's so smart, it's probably just modern day farming isn't it that I associate with casual dress.

B. Pilcher: Yeah, nobody had jeans.

Anna: Yeah yeah of course.

L. Pilcher: You know what I said about the old threshing engine, well that's ploughing, see you had one of them on each end of the field and attached to the cable.

Anna: I see, steam-powered?

B. Pilcher: Yeah, steam-powered.

L. Pilcher: There's another one there shown threshing.

B. Pilcher: That's the other side there.

Anna: Wow it's so amazing, the landscape looks so different.

B. Pilcher: That's the only way you got electricity, when you see the fun-fairs now they've all got an engine they're driving a generator that produces electricity for the fun-fair, but you never had farms with I dunno, with a 1000 head of cattle, would they? They would have had 10-20 and around here they'd have had a bit of marsh ground and as soon as it was wet in winter, and it dried up in the summer, they'd turn the cattle out of their pens and put them down in the marshes.

L. Pilcher: *[inaudible]*

Anna: I see, yeah yeah.

[pause]

B. Pilcher: As I say, yeah it really spoilt village life, everybody knew everybody, but now in the village apart from 2 or 3 people, we don't know anybody and there's more housing.



Anna: And less community, so sad isn't it?

L. Pilcher: *[inaudible]* then you put them 2 feet apart and if you had small feet, it would be smaller and if you had big feet, it'd be bigger.

Anna: [laughing] yep exactly. And the sense of community between all the labourers and the camaraderie must have just been so different?

B. Pilcher: I mean yeah, just think about how many pubs there were in the village. You go to Woodnesborough there was 4 pubs, in Staple there was 3. They all went to church, you all went to church wild Indians or mullwich union. I don't know what the men did probably, went to play darts or cribbage or dominos in the pub at the time. But round here they played batam trap em. Ass I say therethere was always something to do, because we were predominantly market gardening so we was riddling potatoes in the winter or cutting cabbages or

Anna: Yeah managing vegetables.

L. Pilcher: that was making cart-wheels

B. Pilcher: And then you took them to the blacksmith who got them red-hot and then they'd expand and you'd drop them in place, using special tongs and then cool it down and then knock it on the rim quickly and as it cooled down it shrunk the tire and tightened up all these joints in the wheel, because if your tire comes loose, then all your spokes and that come loose as well.

Anna: Yeah, I see.

L. Pilcher: Don't make 'em like that anymore.

Anna: No indeed, it would be a totally bespoke craft now.

B. Pilcher: Is that a pun?

Anna: Oh yeah! [embarrassed laughing]. I actually make them accidentally all the time, it's really embarrassing.

B. Pilcher: I can remember doing that, we had a blacksmith when I was first apprenticed.

L. Pilcher: That was the other thing that farmers had to always do, they had to take the horses to the forge for their shoes. There's one there being shoed.

Anna: They must have gone through shoes quite quickly if they were working horses.



B. Pilcher: Well obviously when they're on the land it's okay, it's when they're on the road that they get through the shoes.

Anna: Oh is it the road yeah, because of the hard ground isn't it?

B. Pilcher: But then the tarmac wouldn't have been so good in those days, I suspect it would have been a bit softer.

L. Pilcher: That's them shooting rabbits.

Anna: Aww that's a lot of bunnies, God yeah! They'd just overrun.

B. Pilcher: That was food!

Anna: Well exactly, rabbit stew!

B. Pilcher: I mean when we was kids, granddad, your dad, he had rabbit hutches at the bottom of his garden, he used to pinch a bit of grub from somewhere, he fed them on your carrot tops and your cabbage leaves.

Anna: Got them nice and fat!

B. Pilcher: Yeah, Nan used to do rabbit and pork pie at Christmas.

Anna: Oo that sounds marvellous.

B. Pilcher: We used to have rabbit as pets but our pets were donked on the head, me cousins used to feed them to death.

L. Pilcher: This here is a shepherds' hut

Anna: Ohh I love shepherds' huts, my best friend has one.

B. Pilcher: An affluent friend then?

Anna: Yeah her family are, down our way.

B. Pilcher: Has it got a log-burner and everything in it?

Anna: I'm not sure, I think maybe it does, it's pretty posh.

B. Pilcher: Yeah the chap over in Stodmarsh is making them. I mean I wouldn't have thought round here that they would have.

L. Pilcher: Yeah course they did.



B. Pilcher: I thought it was more on the Downs.

Anna: Yeah I thought it was a South Downs kind of a thing and probably the North Downs as well.

[pause]

L. Pilcher: Here they are shearing sheep.

B. Pilcher: But then years ago that would have been done with hand clippers, have you seen what people do now? Has he got clippers in his hand there? They would have been the metal ones that you squeeze together.

Anna: That would have been hard work, it always looks like hard work, sheep-shearing, even now, maybe it isn't so bad now.

B. Pilcher: Well they say if you get a sheep in a certain position it sort of sits there.

Anna: I think it's because I'm quite small, I always think a sheep would be quite hard to wrangle but I'm sure for big farmer men, it's fine.

B. Pilcher: But it was all done by hand, you didn't load them up into the lorries and cart them round England to do it.

L. Pilcher: Here's the horses with the binder.

Anna: It's all just so much more human-paced, the way of life, compared to now where it's all at the speed of broadband or something.

B. Pilcher: Well I don't think people expected things to happen instantly. Years ago, I don't think we wanted instant, instant this and instant that.

Anna: Yeah, instant gratification.

B. Pilcher: Everyone was a bit more patient.

Anna: Relaxed and patient, exactly. There's a lot to be said for that I think. Aww those are lovely pictures, are they doing the hops?

B. Pilcher: Well they're putting them into a net aren't they? When Nanny used to pick them into bushel baskets but you didn't have to shake them, if you kicked them, it would settle and you'd have to put more on the top. And the tallyman would come round and look over it and level it over the top. And if you were kids and you were running around and you kicked it down, or if you did do it, Nan would tip them out of one and gently put them into another one so they weren't too tight.



[pause]

Anna: Wow, she did it for 40 years that lady apparently.

B. Pilcher: Well Nan must've, how old was Nan in '66? Nanny Hogwin?

L. Pilcher: In '66?

B. Pilcher: When they packed up?

L. Pilcher: Well she was 74 when she died.

B. Pilcher: Well she died about '74, so she was born 1900, so 66 in '66. So she probably would have been probably picking hops for 40 years too, Nanny would've been.

Anna: For 40 years, amazing!

L. Pilcher: So this is what the old boys used to do years ago. They used to go down the pub and sing songs and all of that [chuckles]

Anna: [laughing] time to relax and unwind, I would imagine.

L. Pilcher: A pint of beer was 4pence and a packet of woodbinders tuppence.

B. Pilcher: 1 and 3 pence when I started drinking.

Anna: My grandfather always used to talk about going for a really good night out in London on a pound.

B. Pilcher: When would he have been around, your grandfather?

Anna: Well he was the one who was born in 1913, so he was old [laughing].

L. Pilcher: What did he do?

Anna: He was the Massey Ferguson man, yeah I wish I knew more, I did ask him questions at the time but because he died over 10 years ago now unfortunately, I don't remember enough of that.

B. Pilcher: He'd have been useful for this project.

Anna: Yeah, I didn't really know I'd end up doing as much stuff with farming as I have done.



B. Pilcher: Most of these farm workers would have had a garden that was cropped up with all vegetables.

L. Pilcher: These farm workers, they all used to work all the hours that God made, they always had vegetable gardens, they never bought any vegetables.

[pause]

B. Pilcher: Yeah both my granddads had good vegetable gardens.

L. Pilcher: Yeah, well I did until...

Anna: Yeah it's good round here, the soil and stuff?

B. Pilcher: Yeah, luckily we've got what we call good ole brick earth, its all grade one dirt. It's not until you start getting to the other side of Canterbury, up on the Downs where it all gets to be London clay.

Anna: All London clay. Yeah quite a few farmers seemed to have got quite cross about that.

B. Pilcher: Well you know it is a bit claggy yeah,

L. Pilcher: Well here's the old boy cutting the hay with an old style mower.

Anna: Amazing!

B. Pilcher: It's just the fact that, cheaper food, more profit.

Anna: Exactly, it's all about that isn't it?

L. Pilcher: But I remember on my grandfather's farm, he used to get the vegetables and go to the pub and then a horse used to bring him home.

Anna: Ah wow, really? After a few pints too many.

B. Pilcher: And then when we were kids, you know, the milkman had a horse and cart. I don't know when he would've packed up, well we were living in Ash so that would have been the early 60s when I suppose that went.

L. Pilcher: There they are cherry picking.

Anna: Ah when you actually climbed ladders to get to them, rather than getting into a cherry picker. Look at that, they're such tall ladders as well. I love the girls in their dresses and hats as well.



B. Pilcher: Yeah they haven't got their trousers on have they?

Anna: Yeah, no jeans.

B. Pilcher: I think that woman might have trousers on.

Anna: I think it's a skirt.

B. Pilcher: Yeah I mean even when Nanny was hop picking, she never had trousers on, she'd have an apron over a skirt. I think the only person I can ever remember was wearing trousers was Auntie Joan, she used to wear trousers when she worked at the nursery.

Anna: It was unusual then.

L. Pilcher: Here are the land army girls during the war, they didn't get enough praise for what they done.

Anna: They did a huge amount of work, I'd imagine.

L. Pilcher: There they are, they didn't have a break.

Anna: Ah look at them, they all look like movie stars somehow, I think because it's a black and white photograph [laughing].

B. Pilcher: Well they were the timber girls, that's what they called the girls who worked in the timber corps.

Anna: The timber corps? I didn't know about them, wow they must've been strong

L. Pilcher: Well years ago, they'd use that knife, no matter what they used it for, sheep's hooves, they'd use the same knife to cut their bread and cheese with.

Anna: Ah wow.

B. Pilcher: They say you've got to eat a bushel of dirt before you die.

Anna: Exactly, no one eats enough dirt these days [laughing].

...

L. Pilcher: That's another thing, there used to be a market, a big market in Sandwich and on market day, they dropped the pigs from the market and to put them on the station, they'd have to drive the pigs through the high street.

Anna: Wow, that must have been such a sight!



B. Pilcher: That was Brian Stone, and they had a solar farm put in and it went all through his irrigation main.

Anna: Yeah? Oh God! Oh really, wow!

B. Pilcher: So when they stuck it up to go irrigating...

L. Pilcher: That's what they call a run-round, you can't go up and down with that plough.

B. Pilcher: With that plough, it just goes one way

L. Pilcher: We never had them, we always had a balanced player. And another thing years ago, we had what was called a kemp plough!

B. Pilcher: There's a picture of a kemp plough.

L. Pilcher: And it was all made of wood [*inaudible*]

B. Pilcher: The mull board was the curvey bit

L. Pilcher: [*inaudible*]

Anna: Right.

L. Pilcher: And when you used to go across the field with it you used to come up the other side. Another thing you used to have in this area and no other area was something called broad-shears, you don't what broad shears are do you?

Anna: No I don't.

L. Pilcher: It's like an old kemp plough but 3 furrow thing all joined together and people used to use them.

Anna: Amazing! Thank you for writing that, farming dictionary that's what I need [to Bob writing down jargon definitions for me]

L. Pilcher: That's an old kemp plough. So you took one side and put it on another, then you had a colter, what you call a colter, and there's a bar there so when you turn round and you had to put it on the other side to push the colter there. Do you know what a colter is?

Anna: No I'm afraid not, I'm such an ignoramus when it comes to all these technical things but learning a huge amount, so thank you. Ah this has been so cool, thank you.

L. Pilcher: Ah any time I can help you, I will.



Anna: Thank you, it's really appreciated.

B. Pilcher: You're not very far away!

Anna: No exactly!

B. Pilcher: Do you want some books?

Anna: This is really kind, the thing is I'm actually going back to London this evening.

L. Pilcher: You're going back to London tonight.

B. Pilcher: She's going clubbing!

Anna: It's going to be pretty quiet.

B. Pilcher: You know where we are anyway.

Anna: Is that alright? If I contact you to borrow them for the display or something, that's fantastic. Perfect.

L. Pilcher: Don't be frightened to ring! We're here to help.

Anna: Wonderful, thank you so much, it's so appreciated.

L. Pilcher: I got 4 children, 11 grandchildren, 5.5 great grandchildren

B. Pilcher: 5.5? Oh yeah we've got one on the way

Anna: Another one on the way? [laughing]

B. Pilcher: We were all together at the weekend.

End