INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Tony and Eileen Sidaway
Age: 73ish
Location: Middle Pett Farm, Canterbury
Size: 180 acres
Type: Fruit

Interviewed by: Joe Spence
Filmed by: Joe Spence
Date: 3rd December 2015

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Tony: Well I'm Tony Sidaway

Eileen: And I'm Eileen Sidaway

Tony: Yeah. And I started work on the farm in the worst winter on record. First time I'd ever worked outside which was in 1962, 1963, that bad winter where it snowed, I think, for about 6 weeks. And nothing stopped, everything kept going, you know. And there was a lot of snow! And that's when I started. That was my first winter outside because the previous 5 years to that from when I left school, I worked in a coal mine, which was at Betishanger and Snowdown collieries. And then on to the farm and I went for, to stay there for 2 months until the end of February, and I stayed for 46/47 years, in the end. And it has changed dramatically, from just picking of the apples which was, you picked…

Eileen: Well when I first started picking was 52 years ago, and we had metal buckets, and great big ladders, great big trees, and we picked on a stand with these metal buckets so, you can imagine you had to be very careful because of the bruising. And then we used to drag our ladders from orchard to orchard, it was so, so much harder to what it is now. And I worked on and off on the farm for 15 years, because in between then I had the children and I used to have time off with then. And I worked in the winters canker painting and,

Tony: Mildew
Eileen: In the spring it was blossom thinning, wasn't it? Apple thinning and apple picking which I done for 15 years. But I mean, gosh, it's so different now. When I left we had started pikcing in bins, hadn't we, and my friend and I, we used to manage to

pick, we used to start at 9 in the morning and finish at half past 3, and we thought we were wonderful because we picked 5 bins between us, but now they pick about 10, don't they?

Tony: The students, yea, yeah yeah.

Eileen: So, you can tell how it's changed.

T: it has, we picked in trays to start with, (Eileen: Trays, on a stand, yes) which was like 6 pence a tray, or something like that, which matters in old money. But, yeah, no, it was quite an experience, but it has changed dramatically.

E: You used to get more than me, havne't you, obviously?

T: Yeah, yeah, cos I was, got interested in it, cos most of my friends come from a farming background and I was interested in the mechanic side as well as the… I like doing things with my hands. And then as it progressed and it went into, I mean when I went to Middle Pett farm, there was 180 acres, and we had 80 bullocks cos we had, up to 30 acres of arable land, which was mainly pastures, or a little bit for grain, and then 80 bullocks we kept in the yard in the winter for the manure for the trees, and then they went out into the, in the summer, into the field and that. And there was 13 men worked there when I went there. THIRTEEN. And it was just amazing to what it is now. I mean, when I left, when they sold it, well there was 4 people left on the farm then. But, it's just such a difference. And all the rest of the labour, like the women and things like that, who come to do the picking and the odd type of jobs, you know, they come all locally, and we went round with a lorry, with boxes in the back, turned upside down with a scaffold plank on the back of it, and the children would all come as well.

E: The children used to come, yeah.

T: And they all went. And I don't think we lost anybody, at all, and the women used to make sure they looked after their children really well so, you know, it was safe. And I know now we've got the health and safety and everything else, and in the end we ended up with a coach, which I used to drive and we used to go from Pett Bottom, down in Bridge, and we used to go out to Whitfield, Lidden, Buckman down in Dover, and pick up the women and that, bring them to work and take them back again in the evening. Yeah, lots of, lots of, lots of anecdotes really you could say about it, but you could go on forever really
Eileen: But when I worked out there, all the children used to play, they used to have a lovely time, but I mean once the children, they stopped having children out there didn't they?

Tony: That's right yea

Eileen: And I think that's why lots of women stopped coming out into the orchards, because the children weren't allowed to come. But I mean, especially the summer holidays, my children used to love it because we lived out in the wild so there wasn't many children about was there? So when all the apple picking started, they had friends to play with.

Joe: What year are we talking?

Tony: When I started, as I say 62/63, and I worked for Mr Wallace, W M Wallace, and they had 3 farms then. They had Middle Pett farm, Bekesbourne farm and another one out at Bramlin, another farm there, which was all fruit, out that way, but we had the stock, the bullocks and things like that down at Middle Pett farm, cos that was the biggest one. But, yes, it was, yeah, 1962, in the winter then, but there was a lot of people working on the farms then.

Joe: What might be quite nice, is if we could work through, maybe we could go decade by decade, maybe that would be a useful, a good way of doing it. We could talk about the 60s, and then we could get your perspective, as what life was like for women working on farms in the 60s and maybe we could move up…. Do you think that would be a useful way of making it nice and easy to understand?

Tony: Yes, it did start to change I mean and then all of a sudden, as far as the workforce on the farm, we wasn't getting through a lot of the work and things like that, and then we went to piece-work pruning, we had you know contractors come in to help us do the pruning, and cos we said well, we found out how much they was earning, and said 'well why couldn't we do piece-work pruning?' and Mr Wallace said 'If you wanna do piece work pruning'… cos the manager was a man called Vic Rogers then, and he said, you know to him, he always called him 'Victor! And well Victor, if the men wanna do piece-work then they can do it' and so we did, and then we started doing piece-work pruning, and gradually the staff went down and I think we got down to about 6 or 7 in the end, you know and that was about the sort of rate. And gradually, by the 80s, we were down to 4. 4 people working there then. And a lot of it then was contracted out, like the pruning, and the things like that, and which they do today, you know, coming right the way up through, and in the 80s through to the 90s. Things started changing with the mechanics then, you know, with the tractors, and the implements, and electronics then was coming into it, you know. ULP spraying. In fact, with 'Fast' the advisory company, don't know if you've come across 'Fast', I built a sprayer with them, on the farm at Bekesbourne, which was one of the first ULV sprayers. They got all the pieces and all the bits and pieces and, we had a workshop down there, and Eric Gardner who was the manager director of Fast, who's company it was he started, he come along one day, and he'd

got all these bits and that, and he said 'you gotta go into the workshop and build this sprayer' and I said 'I can't do that' you know cos my boss then was William's mum, and her husband which was Alan Hayes, and Alan said 'no it's alright, you can go in there' So I spent weeks, well about 3 weeks in there building this ULV sprayer and it all started off from there.

E: and that was in the 80s was it?

T: And that was in the 80s, and then towards the 80s, towards the end of the 80s, trees, we was growing 180, 160 -180 trees to the acre then, big trees, and sometimes like pruning, piecework, in some places in the orchard you'd only do 12 trees a day. And then we done away with that and they went to 3 row beds, and we was one of the first to go into 3 way beds. And we got a machine from Yann Boglers, at top of Blean, is it Blean? Yes, and Peter Kelly there now I think, and they had this 3 row Auger, which we demonstrated on the farm, which I had on the tractor to go and demonstrate it, and in the end we bought that and then I went round quite a few farms through the winter, you know, drilling holes for quite a few people all over the place, even right down to Saltwood to Nigel Harland and people like that, you know, down there. And then we'd gone from 180 trees to the acre to, I don't know, 1200, 1300 to the acre. And so that was it. And when I moved to Bekesbourne, when they sold Middle Pett farm, and I moved to Bekesbourne and I was there then virtually on my own. Sort of running the farm. Then, if I wanted anybody I got them in and then we had the students coming as well, we used to have that to look forward to and local women used to come picking as well for me there.

Joe: And we're in the 80s still now?

T: We've gone into the 90s now

Joe: We're in the 90s?

T: We've gone into the 90s now. And then there was getting different systems coming up and then we planted a disaster, an absolute disaster. We planted 2 acres of trees at Bekesbourne, about 12000 trees, which was called a 9 row bed, and they were super spindled, what they call super spindles, on wire frames. And I put all the wire work and everything up to grow these trees and we had all sorts of people come to look at them and, I think, most of them had, I was doing for what my boss wanted me to do, I think most people had the same idea as me that it was a very, very sort of brave to do. And they never really paid for themselves. And then when I started working, when I was 60, just turned 60, Sally Hayes, and Alan, they lives in Wells by now, and they didn't want to be coming backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, you know, cos every time I was alright there running it but occasionally they had to come down and see it all. So they said they would turn it

over to 2 boys, which were the same age as my children, and I'd been there when they grew up, you know. On the conditions that they kept me on, and paid my salary for me, and my pension, which they did and actually I was probably better off still, working for William and David. And yes, it was good. But they pulled them trees out, where we'd put 12000 trees in 2 acres, pulled them out. They're alright on the outside but once you get inside, no light, didn't get no apples on them. It really was a disaster really 'cos it must have cost a fortune in the end … £50,000 or more I suppose and that was a lot of money. And then as I say from there on I started working with William and David [Riccini] which we … run Bekesbourne farm and then went down to Preston and run the farm down there and done a lot of planting down there. And then when I retied I used to do 2 or 3 days a week. Previous to that I was down at Cranbrook 'cos they rented a farm down at Cranbrook and I used to do that 2 days a week, I used to go down there and do spraying or whatever it was and then come back again. But… yeah that was it … but the changes was tremendous to what it was. And the happiness I think too and the farms, with the people, everybody was happy and everybody cheered along but it got really really sort of … quite serious in the end. I think people though if there was people laughing and joking then you wasn't doing any work but it was … that was the difference I think. But otherwise…

Joe: Can you tell me a little bit more about the mood of the farm. As these changes came about how that … you mentioned about happiness? How did that affect farm workers?

T: well yeah it affected farm workers because there wasn't the work for farm workers. You know, you just didn't need them anymore. And the tractors got much better and everything got so much bigger. ULV spraying for a start, we used to spray 50 gallons to the acre so you was always down the farm filling up the tank whereas when they went to ULV spraying you sprayed 5 gallons to the acre so now you was you .. you know … you'd go fill up a tank and go and do ten acres which was … you know …. just with a 100 gallon tank. So that was the difference, that's what the difference was. We grew blackcurrants we grew raspberries, tayberries, all sorts. They diversified into lots of other things as well … you know … in the early days. But then in the end by the time you got to the 80's and we started plating 3 row beds it was mainly mainly apples. And originally when they started to plant 3 row beds you was going to plant your trees on your best ground cos of these 3 way beds, 'cos it was going to be labour intensive and that's all they was going to do, but they didn't .... they … because it worked so well they planted everything up in the end. If they could afford it they planted more and more and more 3 row beds. And we hadn't got the labour, because it was labour intensive. And they was going to keep them for 12 years (inaudible) in the orchard. But you don't do it, we'd seen it in the past when we planted our different things. But we lost a lot of our apples… Cox's for example … at least 80% of our trees were Cox's right up until into the 80's. Whereas … and then

Bramleys which was another one which was quite a big percentage. But nobody … I mean when you talk to William and David …I mean maybe 10% of farm now is Cox, not even that I don't think. And Bramleys are gone so I don't know.

E: But what did you mean about the happiness in the orchard? Cos when I worked in the orchard it was it was mostly all people that you knew, it was like a big family really because it was all the girls that I knew from Barham, it was all local wasn't it, Barham and Bridge. But I mean I left in 79 so I don't know much after the 80's. But I mean we were all there and we all had our children small but once they got to go to the big we sort of left didn't we. And you knew a lot of women didn't you, you used to go down to Lidden so I think that was a change

T: and sometimes had them from Canterbury you know, which made their own way there then. And yeah it wasn't the same, it didn't seem the same. Mind you I suppose as you get older you know, you're not the same! So you take it more serious I should think and things like that. And William and David's father, I got on really well with him. Will and I done a lot of shooting and we done a lot of night shooting because the rabbit and the hares used to devastate your trees, absolutely devastate them. So we used to do lots of shooting. I can't think of anything worse than going shooting now. But yes I has changed and …I'm just reading in a magazine, a farming magazine just last week, with the new tractors … you've got (inaudible) tractor with a sprayer on and you drive into the orchard and you set your computer up and everything else and you drive off and you get to the end of the orchards and switch it off and then you take it back to the beginning of the orchards and you switch it on and get off and leave it. So I don't know, we talk about unemployment and everything but its got to be … got to go up and up and up and up … its just how we distribute the wealth of the country to pay people that can't work or haven't got any work. I don't know. I don't know.

Joe: So what you're saying is that over the years as farming became increasingly mechanized, farmers tended to find themselves out of work?

T: Yes yes, and the houses went. They started selling the houses. Obviously if you lived in a tied house, that was worth quite a bit to you because you wasn't paying the rent but there becomes a problem at the end of it all if you're living in the tied house depending on your employer really … depending on your boss, who he was. But we always thought that maybe one day, maybe you would have to go and I do know people, and Eileen knows people that worked for like Highland Court and places like that which …their houses went and they had to go, and their job went, they had to go. So I was, in some ways I was quite lucky that I could of stayed, but I didn't know that at the time and good job I didn't, cos I would'nt have lived here if I had cos I probably wouldn't have looked after my money so well. But yeah, no… It was a good life, it was a good life, I mean, it wasn't over rich but I mean you had a good life, and

you knew most times, you know, cos that's one thing I hated about coal mining was shift work, you know. Mornings were fine, afternoons were terrible, when you're young it's terrible, Yea.

E: And I think when you worked on the farm, when we worked on the farm you knew you wasn't gonna be out of work didn't you? There was always a job there

T: Oh yes, you knew you weren't gonna be out of work, it was a regular, regular job. I mean, unless you was really bad, I mean, you'd have had to be bad really to have either got the sack or whatever, I'm sure some people did but, I mean, you lived right on it, you couldn't make excuses for not going to work. You couldn't say 'I'm ill today' well you could, but you couldn't go out, you know, cos you was there on the farm and everybody would see you if you did sort of thing, so that kept you also on the straight and narrow a bit. But yes, it was an interesting kind of life and you had different things, you know, different perks, and like…. I think the wage when I started was £10 I think, a week, £10 a week and when we was pruning, we used to get a bonus on top which used to be £2 a week. We had very good bonuses from Mr Wallace, he always believed in a bonus, so if we had a good fruit picking year, we had a good bonus. And from when we got married, a bonus I could go out and buy a 3 piece sweet, and one or two other things, you know with your bonus. It was equivalent to about 8 week's wages so it was a good bonus. But that, you know as it come up against more problems fruit growing, you know that gradually phased out until it really went. And Christmas we used to get a Christmas box of a week's wages, you had 2 weeks wages at Christmas, can you imagine that today? You wouldn't get that today.

Joe: So in relative terms, would you say a farmer, or a farm worker sorry, in the 60s and 70s would be better off or worse off compared to today?

T: Yea, I think financially probably worse off you know, years ago.

E: You were worse off years ago you mean?

T: Yes, financially, you know to take everything into consideration, most people now I would imagine working on farms, cos there's no tied (sp) houses, so a lot of people, probably there'd be a few council houses still left but a lot of people would be buying their own house and everything else. And they're doing the long hours, and also they're, I couldn't do it now, cos I couldn't learn it I don't think, all the (unclear) and you've got to have the, you know, all the certificates for doing every single job, I was lucky I finished when I did cos I was going under grandfathers rights all the time. But I mean, I did have a few computers on the sprayer and things like that, which were simple, but wasn't to me, to learn it, you know, I did learn it but it wasn't that easy. And once you'd learned it and been showed it, you had to remember it,

and you know 'was it that switch or was it that switch?' So you know that made it sort of more difficult. Cos it wasn't really a practical thing, and the same with all the guards and all the safety rules and regulations that come in, we found them a lot different and a lot harder. Some of them made it more difficult, you know, to do, I think some of the safety things were more dangerous than what it was if they'd left it, cos you're always trying to make that little short cut you know, behind these different things, you know because otherwise it was a nuisance really. Yes, I mean really it totally changed, from going, Mr. Wallace, who I worked for in the beginning, in the 60s, up to ending up working for William and David, in the sort of 21st century, where as now there's just William David, on 200 acres I suppose, getting that way, just the 2 of them running that. Whereas when I started there was 180 acres, 13 people.

E: But then you couldn't have coped then, like they do now, because of all the, you had to pick up every tray with the tractor every … where as now it spins, isn't it?

T: Oh yes, that's right, yes, yes, picked them all up by hand. You got picking trains and all these, all these modern stuff which is, and, it's going to be picked by robots, isn't it? It's going to be picked by, I don't know how, but it is going to happen, so I don't know .

Joe: Well already in dairys the cows are milked by robots.

T: Yeah my mind boggles. You know we watch the tele and … just now coming up to Christmas the places like Amazon and the Argos stores, you know the big things … all the things going in there doing all those, you know picking all the parcels and stacking them and all that. And the same happened 'cos I when I started was East Kent Packers – that's how it started off East Kent packers. Each farmer sort of started to group off and they each bought a lorry and things like that and …I think Mr. Wallace was farm 15 down Pett Bottom, no farm 16 Pett Bottom, farm 16 Bekesbourne and I think it was 14 out at Bramlyn (sp). That had a lorry and everything else and it went like that but then in the end I used to …half way through my working I had to go up the pack house you know to see up there and then they went into all the robotic things for grading and grading of the apples and my own opinion was one of the downfalls of East Kent packers because I think they paid about 3 million pounds for a grader with the cameras to do the colours everything else. And it never really worked, it was a new thing and they had all the teething problems and everything else and… I think that really finished it off which was a shame because I think was one of the biggest pack houses in Europe at the time. And the other thing… I went up on a trip a few times to London to Common Garden and places like that and they would ask for apples by a certain grower and they'd say 'we want WM Wallace's apples ' you know and they would know that. And East Kent Packers would have people going round, all round the markets. Lidpool (sp?) and

places like that, and Gateshead and they would have somebody out there doing it all. And in the end that all went and I think, that was one of the downsides really. Lots of people don't understand, I've got friends you know that don't understand…they said you know 'why don't you sell them at the gate'. And I said you can't imagine you know ..one them bins… we used leave bins outside and have people do it there. There was £750 of apple in a bin – you're never going to sell £750 of apple in a week and you'll be picking 200 bins a day! It's incredible. And one of other things do come too, a lot of the things that happened on the farm is that a lot of people moved out of the towns and the cities and, and especially at Bekesbourne when I was at Bekesbourne it was a pain of my life because you know, if I cut the hedge I had complaints from people. Some people would say 'let more into my house, especially up on Bekesbourne hill up Bekesbourne Lane there. But a lot of people would claim…they were taking photos of me and everything else you know and they were going to send it to the paper because you know 'you should give me three weeks' notice if you're going to cut the hedge'. And in the end id had so much trouble with it and down by the Unicorn I went down there to have a look at sweeping up and in fact Mr. Ash the councilor phoned you [Eileen] up didn't he and said about the hedge cuttings on the road and there was none there. There was nothing there. But he suggested to Eileen that Tony goes out with a broom! Which upset me a little bit! But I went down the road with broom, not sweeping, carrying it and met people by the Pub and they said 'you having to clear up?' And I said 'well there's nothing to clear up'. And then one chap had said something about it and I said, 'well anyway we won't have this trouble next year because we're cutting the hedge down and we're going to put up a barbed wire fence'. 'You can't do that… you can't do that!'. Why? And, you know, they do moan about it. And you can imagine, well you know, the whole countryside would be a tip if it wasn't for farming. Who cuts the hedges? The council don't do it anymore. And that's it. That's all the changes really that I've seen come though farming and really. I've had a lot of people coming out, I've had the police come, I've had big lorries up there to pick up the fruit, and I had a delivery of trees from Holland and I went up in the morning and a lorry was there, just come in when I got there the chap said to me ' the police are coming' . I said what!? He said 'the police are coming'. I said 'what are they coming for'? He said 'a lady has reported to the police'. And they did … they said 'how did he get here'? really abrupt to me. I wanted to say 'by boat' but I thought I better not. But that I mean 'did he come up the hill?' and I said 'yes, yes he did' and they said 'not supposed to cos there's a width restriction'. And I said 'no there's not'. And there wasn't, there's no width restriction and with that he said 'well I should fine him really you know but I won't' and I said 'if you're here when I'm fruit picking well I've got at least one of these everyday coming in'. He said 'well you better not have'. I said 'well I have, we've got to pick fruit somehow'. It was silly, they was ill informed as police I think really. They should have known that that would be happening, and further up the road than that actually. But yeah, people moving out the towns and the cities into the country with…not knowing you know.. about the sort, the life really, and the

smell and everything else that goes with it. And so as I say and I sit here now and I can't believe when I look out of that window [Tony's living room window overlooks a farm] that its all Velcourt does all of this area now which these massive combines, massive combines. And so you've got, all your hedges are gone, you've got a job getting them up the road but you know it's got to be done you don't waste it now they really go up and down and up and down. They really get a move on it really looks, out here on the banks out there we watch them out there and it Owen Growers who owns all that up there and I know Owen really well and his Grandson does quite a bit of it and I said 'he's really good' and I watched him set that field out a couple of years ago and he said 'its all done by satellite' so yeah there's just all that to it. They put the fertiliser on now by satellite and put it on here and don't put it on there and its just incredible to how it was. And even with the computers, yes it does get it right and exactly right and things like that but when you used to do it by hand you knew…I mean for setting up a sprayer we would go in as field where you've got 120 trees to the acre and you'd sort of put x amount of water in, maybe if you're spraying 50 gallons you'd put 25 gallons of water in and you'd do half an acre and you'd know when you did x amount of trees that was going to be equivalent to about an acre and you'd have a look in the tank and…you wasn't far out! So you got it quite .. and that helped, that made it a bit more interesting rather than flicking the switch and letting that do it. And the same with you doing the fertiliser and everything else. It was a lot different.

Joe: would you like to take a rest for a while and then we can talk about the women, the perspective of , of what it was to be a female worker and then we can come back at the end. You've give me some good ideas for questions at the end

T: I've got a long span to get though, you can't remember when things started and when they finished – do you know what I mean!

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E: OK well as I say , when I first went out there I was only 20 so I worked with Tony's mum and we used to do apple picking and then as the years went by and I had the children, then I used to go back and I used to take the children with me and I worked with a friend. But we we're all like, we we're all friends that worked there then. It wasn't a big crowd of us so much and I mean, as I said, we did have fun with the children and everything. In the winter we used to build big bonfires and sit round there and it was just a lovely atmosphere to work with the children and everybody. But as I say I left in the 70's so I didn't have much to do…as it got more involved you know.

T: but when the children was little…what you used to ask the people about…when the children were poorly…like mother and that

E: oh yeah there were some characters. When Tony's mum worked there were some older ladies and they used to help me with the children if they were poorly or anything. If they had colds they used to say to rub goose fat on the bottom of their feet and on their chests of all things. In fact when my son first started school … I didn't take him but my husband Tony had to take him … and the women were crying up the orchard. When I finally did go to work they all cried because he had gone to school. So that's what I mean about being like a family. Everybody knew everybody else and all the children grew up together.

Joe: All the women lived on the farm?

E: no they didn't live on the farm but they would live locally like Bridge and Canterbury. But they were local women and they used to come on their own steam I think didn't they? You [Tony] picked a few of them up. There was …Shirley, yes she lived on the farm, she had a little girl, and my friend that lived at Lower Hardres and they used to go to Lower Hardres school so we were all in the same boat …holidays and things, they were all the same. And things like that. But it was good fun then, I think it was. I think I left at the right time because that's when it sort of changed I think in the 80's. It became different didn't it, you had a different crowd of women. So I think I left at the right time.

Joe: so you're saying it was a different crowd of women, can you tell me more about the 80's.

E: yeah I think…because I suppose we'd all worked together and our children were small, once they went to the secondary school or wherever they went, I think we all just branched off and got different jobs. You know, more regular because didn't need to be there for the children. I mean the farm work was ideal for when you had children because you could take them with you. And then … so that's when we sort of left so I think, and then the other women…they didn't bring their children did they.

T: A lot of them didn't

E: A lot of them didn't. I think I got stopped in the end, you weren't allowed to bring your children
T: no you weren't allowed in case you have a creche or something like that. And that's when they went to the students

E: Yeh, our farm didn't have a crèche did it

T: No some big farms did. I think they still have today for local women if they have any local women or anybody with children. You can't do it otherwise

E: and I think that's probably why they went to students because the local women couldn't come with their children so they had to get students probably, perhaps that was the start of it

T: I think it was the start of it. Because with the health and safety and everything else…so it really was…how it had to be.

Joe: so to clarify, before the 80's women could bring their children along to the farm

E: it was all women with children, well mostly anyway. There were a few older women weren't they but most of the young women had children

T: and most of the women too, sorry for butting in, they knew each other socially, in their social life they all knew each other. They was all friends, all brought up together. I mean people from Barham in place like that where you knew everybody. There was three pubs in Barham and if you went into any of them you knew everybody in there. Now there's only one pub and you go in there you wouldn't know anybody

Joe: Who decided that women would no longer be able to bring their children onto the farm?

E: I don't know how that happened. Who decided that? I can't remember now how it happened.

T: no it just came in I think, it just gradually came in

E: cos why did they start having the students then?

T: because they needed to get

E: for the (inaudible) yeah

T: and I think … from Poland and places like that being… I don't know … I'm not into politics but I suppose it was a communist country, they wasn't letting them out and if they are going to keep up with the rest of the worlds they ain't got no choice, they got to let them out so then we started… that was the first we had …was Polish. And very good. I had a boy and a girl that come for me at Bekesbourne and you [Eileen] was like a mother to the girl, she [the girl] used to go to her [Eileen] with all her problems and that. And then we had some Czechoslovakian ones and then two …I

was being pushed then for the good pickers and I wanted good pickers… and I had two Russians come in and they wanted a job and you know …you couldn't give them a job really, you wasn't supposed to but people did. And then one day I said no, I hadn't got anything and one day, it was Monday, it was pouring with rain and I was sitting in the office and they came in again and I looked at them …they were soaked, absolutely soaked… spoke good English, better educated than I was. And I spoke to them I said 'all right, you're here … you're here … you can stay here … and ill give you a job alright…I don't know what my boss is going to say but I'll give you a job'. So I give them a job apple picking and they said 'how much will we get'? And I said if can pick a bin, and I showed them a bin, and I think in them days it was £10 for a bin and I said you'll get £10 for that bin. And they said 'how many days will it take me to pick that bin?' And I said 'you better pick 3 or 4 of them in a day'. And they looked at each other you know because they knew straight away that that was going to be £30 or £40 a day. 'We will be very rich' they said. They couldn't believe it and they were saying…they did go on to tell me that for £3…because they'd come, I don't if they been on a tube in London and for what it cost to go from one place to another…for £3 you could use all the sort of transport in Moscow for a year for that. It was a ticket. And that's what they couldn't get over. And Eileen sorted out all pots and pans and things like that and I was well into fishing and sea fishing and I used to make my own weights and things so I took all my gas and burners and everything up there for them. So they'd got saucepans so they could cook and everything, and they stayed and they was as good as gold and that was lovely. And then when they left in the end it was funny because … well it wasn't funny …Eileen said we would do a tea for them and so they all came down to me to have a tea

E: it wasn't just the Russians though there was others as well

T: oh yeah there were others…the Czechoslovakians and… no there wasn't the Polish there then was there, it wasn't Lina and Peter (sp) was it? Anyway they came down, there was five of them there and Eileen had done them a tea, well 'cos knowing English they said 'tea'? They though tea was just a cup of tea because she'd laid on an English tea you know with sandwiched and everything else. The only problem was she done ham sandwiches for the Czechs and they was Muslim! So I had to tell them! I didn't realise you know until I got home and I was there and I said you can't have them … but the Russian's soon ate them! They soon had them. But they was very very nice and …cos I was into videoing then I always used to take them out and ….we used to take them all over the place, down to Dungeness at weekend and Broadstairs. And my father was in the British legion Home at Broadstairs you know 'cos he was an ex soldier and when they had their Broadstairs week on which was in the middle of apple picking they used to take them down there on the Thursday when I went to visit my Dad and we'd leave them in Broadstairs and pick them up when I come home. They used to have a lovely time down there, had fish and chips they did and things like that. But we always took

them around and I'd always done a video of them and copied it for them so they could take it home so that made it sort of interesting and made them a little bit more happier.

E: that was the only few we had then

T: that was the only few we had, but then when I went to William and David [Riccini] we joined all in together then we had all different sorts you know, from Bulgaria, Romania and Albanians and everywhere, everywhere. But the only thing that I can say, I'm sure ..the same with everybody, there'd be good ones and bad ones but I never really met any bad ones and yes they were…they worked so hard. They worked so hard. And I did talk to one couple that I got quite friendly with, they were Romanian, and for some reason or other we got on to this conversation and he said his parents hadn't been paid in money for 15 years. And I said 'why not? What do you mean not paid in money? How do they get paid then?' He said they get paid in grain, so much grain. And I said 'well how do you buy your clothes or your food?' Well he said 'we grow our own food' 'cos they've got a communal there you know and if you want to buy clothes and you want money then you sell some of your grain'. And I'm sat there thinking …we was in the 21st century and you can't believe that! To what we're doing here. But all of them that I knew was good, good workers and done so well. And the one outstanding one was, who worked for William and David who is now products manager for Gotham's and he's done so well he's here for permanent now. I got friendly with him when he come as a student, he was younger than my children, and I think maybe he looked onto me as a father figure in some ways. But I got on so well with him, we got so friendly that in fact we went to Poland and he arranged for all the places for us to go to and his friend and his wife come with me and then we drove to Poland and then we toured all over Poland and stayed with his parents for three days. Fantastic people. And that's why I can't understand what's going on now in the world, 'cos most places you go they're like you and me you know. Apart from they speak a different language … but I don't think they want to fight anybody, they've got to put a roof over their heads and food on the table and their kids to get educated and that's all they really want. But I don't know how you sort it all out. Maybe your next generation will sort it all out. So yeah as I say, farming was a good life, it was a good life. But I don't know whether it can be so good now for the simple reason that, like these big farms here, there's not many people there. You know had quite a gang that you was working with, quite a bit of banter and everything going on and bit of sort of joking and things like that, playing tricks and all sorts and things like that. And then even with… like with Williams dad *[Tony is referring to William Riccini who's dad was Italian?]* and Tero (sp?) he couldn't speak a lot of English when he first got married to his Mum and he used to work with us, and he used to come and go shooting with us, and the things we used to put in his lunchbox I wouldn't want to put on camera you know! It was amazing, it really was. But was good. Good.

Joe: So just coming back a little bit, women were no longer allowed on the farms, farms presumably at the same time are taking on migrant workers

E: yeah I think women still worked on the farm didn't them, you had women, but not with the children but you know, the women still come

T: they still come, not with the children. I suppose in fruit picking I had about 5 or 6 or more at Bekesbourne coming regularly plus odd ones or twos. Mainly from the Canterbury area, some from Barham and then we'd get a few students 'cos had a caravan, a mobile home caravan up with top which was ..we have the students in so I might have had 4 or 5 students as well, which all sort of got in together. And they mixed alright, they got on alright. And they picked the apples all right you know. And when you're on your own it is difficult, if it's quite big and you've got a supervisor then it's not too bad but when you haven't got anybody like a supervisor or anything like that and you've got to do it all and you've got to get the fruit in and you've got to load your lorries and you've got to do all those sorts of things then it a bit more difficult but you want good people, that's the thing, peoples you can trust and know that they would do it. I had couple of pickers from Dover that used to make their own way to me, that I bump into occasionally now, Val and Lorraine and they was just superb. I knew what time they was coming, they'd come at 9 o'clock, I knew how many bins they would pick and when they'd picked them bins they would go home, it would be about 3 o'clock. And I'd know I needn't even go and look at their fruit because it would always be perfect. But then you'd that other few that, when you're about they're alright but when you're not they'll throw it in, you will always get that, you will always get that but some of them are pretty good, most of them I think.

J: Just to ask a very blunt question, and again just concentrating on women and their experiences working on the farm, what's changed between now and the sixties?

E: well as I say I left in the 70's so the changes since then I can't remember really. It was fine then, I think was changed is the people that come probably didn't know each other like we did.

T: not they was more spread out and we didn't have the children that we used to have

E: and I mean everything's just got so much easier with the bolt bins and everything. It has just changed to bolt bins just before I left, a couple of years before I left. It had gone on to bolt bins so it was much easier. But as I say, I think I left at the right time.

T: and originally it was all trays, flat trays which had two layers of apples in and then you picked them up and put them on the pallet until they was ten high, you've got 40 trays on the pallet and then you took them out and that was how they went on the lorry. And he drove up the rows and you would be up there. I mean in fruit picking I'd hardly see my children apart from weekends 'cos I mean you went to work when it was dark and you'd come home when it was dark. And we had the light on on the tractors you know loading up the boxes. And it was hard work, but enjoyable work. You enjoyed it, you had a little bit of banter going on because you know you was trying to get out more than you… there was two of us on the tractor and we took it in turns and we took it turns at driving or loading, and then two of the others on the other tractor, they would do the same and get one out before them and as I say, the commander, who was…who married David and William's auntie. He used to love it and used to have a bit of chalk and he used to call us 'fast and safe' and he used to write that on the boxes. 'Another first for fast and safe!'. But yeah no it was, it was good.

E: about us I mean we used to pick in what they call market boxes and we used to have to go down the road and load them on a barrow, a wheelbarrow, and this is women mind you and used to have to push it to the top for the men to pick up. I mean that was hard work. Like when my children were small I used to have to push them in the pram to come home for lunch and push them back up after lunch. But I mean they don't do any of that now do they.

T: in fact our daughter fell on one didn't she…

Eileen: oh that was when she was tired yes

T: On a barrow, and it stuck into her chest and it nicked her liver. She was in hospital for a couple of days but she was alright, she got home

E: but that was children playing on the barrow, which they shouldn't have been doing

T: but I can't remember any other accidents

E: so I think it was a lot harder in my day to what it is now. Don't you?

T: yes I do yes

E: because they're small trees now aren't they, you don't have to drag a big ladder, don't have a wheelbarrow

T: but having said that when you look to the migrants again, whether they be migrants or whether they be student workers, and to see some of the little girls, I mean little girls, they're not very big, picking pears!

E: and they are heavy, very heavy

T: I don't think you've picked any fruit, have you ever?

Joe: No

T: next summer go into some of the orchards and ask somebody if you can have one of them things on when their picking pears and fill it up with pears, and tell me you want to do 7 or 8 bins a day. And you'll say 'I'll stick to my videoing!' 'Cos it is … and how they do it I don't know, even as a man. I mean I've tried it, I haven't not done it … I was hopeless at picking but I mean they are fantastic. They keep going. I have another little tale to tell you … going back to … you said about the farms being 'tidy' and everything else. I think they're much more tidier now than to what they was then. Again, health and safety and all the hygiene you've got to have now which you didn't have in them days. And I know at Bekesbourne we had quite a bit of old clutter, you know old stuff which you keep hold off, you don't throw away. But William, he was a terrible person for throwing things away, he would just dump everything.

E: he's a tidy person

T: …and David liked to collect things as well, his brother, and he had a skip in when he come and he was throwing it all in the skip and me and Dave was going round the other side of the barn and taking it out and bringing him back the things what we wanted. So yeah there's that to it as well. But I mean most old farms have got something kicking about, and good job or else we wouldn't have no museums or nothing would you. So there's that side to it I suppose. But I'd say most of them are spotless now

Joe: we've covered an awful lot of ground. We've been through four or five decades

E: its all muddled up isn't it?

T: its very hard to start and go…'it was two weeks before Christmas when I started and the farm' and then go through…there's so much happened in that time so you get maybe the years, the decades a bit muddled up. And there was so much going on and so many…some people would say you remember the bad times, you don't really remember the good times, but I do remember the good times, mainly the good times, there wasn't many bad times I don't think. No think they was all pretty good

Joe: have you got another 10/15 minutes?

T: yeah we're fine. None of us are doing anything no

Joe: I'd quite like to look into the crystal ball and seem where farming will be in the future. Have you any thoughts on that?

T: well yeah I mean that's…it's hard…it's hard for me to look at farming now, you know to see the difference and the things that they've done and what's in the pipeline. To what it's going to be like in the time that I spent, say 45 years on from now … I really wouldn't like to answer. There won't be anybody sitting on the tractors obviously, it'll all be satellite. I can see it all being satellite and the chap that runs it will be sitting in his office on the computer.

E: but what about picking?

T: it'll be robots. Oh definitely will be, it's going to have to be. So I don't know how they're going to do it, I don't know how they're going to do it. I remember years ago when I started and I said we will get to a stage, which we really nearly did get to that stage, I think we could have done, where you would get a tree to its ideal shape and size, and then you would be able to spray that tree so it would stay like that for the rest of its life. We didn't quite get to that but we nearly did by using, I don't know whether they can still use Coltar (sp) but its called 'Coltar' (sp) which you sprayed on the tree or you could put on the ground. And it stopped it, not dead it could, you could stop it dead, or it could go the other way too and then you'd get loads of little apples all things like that. And they nearly come to that. But now as far as fruit picking is concerned, I mean they pick blackcurrants with a blackcurrant picker machine, I suppose they do gooseberries and things like that with a machine. It'll come to the stage where they grow apples just on one stem which they will pick with a machine, and it'll just be a super spindle, they'll be cheap to buy. And the way they'll be grafted and things like that, the root stock it'll be on…and you'll keep keep 4 or 5 five and have them out and put another one in. I suppose you'll have, like they did years ago, replant sort of problems you know where you get a replant disease and things like that but I'm sure they will come over that and they will just cut them off. And I mean they're putting the different varieties now just on the one root stock you know you can have two and how they're grafting them, incredible. And you know you've got the other (inaudible) which could start (inaudible) which not much come from that. And also when you've got a big thing like they go round the farms, not just the people that are doing the…I can never find the words…the technical parts and that, there's the other people that are coming round like the salesmen and things like that, the salesmen and that for the machine, not so much today maybe but they did in the past and then they changed their machine to all these new ideas

that they fitted on the machine - they got them ideas off the people on the farm because they done this modification themselves. And then they would go back and tell the company 'ooh see this' and then they would then start putting it on them. So it was all made like that. And as I said if were going to work on a farm years ago, if you were going to get on and do anything you had to know how to use a spanner and if you couldn't use a spanner you was in terrible trouble. 'Cos it was all like that setting up by hand, adjusting and things like that. You only have to go and watch a ploughing match and watch them setting up the bales and things. You couldn't do that by satellite. I suppose you can (inaudible) them up and down but you can't set them up. Maybe they will do that, they'll have little motors on them.

Joe: with all of these changes, again looking into the future, what are we in danger of losing? What would you hate to see go from farming?

T: well just a…a farming community really. A farming community really. I mean it's got worse now because the farms have got so much bigger, I mean before you had…where you've got a great big farm you had 3 or 4 little farms. And they was all there, down when William and Dave's is down there, you know people coming from after the war they build them houses down there on the marshes and all that for people to set them up in little market garden places and things like that, so they have little communities. I think that's going to be the difference. I mean down at Preston now they're building what's it called that 'Preston Grange', that new thing. Its not going to be farming people that live in there, they're not going to be country people that live in there I don't think. It's going to be desperate people that are escaping with money to get away from the cities, and can't afford to buy somewhere in the cities. So that's a different I can see, the community life. And that coming from … before I was married I lived in Aylesham, before I was married I lived in Aylesham. But it's a community, and everybody helped everybody else. Now, I mean I'm quite lucky here 'cos I got quite good neighbours you know both sides and across the road, and my daughter lives down the road. But lots of places now, people don't even know who their next door neighbour is, you don't talk to them, whereas when we was younger, nip out for a cup of sugar and they'd give us a cup of sugar and half a bottle of milk…so that's what the difference is going to be, so that's what the difference is going to be, where it's going to be. Sorry about swearing but 'bugger you Jack I'm alright' – it don't work like that. Not in the end it doesn't work like that. You know I've even talked to my son about this sometimes and he says 'I don't need any friends Dad I've got my wife and my children'. But don't you believe it, you do need them. You do need friends, you just do. So I don't know. That's the difference I think. That's the biggest biggest difference.
E: and I think when we were young we were all sort of in the same weren't we. I mean we had friends like your friend in Barham, and you all got the same amount of money. There wasn't that big divide in money or anything so you all had the same sort of things. Whereas now everybody, they're different, it's so different.

Tony: I lived in a council estate up the grove in Barham when I was a boy and, this is how I always quote it is that up there there was people that worked in the coal mine, there was mechanics, there was people that worked on the building sites, there was people that worked on the council, there was all them different jobs, but the actual difference in wages was a couple of pound either side. But now you've got the minimum wage or whatever it might be but someone else who just an ordinary working class person and he's on £600 a week. The other person's on £200. You never had that gap before. And not many people own their own houses, and that gradually started coming in, and as it comes in… I think was the same as when like colour television, if your neighbour has a colour television then you as a working person thought you should be able to own a colour television, and why shouldn't you, you know? And I think it's got like that, it's like cars we've never had cars, people didn't have cars, I mean did have an old van near the end but apart from that you didn't. And yes, we were just coming out of it then by the time I was 50 60 sort of had motorbikes which most people did you know. And you whatever motorbike you wanted. You could have BS8 Bantam which was 125 or you could have a 1000cc whatever. It doesn't matter you could even hold it up, I know my first one I couldn't even hold it up, I fell over. And the mechanics when I was getting out the garage had to help me pick it up again, in fact there's a picture there. But all the lads with their motorbikes and that. But no, that's the difference, the community. Community. I think there is a few scouts and guides and that in Shepherdswell is there?

E: Sorry?

T: Scouts and guides groups. I don't think there is in Barham now, but there was always and girls guides and a boys scouts and things like that, and people willing to run it and do it.

Joe: These were all people whose families, or either themselves or their families were connected through farming?

T: That's right yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean my first experience of London I think was with the boy scouts. When I was about 9 or 10, whereas, you know, that doesn't now.

E: Well when we worked on the farm they used to take us to London….. to the theatre

T: Yes, and that was the other thing. A lot of the farms, well locally did, they used to take their employees out for the day. Mr Wallace used to take us, we went to Ice shows, went to Victoria palace to the black and white minstrels, which you're not allowed to have anymore. You know and things like that, and you know, we thought

it was a great show, used to be on the telly black and white minstrels, nobody ever thought of anything other than, you know, it was like that Robinsons golly, nobody ever thought of it as anything else as a golly, you know, until people put it in their minds really. Cos when you're born you aint got no prejudice have you? It's only people put it there.

E: No, I don't know what the farmers do now, I shouldn't think they do that sort of thing now cos….they haven't got the people working for them.

T: No, they haven't got enough people to do it for. Cos we all went, the 3 farms all went together, and to the agricultural show. You all went in a coach, all together, you know. And it was great cos you went round all the stands, and you knew all the people, the people that sold you the sprays and the combines and the tractors and everything else. And you could come home sloshed if you wanted to, you know. It was, yeah, no and it's still a community, it was a community, really close knit, really good. But not like that now. And less…

E: Well that's progress as you say

T: Yes, it is progress, and you can't stop it. No, you can't stop it. It would be progress but I think we do go backwards on some things. Yeah. But, no, it will be mainly, that's top and bottom of it, community. Yea, yeah, where you all sort of work and pull together and do the different things. But it's so difficult now, especially for the lower wage people. You know, and farming was a low, lowest wage thing really and truly. I mean…

E: But then we had a house didn't we?

T: We had a house and Eileen went to work, but [inaudible] a friend of mine is dead now and gone, we used to go down into Bridge when we lived at Bottom [to corals?] and they used to have oil lorries down there, you know since 16, we used to go and clean them by hand, with a brush, and soapy water stuff you know, scrub em and hose em off, 16 we used to do. Every Friday night, after work, it'd be midnight sometimes when you come home. For about £3 I think, it was at the time. Often I say now I wish I'd put it away every time I'd got it paid, but I didn't we used to go out on the weekends with the kids and spend it, because that was the thing. A lot of people used to say that women went to work on the farm for pin money, what they called pin money. But they didn't, it was to subsidise their husbands wages, and to have those little things in life that you wouldn't have otherwise. So, I don't know. That's the difference I think, that is different, yeah.

Joe: I think, unless there's any particular thing you think I've not, you've not managed to get into or that, you know I've not asked a question to help you, you know…

E: Is there anything else that you can think of, I don't know really

T: Not really. I know Will said, when you'd said, you know, you was gonna come, and it was, or that you know, he'd give you my phone number if I wanted him to. You know, just the changes in farming, and I said 'Where do you wanna start?' You know! But on starting, 'Where do you wanna finish?' Don't know…

Joe: I think the tricky thing with this is we can never get a lifetime, or a generations worth of stories into like an hours interview. But I think what's nice is that we're interviewing not just a few farmers, we're interviewing 50 – So the accumulation of those stories.

T: Yeah, and it will be interesting now, for me to see what other people will say about where's it going. Farming - What difference is it going to make to the countryside and everything else

E: And I wish I could remember when they stopped the children, when, what was it? Through health and safety wasn't it?

T: I think it mainly because you had to have [inaudible] you couldn't just take children willy nilly. But

E: But I know I, you know, I left

T: But I can't remember, no recollection of ever being any, not just on our farm but on other farms, I think once I can remember that somebody, where there was pea picking, and they'd laid a baby down on the sort of pea bines you know, and the tractor had run over them. But I can't remember anything else. I mean lots of accidents for farm workers, you know with tractors overturning, and you know, cos I see the roll frames come in and the safety cabs come in and the ear defenders come in and all these things, you know.

E: We had that happen on our farm, the tractor run away with Mike Green on it

T: Oh yeah, Mike Green

E: He was coming down the cliff wasn't he?
T: That's right. Yeah

E: And the tractor run away with him. I mean he was lucky.

T: Yeah because she didn't know because, Mike, was a, don't know whether you've come across him, or whether he's retired by now, he was to do with home grown fruits in the end. I think he was a director for home grown fruits. He lives in Bridge

E: No, is it Bridge?

T: He lives in Bridge now, yeah

E: Oh, beg your pardon.

T: And, nice lad. And he was a student with us when, cos we'd just had my son, not much younger than me, but we'd just had mark hadn't we and he couldn't get home or

E: He was 18, and you was 21

T: 21 That's right, and we was picking then in trays, and we had what they called Cameron gardner (sp) loaders, and you had a pallet lift on back, and a loader on the front, which tractor you used to load the lorries with, and no power steering, really heavy.. And Mike, yeah, Vics, the manager then, had sent him up onto what we called the cliff – we called it the cliff because it was like that, that was at Pett Bottom, really steep bank. And it was wet, and cos him not knowing any difference, he went up to load himself. And he get off the tractor, put a few trays on, move forward, put another few trays on. The only thing he did, he loaded up 40 trays on the front, and didn't put any on the back. So once he got his nose over the brow, you know what happened 'shhhhoooooo' he was gone. No weight on the back, there was no braking no nothing and he just went straight down and he hit the last, good job they was big trees in them days, hit the last tree on the bottom which spun him round and he rested against the fence, like that. And he was always, he's a blonde lad, with a ruddy complexion, when we went, we heard the noise and we all rushed round there to see him, cos we guessed what had happened, and he was about the colour of your t shirt. White, he was, white!

Joe: Thank you ever so much, it's really been a pleasure to meet you

E: It's fine, I hope it's been a help anyway, it's awful, you forget things don't you, I shall probably think of other things when you've gone.
T: Oh yes, as I say there's loads and it's just hard to keep the decades apart, you know, as you go through cos it all changed. When it did change, it changed quickly didn't it, or it seems to now, when you look back at it.