

David Fryer

David Fryer was born into a non-farming family and raised in the countryside at Strines, near Marple. He started his career as a farmer at the age of nineteen when he bought a small farm on Anglesey and farmed there for a short period. Returning to the family home in Strines, he eventually bought a farm near Longnor and built up a large dairy herd. David now lives on the farm with his daughter, Heather, and her family.

DF: The first farm I had was on Anglesey. I had twenty-two acres. It was only a little place. Anyway, I stayed there for a bit and then I sold the farm in Anglesey, over some difficulties or something, and I came back to me father's home, which was in Strines near Marple. Me dad, he was a manufacturing stationer and paper merchant in Manchester, Lee Street Mills. Anyway, I started to work on a farm at Woodford for a bit and then I bought a farm in New Mills, Shedyard Farm. I sold that and then I bought this. Well, I didn't buy it actually, I helped a farmers son out, well a bank managers son had a farm at New Mills and I helped him out a bit. And he said 'if you ever want to buy another farm go and see Mr Low at the Midland bank, Glossop'. Anyway, I did buy another farm through Mr Low at the Midland bank, Glossop. And I bought this like.

CG: Your family background wasn't farming? How did you get this passion for farming? What made you want to do it?

DF: Well, we were born in the countryside and we sort of lived on a farm. Well, there was a farm below us. I just sort of got tied up into farming.

CG: So, that was near Marple?

DF: Yeah, a place called Strines, near Marple.

CG: So, had your family further back been farmers or not?

DF: Well, there was farming in the background.

CG: So, when you first came here you had dairy cows, did you?

DF: Yes, we milked cows. We kept some Channel Island cattle, a few, and we kept Friesians or anything, you know. Just a commercial herd, like.

CG: How many did you have?

DF: Well, we had a farm sale and it was the biggest sale ever been known in this part of the world. We were milking about one hundred and forty, in those days.

CG: So, when was it you sold up? Sold your herd?

DF: Now then. You see I got left on me own with Heather when she was five. I brought her up on me own. I'd been taken bad, I'd been in hospital with back trouble and when I come out, she was dropped off at a neighbour's you see.

CG: It must have been a big struggle to be here with a big dairy farm and a child on your own?

DF: That's why I sold all the milk cows like, you know.

CG: Have you enjoyed your years farming here or was it a bit too hard sometimes?

DF: Well, it was alright when I'd got me driving license an' I could go about and do what I want to like. Now I'm in a mess, you see. No driving license, I have to depend on other folk. I used to be very friendly with Woolley's at Bank, you see. I can't even get there now. There used to be a big family of them, like.

CG: Do you feel very attached to this place?

DF: No, I'd be glad to see the back of it if I could.

CG: Where would you like to be then?

DF: Well, it ain't where you'd like to be when you get in my position. I'd sooner live in a village somewhere, where everything was to hand, you know.

CG: So, it feels a bit too lonely to you down here now, does it?

DF: Well, it is and it's a lot of trouble. I've still got responsibility for the damn place. I mean, I lease it off like. I've leased it for a long, long while, but what I used to do was all the draining and the maintaining and the fencing and all the rest of it and then this lots happened and I can't do it, you see.

CG: Do you think it was a tough place to farm? Was it a tough place to work?

DF: Well, not really, you never thought about it in them days, because everybody was struggling. No, we used to be alright, we helped other folk, we helped one another in them days. When we was hay making or anything like that, you'd have a field full of folk. Particularly, Balls at Newtown. They had a big family, about nine of them. I've seen them all born.

CG: Are you a bit sad to see some of the wildlife that's disappeared, because there was a lot here in the early days?

DF: Oh, very sad to see the wildlife gone and most of that has been through mismanagement. I'm still on a conservation scheme now, like. But they wouldn't be told. It's alright making habitat for the wildlife to come back, but where are they going to come back from, they're not there anymore, you know. There were black grouse when I came up here, back end of these trees would be full of black grouse and they've all gone.

CG: What do you think is the answer then? Why do you think they've gone?

DF: Well because there were too many predators it finished up. There was nobody..., you know. Badgers and foxes.

CG: But you're still in this farm, you've been here for a long time now, haven't you? How old were you when you bought this farm? I think I was told you were about thirty.

DF: I possibly was, because when I first bought a little farm on Anglesey, I was only about nineteen. But I mean, me Dad leant me the money for that like, but it was only twenty-two acres, I can remember that and it was only £1,200 in them days.

CG: But you set your heart on being a farmer?

DF: Well, I don't know why. I have worked in Manchester a bit. I used to travel from here. I helped me sister out when me Dad died, until they decided to sell-up.

CG: It's interesting that you came into this area.

DF: Well, there's a lot of people came into this area. You see, there's John Johnson at Smedley Stitch, they came into this area. There were quite a number. I mean there is now at Fernyford, that's owned by Peak Park, I think. But Neil Richardson he's come into the area. But he used to be a sheep shearer. He's only come into farming quite recently.

CG: But you bought the farm from the Harpur Crewe estate, did you?

DF: Yeah, and of course at that time I bought it from Harpur Crewe and of course Bill Lownes and Yvonne and them were next door then. I know when I came to sale, before the sale I came to look at it and this wall over here was propped up and they took it down didn't they before sale. It was next doors wall and anyway eventually next doors wall fell out and they rebuilt that, like.

CG: There were lots of farms weren't there for sale? Was it in the 1950s, I guess it was, wasn't it?

DF: Because Merrill Grill, the same time as I bought this, Merrill Grill was up for sale.

CG: So, tell me, what was the acreage when you first bought it?

DF: Hundred and eight. Later, I bought some of next doors. I had hundred and fifty-eight. I've still got hundred and fifty-eight. I held onto it, but now I let it to Johnsons.

CG: But you managed a big herd then on not very much ground really, didn't you? That's quite a big herd?

DF: It was a big herd. Ah, but you see, there again, I used to rent ground up and down, you see and eventually I bought another place for a bit, Wickenlow at Flash. That was about hundred acres. Then sold it eventually.

CG: In the early days you'd have had all traditional hay meadows, wouldn't you? Then did you plant a lot of rye grass, silage grass?

DF: As you go up the lane the field on the left that's original pasture that was, but it's been meadow since. That's never been ploughed or anything, it's natural grass. Then the top field and the field there, that has been ploughed and re-seeded. These slopes on the right, were ploughed and re-seeded. But that which is now Johnsons meadow now, I meadowed it, but it was permanent grass, it was never, you know...

CG: Do you think it was a sad day when they got rid of so many of the hay meadows?

DF: Well, that's another thing, it might have spoilt some of the wildlife, but the main reason getting rid of hay meadows, I think, what's done more damage is spreading this slurry up and down you see. It kills all worms off.

CG: What do you think's the right way to manage it?

DF: Well, there were nowt wrong with how I was managing it before, when I was doing the work and taking other people's cattle on like.

CG: So how did you manage your grassland in those days?

DF: In those days how did we manage it. We did no more, only spread traditional muck with a muck spreader. Nice dry rotted manure and all rest of it, that's all we did.

CG: So, it's the slurry, it's disgusting isn't it?

DF: It doesn't do the ground any good you see. It kills all the worms and that's it. And yet it still doesn't stop the moles. But you see, I used to catch all moles.

CG: You used to work hard to keep it good then?

DF: Well, I suppose I did in a way like.