

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 Four. Margaret Tunnicliffe

CG: I'm going to switch over to Margaret for a minute. So, Margaret are you from this area?

MT: I lived about ten miles away on a farm in Macclesfield Forest. It was a mixed farm, but my Dad died when I was 15 and my brother came back to the farm and he stopped producing milk and they had beef cattle and sheep, and he and his wife were very keen Derbyshire gritstone farmers, so they've kept those and I worked with him for a very short time, before I got married to Geoff. When we got married, I was working at different places. I went to Rease Heath College for a short course and then I worked on a farm in Rainow and then we got married in 1968.

CG: So, as someone who's been farming all your life, can you tell me something about the size of that farm. You say you had sheep and beef cattle?

MT: It was 400 acres of pastureland and moorland which ran up to the Cat and Fiddle. It was rough, tough territory. We were out on the hilltops rounding up the sheep.

CG: I'm going to see Bill Brocklehurst. Do you know Bill?

MT: Well, my sister in law is the Derbyshire gritstone breeder from Goyt Valley and she is sister to Bill Brocklehurst. He left the farm and went to work for the Peak Park on the Roaches as warden.

CG: A lot of people in England would almost not believe the challenges that people like you face in this sort of landscape as practical working farmers. What would you say were the joys of it for you, what were the good things about it?

MT: Well, it's a way of life that you get into that you wouldn't want to do anything different. But the problem is now that there's so much paperwork that really makes it that you can't do the farming that you're wanting to do.

CG: Can you describe the landscape for me, the things that you feel the most attached to, the things that you like about it?

MT: Well, we're very keen to preserve the nature and the birds and the animals. You know we're very conscious of conservation and we're up for it and we don't want to overgraze anywhere.

CG: So, what do you remember seeing. Obviously, you know the terrible statistics about the loss of farmland birds, throughout Europe, actually. Can you remember seeing these birds as a girl and a young woman?

MT: I saw a lot more Lapwings on the farm where I lived on the pasture, which was open land, but I feel that the predators have helped to diminish a lot of the species.

CG: How did you feel about those wild creatures. Were they part of your life?

MT: I'd go out and the skylarks were singing and you don't seem to hear them now, well we used to hear them where I lived.

CG: You'd remember over in your very distant neck of the woods, all of ten miles away, do you remember hay making as a young woman? Was it something you enjoyed?

MT: Used to get blisters on your hands. Well, I don't know whether it was enjoyable it was just what we had to do and I mean when you're little...

GT: Margaret's brother, Joe, was one of the first people anywhere about to make silage. He was a pioneer around here.

CG: What about you, your working day as a child or teenager, how did that go round school days?

MT: We used to walk to school, as a primary school pupil, from the farm where I lived to Macclesfield Forest. Next to the church there was a primary school there.

CG: How far was that?

MT: A mile and a half.

CG: That's quite a long walk for a little five year old?

GT: But your mother took you first day and she went herself after that.

MT: You wouldn't dare walk down those roads now with the traffic on the roads. But we used to walk from age five. And then I used to catch a bus to Macclesfield to the secondary school.