

Geoff Tunnicliffe

Geoff and Margaret Tunnicliffe farm together with their son Andrew on Manor Farm in the Dane Valley. They also keep stock on the Roaches by agreement with Staffordshire Wildlife Trust, in addition to the stock kept at Manor Farm.

Part Two. Cattle Breeds

CG: Your Mum and your Dad had about thirty cows. What did they have then?

GT: Shorthorns.

CG: Did you carry on that tradition?

GT: No, we went into British Friesians for twenty odd years, perhaps thirty years, and then we bought a Shorthorn and we carried on and then we've gone to pedigree Shorthorns and I wouldn't have anything different. There's nothing wrong with a British Friesian but they're on the Holstein Friesian now. Well, I wouldn't walk behind them if you paid me. The longevity of them is two and a half lactations. They're not suitable for up here. If you had a cow give 5,000 litres years ago you had a belting good cow and now they have to give 10,000 litres.

CG: It's dreadful cruelty, I think. Their poor old skeletons can't really hold the weight, can they? Whereas the old British Friesians they were quite tough really.

GT: We've got Shorthorns. I think we had one, it had thirteen calves. And the average is about eight or nine. I can't get carried away with just the milk, you know. And then with a Shorthorn you can put any bull on it you like, a beef bull, and you'll have a cracking good beef animal. Because now on the Roaches, we have to run a breed at risk, that's Beef Shorthorn and Derbyshire Gritstone sheep and so we have got quite a lot of Beef Shorthorns now and we're going down both tracks of it. We've still got dairy Shorthorns, but we also got Beef Shorthorns.

CG: What made you make the shift back to the shorthorns of your Dad's farming days?

GT: I think we happen to go to the shorthorn sale when we were down in Cheshire moving sheep and went into the shorthorn sale at Chelford and bought a shorthorn cow and I remember saying the first time we milked it, "well milks same colour anyway". We just went on from there, you know. I don't think you can beat them. They are more suitable, because they have to walk quite a way to the fields.

CG: They're strong cattle, aren't they? Shorter in the leg and less vulnerable. In terms of capacity, how's that?

GT: We average six and a half thousand litres. It's quite a lot for up 'ere.

CG: So, you think that they would do better than any other breed around here?

GT: Oh, definitely.

CG: What about the temperament?

GT: Oh, they're quiet.

CG: I know the beef shorthorns, they are browsers rather than grazers, so will they cope with fairly rough land

GT: Well, they're supposed to do, but it's like anything else, they will eat rough stuff, but if there's any good stuff, good grass, they'll eat that first. They're not daft. And the thing that encouraged us to go more for them, Morrisons are giving us 25p bonus per kilo on top of the standard price, because they want to promote British breeds. You get it on the Aberdeen Angus and the Hereford and the beef Shorthorns, so that's encouraged us to push the beef Shorthorn.

CG: So, your market is mainly Morrisons, is it?

GT: Well, we haven't finished any, because we're stuck capacity wise, but we've sold stores in Leek in the trade for other people to buy them and fatten them.