



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Gary Walters

Age: 40s

Location: Highland Court Farm, Bridge, Canterbury

Size: 1000 acres

Type: Mixed Fruit/Arable/ Enterprise

Interviewed by: Joe Spence and Baely Saunders

Filmed by: Joe Spence

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Gary: Ok, my name's Gary Walters. I run Highland Court Farm. It's a family owned company that was established in 1928 by someone called Walter Wigham who was an industrialist and banker in London. And he decided it was time to move out of London and bought Highland Park as an estate I 1928. One of the first things he did was he replaced the old farm buildings with...he spent a lot of money replacing the old farm buildings with a new dairy and mixed farm, so we have some nice big substantial buildings. They fell out of use as the farming evolved from mixed farming through to fruit farming which I think was following the war, when fruit farming arrived. So the farm evolved over time into becoming quite a major fruit operation and also had a pack house, so as fruit was grown in bigger quantities and distributed through the emerging supermarkets a lot of the packing took place on this site here. And the farm did pretty well and evolved and bought a number of other farms round the place, it's now grown to a total of a 1000 acres of ground, mainly fruit but also a little bit of arable as well. So ... no animals at all, so that's moved on, and also the farming operations moved out of these buildings that we're in here - which is the old dairy, because machinery got bigger and practices changed and the building became unsuitable. I took over about 6 years ago and ... I'm not from a farming background, but I took the approach that we were going to diversify and make more of the buildings that we have. And as a result of that, we rented the fruit business out to what was then the Co-op, to a company called Farm Care that's now owned by Welcome Trust. So they do all the fruit growing. The arable we have in hand and I do that with a local contract farmer. So we still have our farming operations ongoing but a lot more of our focus is on making use of the premises we have. We have a number of houses that we rent out and we have a number of commercial buildings including this old dairy. So that's how, over the last few years, briefly, the business evolved over the past few years. So it's still family owned by the



descendants of the original Walter Wigham and that as business is quite interesting because of course over the different generations the interests of the family members diversifies and so we're trying to evolve the company to match the diversified interests of the family. So that's a very potted history of the last 90 years I suppose.

Joe: What involvement does the family still have?

Gary: The family, we have board that's made up of family members so it runs as any company with the family is still involved with the board. We have just tried to change that a bit because the board was getting bigger and bigger and bigger at a time when, as we diversified some of the interests, the operational side was actually shrinking. Because of course we don't... you know our employees all went off when the land was let and now work for Farm Care. So the board, we've really just rationalised the board down to a more manageable size, because, you know they're all interested in the business, but there isn't necessarily enough business going on, so we've made it a bit smaller, still reflecting the family and the makeup of the family. But of course over time, their interests will change and vary, so we're going through, in common with a lot of other family businesses, a never ending evolution to try and find something that everybody is happy with.

Joe: A number of farmers we've met have spoken of a similar story, maybe on a smaller scale, that the farm has passed on to a son and daughter perhaps, one of them wants to continue to farming, the other one doesn't...

Gary: yeah I know a lot, I've got to meet a lot of local farming families and this isn't an issue that's unique to either Kent of England or beyond. I think from the stuff I've look at with farms and the 'family issue' if we call it is that traditionally it was always the eldest son just effectively got given everything, and the rest of the family knew that that was the position and so made their own way. Increasingly, I see it where the parents of children want to split what they've got equally and fairly amongst them. It gets harder to hold any farm land or the business together. Because of the different interests that people will develop when they're younger and the sheer fact that people move away so much more, be it going off to University or going off to work elsewhere, or travelling even round the world now, there isn't that same sense of 'you're born in this village and farm the village and that's what everyone will do - or you'll do something related to it'. So we still have, we've got one of the family that actually works in the business helping me to diversify and manages part of what we're doing here. But it's a really interesting question as to if you're not doing something that they really want to do, or if they want to live elsewhere, how do you then involve them in the business as a family? And how can you keep them feeling part of something when they might be living a completely different life away from this area? And yes, they're shareholders but how much ownership do they feel they



actually have? So that's another issue that I know this building has in common with a lot of other farming businesses.

Joe: Ok

Gary: In terms of fruit, perhaps my experience over the 6 years being here and from talking to a lot of fruit farmers, it's really changed. This farm here when I arrived had a whole variety of different fruits. It was one of the first apricot growers and at one stage it had strawberries as well, apples, pears, plums. It was quite a scatter gun approach. It had some sense to it at the time but it was a lot of different crops to make use of all the equipment over a longer season. What I've seen, not just here but elsewhere is a much more factory oriented way of working where you have one crop that you grow really well, it might be a couple of different varieties to spread it a bit. But it's less 'a bit of this, a bit of this and a bit of that', its actually 'what can we do, what can we do well, what can we do accurately?' Because the margins aren't there to play with a variety of different fruit operations all running at the same time. And I think, also, a reflection probably of our times, is that you're either really big and efficient, growing it like a factory, or you're very small and niche and you have your own route to market, that has to be providing something a little bit bespoke or you've created your own route to market. I think the middle ground, and its not just with farming I think, but the middle ground is what's disappearing and becoming harder. And so you'll have lots of little things that work pretty well because of one person that runs it, and one person living off it, and then you might have a big operation that's very efficient, massive, economies of scale and all those things. But in-between? I think it's really tough.

Joe: Its funny we're just saying on our way here that there just seems to be this theme emerging that the middle ground is really struggling, or being eroded altogether.

Gary: But I see that in other industries. I don't think that's just farming. I think its globalisation and all of those much much bigger issues that as an industry, or as a field of industry, that farming has those same issues going on. And I haven't yet worked out how you go from being small to surviving at the big end. There aren't the sort of league tables where you can work your way up slowly. And in common with a lot of businesses, smaller businesses find something that they're good at and within the business strategy is, probably at some stage, that you're going to sell out to somebody who's absolutely enormous, because you can't necessarily take your business... make those huge leaps that are now required without either the foundations already there, or massive injections of capital. So that's my general read, out of ignorance, on the farming business and family businesses.



Joe: Given your experience on the business side of things, and coming back to this theme of smallholdings being swallowed up by larger operations, is this something that has been part of Highland Court's history?

Gary: it bought some farms, but whole farms, rather than odd bits of land. Over time it's bought some, not for 40 odd years now have there been any major purchases. I think the problem is, if you look at the cost of farmland, its really difficult to actually make money out of cold farm land. Most farmers are now diversifying because on the operations side you can't make enough money. Unless you're big enough to operate the economies of scale or you're doing it where you accept that's it's a way of life, at the small end where, I'm not saying money isn't important, but you're doing it because you love farming. And I think some of where it got lost at some stage is that farmers as they grew and they loved the growing and being involved in their farms, when the supermarkets and other outlets started appearing, they grew more as yields increased and they couldn't just take it to the local shop, and the public created this demand that fruit travelled further and lasted longer. And with the growth of the supermarkets came what I see as a middle field or marketers and the marketing desks who would say to farmers 'you're a great farmer – you just grow it, we'll take it from the farm gate and sell it for you, best you get back into the field and keep growing'. And a lot of farmers trusted that they were going to get the returns from the shop as they used to get in the little shop that they ...the local shop. But the returns that have come back to farmers have got smaller and smaller and smaller. Supermarket buying power, 'cos they had to accept what they've been given to a certain extent, and that that has actually created...there was a gap created between the grower and the person that was taking the money from the buyer. And there's a lot of people between the cash being handed over in a supermarket and the grower that's going to be paid for the fruit that's being produced. And also the demands of the people supplying the public have gone up, you know there's campaigns about ugly fruit, there's campaigns about different sized fruit, the fact is there is massive massive wastage because its grown to such a high specification, or you don't get paid anything. And so we have this wasted fruit that's going nowhere. This year was a really good crop for the fruit growers, and a lot of it hasn't been picked because there's nowhere to sell it because there's an oversupply into the market of British fruit. And it costs money to pick, it costs money to pack, it costs money to grade in between too, to grade that fruit that costs money. Storing it costs money. So you know, it's a marginal business, and I think the places that do well seem to apply much stricter business controls than some of the old fashioned farming which just did things cos' they felt, and I'm not saying they're wrong, but it was done by, 'oh we're going to do this or going to do that, and there were good years and there's bad years, and the sort of 5 year cycle. What I don't see now are many good years. I've been around long enough now I think to have seen a really good year, and a good year is when you can sell the stuff you grow. So yeah, really difficult, a really difficult industry, I think, for people to survive. And I also think that



somehow ... I see the grower as the producer of the commodity that people want but somehow there's been developed a... and I will say it, above the grower is this inverted triangle of people who are all making money out of this fruit industry and the grower is seen as being at the bottom of the heap, whereas in fact, without the grower there is no heap at all. So it's switched from the grower being someone who's important, to being the last person that's thought of. So, and that's me not really being a grower. Its not a hard luck story for farmers, and that's in fruit which really doesn't do bad compared to some other avenues of farming. So yeah I don't want to get too down about it because there is still fruit growing, there is still farming, how long that lasts – again globalisation tells us it depends on what goes on elsewhere in the world. On the arable side, the commodities that we're growing are just that – it is a commodity. So already, and apples increasingly it's the same, but the commodity we're growing, the people who are buying it don't care whether it came from a farm in Kent or a farm in Leicestershire or a farm in the Ukraine or a farm in Australia or America. It is a global thing you're growing, and the issue for me there for UK farmers is that we farm to very high standards and the checks and balances to make sure that we're doing everything right and using the correct sprays, if you're going to use sprays that is, but all the different techniques which produce a really good crop, and yet, even within Europe actually, I think there can be cheaper ways of growing it. Elsewhere, farming doesn't have all those same pressures and practices, and checks and balances, so stuff can be produced cheaper. But on the brighter side is there are an awful lot of farmers who are committed to looking after the countryside, looking after their farms, looking after the land, despite all the gloom and doom in the industry. If they didn't love what they do, no one would be doing it. And I hear much older farmers, who have been doing it all their lives, saying the same thing, where they run these businesses and have to find ways of supplementing the farming operations by diversifying. I don't know how long that appetite will continue but there you are. Bit doom and gloom this, isn't it!

Joe: we've heard worse!

Gary: but the farming communities that I've found, especially among the growers have been fantastic. Really nice people, consistently nice, consistently committed, helpful to each other, very community based and it's a very pleasant world in that way.

Baely: We were talking about selling on to markets, to middle men or supermarkets, where does the fruit and arable from this farm, where does it go to?

Gary: Well the arable stuff just goes off to a broker. It gets fed in, sold on the market. when we choose to sell it in using a local agent. The fruit you'll need to talk to Farm Care about. But when I first arrived in my naivety to this farm, there were some issues with getting returns back on the fruit that we were selling into the market,



and then actually seeing any money coming back after everyone has taken a slice of the pie. And in my naivety I thought 'well that's ok we will just take it all to a local farmers' market or set up our own local farmers market'. But once you get to a certain size there's just too much of it. There are thousands of kilos of plums that come off 20 acres of plum trees, it's just too big. And I realised that I was completely naïve and stupid, basically, to think 'oh we'll just set up a stall!' Fine if you've got a couple of acres, a couple of plum trees, provide that fresh produce...but absolutely you need the supermarkets, you need the outlets to shift this stuff. And I'm not saying their job is easy, or necessarily that the supermarkets are to blame for the position because, ultimately, the public decide what they'll pay for fruit or what they will pay for food. I think...I am as amazed as everyone else at how cheaply food is sold. I just don't understand how it can be done so cheaply, when I know how much work and effort goes in, not just to the growing that's one aspect of it, but the shipping of it, the packing of it, the moving it around, the storing it, and it's still being sold very cheaply. Who knows what will happen, I can't guess what will happen with food prices but I just can't see they're sustainable.

Baely: Another thing I thought ... because you mentioned the fact that prices are driven down by the fact that, if they can get it cheaper somewhere else then they will get it from that other place, wherever that is. Something a lot of the farmers we've met have mentioned is that in recent years 'local' has become a buzz word. Everybody wants local produce and that's become much more popular and they're making more money. There's increased interest from restaurants, to have local, seasonal produce and people will pay more for it. Does that affect you here?

Gary: It doesn't really affect this farm because I think it's too big. I think it's really great for the smaller operations to try and get the money more directly from someone whose paying for it. It's not even about paying more, it's taking out all the layers of bureaucracy if you like and all the other people that have to handle it between leaving here and getting on to a supermarket shelf. And the packaging, the sheer cost of the packaging and stuff like that is what can be removed if you supply locally. I think there's still a little bit of ... there's still only a certain sized market that's readily available that can allow a farmer to say 'it doesn't matter what it is you know, I'll drop some eggs down to you, ill drop some fruit down to you, I'll drop some vegetables down to you'. There's still going to be a lot that's grown at the same time because it doesn't grow around the whole year, there's still and seasonal aspect. I think the increasing interest in where does it come from is great. I think its got to much a whole lot further and the fact is, people love the convenience. And some people don't have a choice of going into a supermarket, buying a bag of food that they know will be consistent ... and I think ... in a way my concern is that people don't even want to buy ... to some extent the market is shifting from buying whole fruits into the added value of prepared, prepacked, instant-need food. That's even more people handling, and yet people don't want to pay anymore for all the extra



handling, all the extra packaging, all the extra work that goes in. And when I say they don't want to pay more, some people perhaps can't pay more. And that's tied up ... it starts to get into a question of how much time to people give to preparing their own food. Everyone talks about time being a scarce and valuable commodity in itself for people, and so people haven't got time to peel potatoes, they want to buy the oven ready chips or the oven ready potatoes. You look at all the vegetables now, the freezer compartments get bigger, the freezer areas get bigger and bigger and bigger, because nobody buys a cabbage and chops cabbage. I say 'nobody' – course people do, but it's this ready food which in theory creates more free time for people. I don't know what everyone is doing with all this free time that's been created, but maybe that will shift, if we get a big shift, if we look at employment ... I'm starting to talk about quite big pictures here, but if you start to look at, if employment changes and we get used to part time working or less time working because of the efficiencies that computers bring and all the evolution of work, what are we going to do when more jobs are done by robots? Perhaps people will have more time, and perhaps we'll actually see people taking the time to be interested in eating good food, but actually preparing food. And it won't be about what a fruit looks like or a vegetable looks like, it'll be about what it tastes like. The top end restaurants will be more concerned with that, and again personal opinion as to whether you can taste the difference between a locally produced carrot or a mass produced carrot, it depends what you've done to it in the meantime probably. But that's the sort of, out of the control of farmers, growers, that's society changing and how it will evolve. And I think ... I'm aware of all the talk and had different conversations on food security as it's called. As the world keeps going mad, then it's all very well talking about global commodities but what happens ... the 'what ifs' and there are many, but how much of our own food would be able to supply in country? And we've always been importers, but if we get some more trouble round the world and suddenly those global suppliers aren't available, we're going to have to turn back to locally produced stuff and the whole issue of feeding the world. Because as less developed countries become more developed, and they start to consume what they have been exporting, and they start to consume it themselves, then that might cut the market that's available for exporting from there to the UK. So we're either gonna pay more for it, or we've got to grow more.

Joe: Just moving on little bit, but given your experience on the business side of things. Something I'm interested in is the integration of global currency markets and stock markets. What has been your experience of futures trading and ... are these things you've

Gary: That's not ... I'm familiar with it but I don't play with it. I shouldn't be in farming - I'm not by nature a gambler! Bearing in mind that we're gambling when you're growing with the weather. Even farmers can't control the weather. It's not



something that I dabble with, I don't speculate on the currency market. I think some of the bigger businesses would probably be doing something like that.

Joe: I wasn't asking whether you personally do something like that. I was wondering how you think that has affected your farm. It tends to be the bigger farms that get involved with future trading and so on and I thought that perhaps you...

Gary: yeah I think that's inevitable in any industry. The bigger players will have the capacity to work more globally. You're either big enough to operate globally or small enough to operate in your own village or your own town or on the fringes of town. In between ... and I'd probably put us somewhere ... too big to do some of the little stuff ... and we could do it on the edge of. We're not big enough to start to involve ourselves too much in ... 'what do we do, shall we go and plant some land in Africa or Australia or Russia, whatsoever'. I think the big ones will, I think it's inevitable. Maybe not just at the moment, I think people have lost confidence in investing abroad. And it's a pretty big investment to go and buy land, and good farmland. I know good farmland abroad is not cheap. Because they might have better weather, better facilities in many ways, and you'd think land would cost you nothing so you'd go and do it. But you're going to pay a premium because you've got the consistency of weather in some places. There may be other bits of infrastructure. But we're not, I'm not on that scale at all.

Joe: OK. I'd like to go back a little and hear a little bit more about Highland Court's story, its personal story from when it first came about. You gave us a brief overview of it at the beginning, could we go back through it just in a little more detail

Gary: Yes. Highland Court like I say, it was actually a house called Highland Park which is still here. And that was bought by Walter Wigham, who changed the name to Highland Court when he bought it, I think because of the similarities in the name – he was Wigham and it was called either Higham or Higham and I've heard different pronunciations of it. And so he decided I'm not going to be Whigam from Higham, he's going to be Highland Court. And the family originally had some Scottish roots so I think there's probably some truth in that. And so like I say he arrived ... and I do find it interesting looking back that there are some people in the countryside who are looking at these oligarchs, they're not just Russians, but new money arriving that buy up these estates. And they say it as if 'oh it's not a good thing' but it's actually no different to what was going on the end of the Victorian era when industrial money suddenly arrived and all these people turned up and said 'oh we'll build a dairy' and in part, this dairy was built to provide employment. So suddenly somebody comes, injects a load of money, I'm sure there were some locals who said 'oh god that's London money coming out', where has all this money come from? Now we're more globalised its happening on a ... it still happens. Often foreign money will arrive and buy huge estates and people worry about it, so that's not



really changed. Anyway, he came down. He had his sons, one of his sons in particular, but it was shared with the other sons. One of his sons was also Walter Wigham, it gets confusing, Walter Wighams all over the place. So the second Walter Wigham, he ended up running the farm with one of his brothers in particular who is known to the family although he died a couple of years ago and is known as 'Uncle Bernie'. And so Walter and Uncle Bernie ran the business, the two of them. Uncle Bernie didn't have any children, Walter had 4 children – two girls and two boys. But he actually when, he died relatively young, and the business was taken over by one of his son in laws. So 40 years later, I'm the son in law who comes in, so the same thing happens again. Because there are boys around the family, but either they weren't interested in running it or ... for whatever reason, it was passed to the son in law. I don't own it, but I'm whose left to run it and look after it.

Joe: so would it be appropriate to say you were the 'heir' to the ...

Gary: Well, the heir to the problems of running a family business has been the son in law. Because those in the family probably realised, 'ah – that's probably not the easiest job in the world!' And there is, I think, maybe a small advantage of being an outsider who comes in and tries to do a few things than being someone actually in the family. I mean we're getting into the strange world of family businesses but I know that they notoriously are, can be tricky, tricky beasts. I'm very lucky because all the family are absolutely perfect and, absolutely lovely. 'Perfect' – just because we're on film.

Baely: Can I ask, because you're not from a farming background, what was your ...

Gary: I lived and worked in London and so, I'd put it down as general management. And that's what farming is, farming is ... yes there's some technical and I do enjoy having a debate with the farmers and asking them the question 'is farming these days an art or a science'? Most say, quite sensibly, it's a bit of a mix. But I have found generally that the thoroughbred farmers will usually say it's an art. And some of those on the technical side and some of the sort of newer farmers will say 'no it's a science', because there is a lot of science'. And I suppose it depends on how you talk about art or science. But again, there is a massive industry grown up providing advice to growers and supplying growers. I hadn't been here very long and I went to one of the fruit shows that take place. This one was to do with... oh no it was one of the bigger fruit shows. And I went to this fruit show with somebody that's been in the industry for quite a long time, and he did comment on how many of these trade stands had started to appear, often populated by people who can't quite make it as growers. And there were less growers and more suppliers, and that balance was shifting over time. And I saw it even then as quite concerning that you are gonna have very few growers, and other people have gone out to be the suppliers to the growers and provide services. It almost like a service industry that has been created.



And it's almost inevitable I suppose, because we can't do it all these days, and so you will buy in, you will outsource a lot of work. Because using the capital for the equipment you need, and even employing lots of workers, who you can't actually employ all year because it's very seasonal work, does lead you down the outsourcing route try if you are going to try and find the efficiencies that make it a viable business. The other thing I think while we're talking about resources and seasonality is it's been really interesting to see the seasonal workers who now pretty much consistently are Eastern European, who come here for work because you cannot find people who want to work for just a few months a year, and work really hard in the fields. One reason for that might be that we don't have those people available, because they're either in full time work or they want full time work around the year and not a bit of seasonal work. Whereas from Eastern Europe it seems to be there are people who are willing to come and work for three or four months, or six months, and then go back home. But I've been very lucky because consistently, they're really nice people working really hard. I thought I'd mention that because, it used to be, pretty much Kent was where ... seasonal workers came out of London and, historically, they'd have their holidays out picking hops or fruit. Although a lot of the pickers here, even 40 years ago, were from the influx of what we now think of as Eastern European pickers. A lot of them were local families who, during the apple season, would come up and just work on the farm for the month or six weeks that the apples would be picked. Maybe a bit longer than that if you take the different varieties that need to be grown. But part of changing from many different varieties, spreading the season, is they've shrunk the season. If you're only growing Gala and Braeburn it's a much narrower picking season so you need a flood of people to do it over a shorter period rather than when there were the different varieties of apples coming in at different times through the year.

Joe: I'd just like to look into the crystal ball really and think about, perhaps from a business perspective, what does the future hold for you and for the farm?

Gary: I have a crystal ball, and it's really good, but I can't possibly share it with anyone! Because otherwise they'll all be doing what I'm doing. No, all farmers are looking for ... and landowners if I call it that ... all farmers are looking for what the next crop is that's gonna work. You're probably aware that a champagne house has just invested in a farm just down near Faversham. So the French are going to come and make some champagne, although they won't call it champagne of course. But they are going to be making champagne in Kent. You know we've got a still growing wine industry, one or two successful vineyards. That's quite a big punt for people to take, a lot of money for a long time and you don't know what's going to come out of it. But those are the kind of the punts that people have been taking. Again when I was doing the fruit, very early days, complete ignorance again, I met one the buyers from one of the big supermarkets and we had some old orchards and I knew that they needed to be replaced and, in my ignorance, I said 'what variety of apples



should I put it?' And he just laughed and said 'well that's down to you' and I said 'but I'm growing it to be supplied through you and you know your customers, so I'm asking you'. And he was like 'oh no, no, no, you've just got to do what you think'. So it's like I'm going to spend a lot of money planting something that won't actually even produce an apple for 3 years, I've got to grow it in that time and hope that the market hasn't changed 3 years hence. And that's one of the other aspects I've found interesting with farming – we live in a really fast changing world that's really dynamic. Marketers will change wrapping and expect to see a result in 3 weeks or 2 weeks 'cos they've done something, a shop will change its display and expect to see a change in 2 weeks 'cos they've changed the display or even the next week. And we live in this massively increasing sped up world – farming can't speed up. It's seasonal, it takes a year to grow the basic crop. There's 1 or 2 bits you can ... but pretty much, on the fruit side, apples take a year to grow and then there's no more till next year. The newer varieties are a bit quicker but they take a couple of years before they're producing anything, so you're ... you can only run at a certain speed. And I do see tensions between what everyone is used to, the sheer speed of life and the slowness of agriculture. I don't know whether that will ever settle down, whether people will actually pay a premium to be part of this slower world, or whether the slower world will just get completely lost into the fast world and we'll stop growing 'cos people have wanted to land for doing fast things and not this slowness of ...you know, 30 years to grow a tree. And that's where again, I've had some debates with family business where you know the 'old style handed down the generations' keeping farming estates together allows people to think 'I'm going to plant some trees, they're not even going to be maturing, I'll be dead' but my grandchildren will be able to benefit in some way shape or form. And as things become smaller and smaller parcels, I don't know if that thinking will continue. We're going to lose strategic thinking on farmland, and it's going to become about the instant gratification that the world ...'suffers from' probably sounds bit prejudicial ...that's just in existence in the world, or certainly in England. So, crystal ball time, where are we going to be? I don't know.

Joe: Do you think it's easier for the larger organisations to adapt quickly to see these sudden changes in consumer demand or...

Gary: No they can't. In farming you can't.

Joe: No matter who or what you...

Gary: Well what are you going to do? Are you going to ... you know, the quickest crops are some of the vegetables perhaps which they plant and then they can get them cropping in 2 months or something. You start to get a bit 'nichy' for the micro vegetables or ... I think that's a really specialist market where they cut the cress within two days of it sprouting so they can put it as a bit of decoration on the food.



But in terms of the mass growing, you can only grow 1 or 2 crops a year, even if you're squeezing them in with each other. Generally you've got to think ... like I say, apples, you plant an orchard you're expecting to get 15 or 20 years out of it. So that can't really speed up, you can't do much about it, that's just how growing is. Like I say, there is a tension with, everyone wants instant stuff and to change something because it's not making money. They don't secure ... and I mention fruit but the same with dairy herds or any other farming really ... if you don't provide long term security for the family businesses that still generally run it, or even other long term businesses, if there isn't any sustainability people aren't going to invest in it and they're not going to invest for the next generation and the generation after of that. It will start to shrink down and say 'well I can't see it being here in 10 years so why don't we not bother'. So again, back to doom and gloom. Not good. But they were probably dooming and glooming a 100 years ago so ... "it's not the same as it was 'cos they now want me to have 20 pigs instead of the 10 that traditionally we put on this particular area".

Joe: Baely have you got anything?

Baely: No

Gary: Well look, you're welcome to come back and see me again. If you go off and see anything around the farm, I won't be around today, but you're only up the road so you're welcome to come and have a wander round and if you then have a bit more time you can come and see some of the stuff going on in these buildings, have a look at the buildings, because they are lovely.

Joe: Are a lot of them the original building as well?

Gary: These are from 1928 yeah. This was a bull pen, so hence the great big solid door. So we've still got the basic dairy, and we've got a milking parlour. It's all still here. It's changed a bit but I'm doing all I can to maintain the heritage. So that we keep a link. You know I've got a jam factory, I've got a bee keeper .. I'm trying to link the heritage and the land and have things so that people don't lose touch with what was here.

Joe: you say jam factory, bee keeper... can you quickly give us an overview of the multiple areas

Gary: ...what we've got here? Well some of it's a bit mad. We have got some agricultural engineers, and we have got sort of light engineering going on with electrical engineers and car mechanics, because when these building weren't being used, people were looking for a bit of space and farmers were able to go to someone 'well I've got an old barn'. It's happening all the time, people come and say 'have you



got a bit of space, I've outgrown my garage at home, can I do something?' So a bit of that went on, and then in my time we completely changed the farming as I've described by renting it out and they're now based in what used to be the pack house at the top of the farm. So moved them out from the yard. And I've found a beekeeper, of course bees are a big thing in farming, and he wanted a bit of space because he was evolving his business, so we repaired an old barn for him and he moved in there and seems to be doing really well so that's sort of, the bees looked after...and then I've got someone who was making jam in a very small unit on another farm and wanted to expand and so we redid a barn ... another old building that had fallen down a bit ... we repaired and tidied that up, and so I've got a jam maker who uses, who makes jam out of fruit grown on the farm or elsewhere locally. My aim is to try and keep in touch with something that's going on on the ground. I also have ... there's a company called 'Oak and Rope' who make oak goods, breadboards, doorstops, things like that, swings, garden benches. But very high quality oak goods that's are carved, you can have them bespoke. They've moved in and have got a workshop and work from here, so I ...they don't use our oak yet but I've got plans to get them to do some stuff with our own trees. We've got some bit of woodland, and it would be quite nice to do something with that. I have got some offices that run as offices, so I've got a card designers here working in offices, I've got an IT company that have got an office, some property people that have got an office, I've also got a big old building that have got some creatives in. If I call them 'creatives', it's a company that run poetry workshops and arts stuff, and that's a really interesting project because I'd like to get creativity really going here as a creative centre. Which I think is then good for everybody because whatever line you're working in, if you can get that sense of creativity going it gives you a bit of energy and it's a bit bonkers and a bit fun. They're really lovely, but there's no money in the arts so they're struggling. But we're working together to create a real sense of an artistic community, a creative community here. Where that takes us? My crystal ball isn't working on that one, there's a real definite blind spot on it, I can't see. Because the way I'm working with them doesn't fit the normal, if there is such a thing, normal sort of business or arts side, so we run up on issues on getting grants and things because they're a not for profit, and I'm not. And lots of people like what we're doing and really think it could be great, but we don't quite fit the model. But that's the point – the old model hasn't necessarily worked, so you have to have a new model, but your new model is great till you bump into this thing called 'computer says no', because it doesn't quite tick the box. And people have to think and actually have to innovate to get over the hurdles that are then presented to them. So quite, in a strange way, an exciting project but quite challenging. So that's how we're sort of evolving these building and bringing them back to life. And just as a throwback to the history of Higham Park, before it was bought by Walter Wigham it was owned by Count Zubrowski who was a racing driver who built racing cars in his barns. And he actually also had a railway line which is now the Hythe and Dymchurch, you know the mini railway, that was in the ground here! It ran around the estate. He was the



richest 21 year old in the world at the time, his money came from Manhattan, his family owned a lot of Manhattan. He lived here, he raced his racing cars, built racing cars. Ian Fleming lived over the back of the farm, not far away for a while. He came up here on a visit and heard the stories of all these racing cars being built in barns, and from that he got the idea for Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, and wrote Chitty Chitty Bang Bang. So when you're next watching Chitty Chitty Bang Bang, when you see the barn doors open and out comes this lovely old car, that was here. So they were diversifying even back then! But there you are, bit of a strange back story!