



Hilda Critchlow

Hilda was born in 1928 and worked for most of her life on the family's dairy farm, Sheldon House Farm, Brund. Hilda was interviewed by Christine Gregory in August 2015.

Part One. Dairy Farming

CG: Right Hilda, could you tell me where your farm was and the name of it?

HC: Sheldon House, The Brund near Sheen and it only milked about twenty some cows and then me father and me eldest brother, he's younger than me though, altered it and made it to tie thirty-nine, but it wasn't many nowadays. But we managed it and it was all hard work, shall I say. And when me sister got married in 1949, she were a good milker, and me and me brother weren't very good milkers doing hand work, it were hand work then, and he says I shall have to order a milking machine, which he did, and we had a milking machine. And it was always my job, I was married to the job, washing the milking machine. I've seen them fetch me out of the hay field to wash the milking machine and I've done that 'til we gave over milking. I was eighty when we give over milking. But the eldest brother, he got married in 1953 and he left home and went to below Ashbourne farming. Course this left me with the youngest brother, he was ten years younger than the other brother, and me mother said when she died, she says to me "you've never asked for anything, you ought to have all I've got, but I can't do that, your dad must look after you". And she says "will you look after John if anything happens to me". She had always spoilt him being the youngest one, which I have done, I've looked after him. He had dementia. He died two years ago. And I've helped him. He'd all the property and he died without making a will. Of course, it made things very, very awkward. Of course, he made no will and so it all had to be sold. Money piled up on the table and me sister and brother got as much as I did. I shall always tell people I shall never complain, because it's worth nothing, I come with nothing and I shan't take anything out. I put me life even to me parents. And me eldest brother, I was good with him when he went and left the farm, I went and visited him. And then me youngest brother, I was obliged, no one to help him. So, I couldn't leave him very well, although I started drawing a pension when we were farming, but no, I stayed with him. In fact, when he went out of the house for the last time, he had to go in hospital a bit, he says "thanks very much for helping me", when he left the house, which I did.

CG: So, how many years did you work on that farm then from being a girl, I suppose you started as quite a small child?

HC: Yes, getting sticks in and coal in at night ready for next day. I remember doing that as a little girl until I left school and then I helped me father. Of course, when me brother left school, I didn't do as much. It was a big garden and painting and decorating, I did that. And

of course, I've been busy all me life and then when me father died in 1976, me brother was left the farm. Me little brother I'll call him. Course he had no one to help him and I've helped him along lifes way 'til he was taken poorly. We give over milking, I was eighty, anyway.

CG: When was it your dad passed away?

HC: 1976 and me mother '74. I'd turned forty then. He lived two years after her. The first twelve months he were alright. As soon as she'd been dead twelve months he'd act as though he went to bits, didn't go his self, he went his own way, and he wasn't the same. And as I say, he left me brother the property and of course I'd no home, but what did I do, but only help John, I'll say. And of course, if he'd got a girlfriend, perhaps he'd 've had a family, and I should have to gone, but anyway I stayed with him, I helped him 'til I drew the pension at sixty.

CG: How many of them are there then? There's your older brother...?

HC: There's four of us, two brothers and two sisters. My sister, as I say, she died last year. Me sister was ninety-seven. Ninety-nine next month in September. She'd have been ninety-nine. Me brother John, he thought he'd live forever perhaps, same as her.

CG: So, who was left on the farm, it was you and your dad and your younger brother?

HC: Yeh, me younger brother, it was him at home that I stayed with. But me older brother, he left. He got married in 1953, but he left in 1960. But he was working for himself, him and his wife on a farm the other side of Ashbourne, he was working for himself. Of course, me father were working for him 'til he turned over to John. I don't know if I had a wage or not, I never complained shall I say, which was silly.

CG: So, you carried on working on that farm 'til you were eighty.

HC: Yeh, yeh. With milking, because I stayed with John up to his death, two years ago.

CG: So, you were working really hard. What sort of work were you doing? I know you said you did a lot of work in the dairy, all those years.

HC: Gardening, decorating, keeping the house, it was a big house, keeping it clean. General jobs, keeping it tidy and clean.

CG: It's a huge amount to manage, isn't it?

HC: Umm, all to no sense nowadays, but I mean in olden times they were bigger families, weren't they?

CG: So, how do you feel about all that now?

HC: Sometimes I say to people I'd have looked after meself more, but I didn't do it. For one thing I thought a lot of me mother and I wouldn't want to leave her. I know I'd once the chance to go to Canada, some relatives of Professor Sheldon come looking where he lived

and said I could go and stay with them for a little while, and of course arranged to go. Of course, me mother thought I should go and never come back and she didn't want me to go and I never went. And I've never complained, that's how I put it, I never complain.

CG: Your mother was the one who you were closest to.

HC: Yeh, yeh. Me father were alright, he'd make you work and strict, if you know what I mean. Old fashioned ways, but nowadays they'd say I'm doing it meself, wouldn't they?

CG: Do you think he didn't appreciate you, is this the thing?

HC: It was how he'd been brought up. It was how he'd been brought up and he'd think we should do the same, be under him. But me mother were kinder.

CG: You must have been devastated when you lost your mother?

HC: Yeh, very.

CG: How old was she?

HC: Seventy-five.

CG: Not very old then?

HC: No, not nowadays, not with me being ninety.

CG: I wonder if we can go back to the happier times like your earliest memories of that farm. Had your family always had it going back generations?

HC: No, Professor Sheldon lived there, bought it in 1913 I think and then he left it until me father got married in 1919 or 20. Me sister was born and of course it was old fashioned farming in them days, horses. Well, of course, I went to Sheen school all me life. It's closed now. Then I left school and helped me father outside, because me next brother, he was four years younger, and I had to help my father with the horses. And of course, the war was on, and of course, I helped him outside with the horses. He'd let me work one horse meself, but there were two horses, he had to be there, and he did so much ploughing drawing rows up, and when there were two horses I had to be in the middle, because one went a bit quicker than the other, and I had to pull it back, he used to tell me "pull it back". I'd wear high topped shoes then. They kept kicking soil. Nowadays, they'd say "I'm not doing it", but you had to do what you were told in them days.

CG: So, tell me about the horses and what else was going on on the farm. It was always a dairy farm was it from the early days?

HC: When me father come, it was the start of milking I should say and he had to alter the cowsheds and then me eldest brother, he did a bit more. Forty wasn't many compared to nowadays.



CG: It was a huge number then. Thirty-nine cows during the war was a lot, wasn't it?

HC: That's right.

CG: So, what did the horse work involve in those days?

HC: Well, chain harrowing and then ploughing, drawing rows up. When it was ploughed you'd work the soil up and then you'd draw rows and set cabbages or turnips. That was one horse then, and he'd set the turnip seeds. When they grew up along the rows you had to go thinning them. That was one of my jobs, go thinning turnips. And it was a back aching job, pulling all these and leaving one. A back aching job. And then at back end, you'd pull the turnips up, top and tail 'em, as we called 'em, and then had to bring them home, put them in the corner of the yard and fetch them in during the winter. Me father had a turnip cutter, it was something to do with electric, and it made it a lot easier than doing it by hand.

CG: And that was winter feed?

HC: Yeh. In summer, when you loosed 'em, you had to go up out of the yard onto the road and there were three farms in them days in The Brund and you could get them mixed up at times, but you see me and me next brother were always available to run up and down and watch 'em. The neighbours be bringing for milking as well, bringing 'em their own way or one farm would go that way. We were the middle one.

CG: So, it was a bit tricky, you'd got three herds all moving at the same time. So, you had to move them all and keep your eye on not getting into a muddle.

CG: So, what kind of cattle did you have then?

HC: Short horns when I left school and then they went on to Friesians, gradually. British Friesians.

CG: What do you remember about the short horn cattle? Were they nice cattle to work with? Were they gentle?

HC: Yeh, very gentle, umm. They had horns in them days and then they'd get as have them dehorned as time went on. And then they got as they had ear tags in, as they called 'em. All that come along the way and now I don't know what they do.

CG: And you were not a great hand milker?

HC: No, no. Soon as me sister got married, my father says "we'll have to have a milking machine now", because me and me next brother weren't good milkers. We played about a bit, I think. Me father made the stools we sat on. I know mine was two little cuts in the middle. We always had our own stools. Just a favourite, I think it was.

CG: So, do you think of those as happy days doing that?



HC: A lot happier than today. More content. We were busy, but more content. I mean, no ones time for you. If anything's sold, strangers buy them, they might be sociable, and they might not. I think they were happier days, you knew everyone. Of course, no television and you'd go visiting your relatives and you don't do that nowadays, the same. It was a simpler life. Very simple.

CG: Were you ever afraid of the horses?

HC: No, I was used to them. Even when I was young, we went to Leek with a horse and float, and left the horse at that first pub going down Buxton Road on the right. I know he used to leave it there.

CG: Did you just used to wait?

HC: Well, I suppose so, I should be young then.

CG: Going back to the horses, did you drive them very much? Did you have a wagon or a pony and trap? Did you get around using the horses in that way or were they just for working on the farm?

HC: Just working on the farm, yeh.

CG: What was their temperament like? Were they nice horses?

HC: There was a brown one that I used to like. Very quiet. Now this white one, she was more for going like the devil, shall I say. She was a bit dangerous for me, but I never worked her meself. But the brown one, I could chain harrow meself with it and if you fetched a horse now and give me some bridles and gearings, I could do it. Get the collar, turn it round and put it on and then turn it back. You've got to have a knack putting the collar on and then the bridle and then the gearing on the back.

CG: Could you just tell me what your working day was like back in the war years? Because how old would you have been then?

HC: I was fourteen when I left school and the war broke out when I was eleven. I was at Grindon, staying with me aunty, I remember that, her standing there with a friend down the road waiting for Chamberlain, he were the Prime Minister then, they were waiting for the news coming out at eleven o'clock. And I can remember them standing there waiting and put the wireless on, it would be wireless then, and Chamberlain, he wasn't Prime Minister I don't think very long. Anyway, when Chamberlain gave it out "we are at war", and I'll always remember me Aunty standing there crying wondering what the end would be.

CG: During the war, obviously lots of farms were being asked by the government to dig for victory, so did you do new ploughing then?

HC: Oh yeh, I remember me father ploughing, newly ploughed fields that hadn't been ploughed before.

CG: So, were you ploughing up some of your old hay fields, then?

HC: Yeh, umm.

CG: How much hay making did you do? Did you have lots of good hay fields in Brunt? Was it good ground?

HC: Oh yeh, yeh. Not the same as now, they go and mow a field, happen two or three fields, but just a little bit they'd mow and look after that little bit.

CG: How big were your hay fields? Were they little ones?

HC: Well, it varied, five acres and seven acres. The first one we had, me father always went first. About two acres that was. And he always went there first, got all the other (...) and then they went in this field, it had grown a second crop. And he always thought a lot of this field. It was all good hay, but that was excellent. I think this Professor Sheldon must have put some different seed in it.

CG: So, can you remember the wildlife in the hay meadows in those early days? Can you remember the things you used to see?

HC: Peewits you call 'em, don't you? There were always lots of nests up and down. And same with the cuckoo, you'd hear the cuckoo. I've never heard that for years and years. The same with the peewits. You'd go what you call peewit egging. They would allow it now. Going and getting peewit eggs when we were children. There were nests up and down various fields, some fields would have a lot in and another field would have none.

CG: You'd got the curlew then?

HC: Oh yeh, curlew and owls. Me and me brother, just before he were taken poorly, the Peak Park let us have some buildings to do up. There were two buildings. I think the Peak Park were more concerned about the owls than the buildings being done up and this niece that has bought this ground, I've enquired, I think the owls are still there. But the other little barn with owls in, someone else bought it and I don't know how that's going on.

CG: That's the trouble, isn't it that so many barns have been converted that the barn owls have got nowhere to go.

HC: That's right.

CG: Do you remember watching the owls?

HC: No, I don't remember watching them really, because perhaps being young we shouldn't be interested in them, not like the swallows and thrushes and robins and all them. There were lots of them, weren't there? Being young, I don't remember the owls.



CG: But you remember that as a happy childhood, do you, being a country child.

HC: Yeh, yeh and I went to school with a friend next door. We were the same age. And she's dead. The last one among us, they were saying yesterday up at Sheen, she's the same age as me, within a month, and she's about the only one left. They were always happy days, shall I say.

CG: Did you think it was quite a friendly community round where you were?

HC: Oh yeh, very.

CG: So, you weren't really isolated there, were you?

HC: No, there were three farms and got three cottages. Like everyone was friendly. You see, you knew everyone up the village. Now if I go up the village I have to be taken. I hardly know anyone. They're all different.

CG: So, when you were working with the horses, can you talk me through how you'd start your day? Cos you did this for quite a long time, didn't you? It wasn't just a few years, you did it for a long time, didn't you? So, how old were you when you first started?

HC: Well, I shouldn't be very old when I'd go with me father. He had someone working with him and I remember going with them, sitting on the horses back, and then when I left school of course, I worked with me father along with the horses 'til one of the neighbours had got two boys, of course they must have a tractor. After the big snow in 1947, they had a tractor. Anyway, the year after me brother being the next one, he hadn't the patience with horses, had a tractor. Of course, it were all tractors then. I did learn with me brother that I farmed with, I found that I could drive a tractor well, but it weren't like the horse days. It were slower, that's the trouble, they haven't time as time goes on, they haven't time for the horses, have they?

CG: What were your feelings about that, when you made that big change. It was the change for everywhere, wasn't it? The end of the working horse. Did you feel sadness about that?

HC: Well, me brother, next brother, he sort of took over and I should do with me father bits of jobs with horses, but as time went on he got doing them with the tractor and no patience with horses. That's the trouble with the younger people, they've no patience, sat on tractor, on their backsides.

CG: So, when you were working with the horses, can you talk me through how you'd start your day? The first thing you'd have to do is catch the horse. They were out in the fields presumably?

HC: Yeh, you'd go with a little bit of corn in the bucket and that's how you'd catch them. You'd get a halter and put it on them and bring them home. Of course, put them in the stable. At dinner time, in war time, I remember when me father with me helping him, he

used to work them until what you call sweat. And he'd have his dinner and wait a while whilst they had a rest and he'd listen to the news at one o'clock, see what the war were doing and then go back and fetch the horses.

CG: They were stabled up through the winter, were they?

HC: They'd stay outside unless it was very bad, because that 1947 snow, that was terrible and me father had to take the milk to Hartington factory. That was before we'd got a tractor. And he had to go through the fields down to Hartington. There's two ways to Hartington, they didn't open one way, they kept the other. And when they got the milk away, it would snow again and they'd have to rid that road again. It was hard work.

CG: How did he do that?

HC: Men with spades.

CG: How did they carry the milk?

HC: It were a cart, horse and cart. They must have got the horses through.

CG: I read somewhere that some people quite near Hartington had a sledge. They'd take a horse and a sledge.

HC: I think me father had got a cart, I'll say. I don't know what sort, I can remember him going in Hartington with the milk.

CG: You were milking what ended up being these Friesians and was your milk mainly going to Hartington then?

HC: Oh no, it went to Sheffield. And then the milk board was taking over and then these milk tankers. I remember it with churns, milk lorry and churns. And of course, went to bulk tank.

CG: So, the farm then, the dairying actually stopped when you were eighty, and that was the end of it and it was just you then and your brother?

HC: Yeh, yeh. When I drew the pension, we ought to said, "I'm giving over milking", he'll have to give over. Well, he wouldn't have wanted to done, he would wanted to done same as me eldest brother at Ashbourne, he'd wanted to done same as him. I ought to have said, "I'm drawing the pension, we'll give over milking", but I didn't. I was to blame, because I had good health shall I say, heavy work, but I could do it until I had the accident, epilepsy and that in my case. I fell a time or two and then I was coming from Hartington one day, from shopping, and there are two turns to Sheen. Come past the first turn and always come to the second turn so as to look at the young cattle in summer. Well, I am always used to the second turn. Well, I remember going past that first turn, because my brother said have you seen that skid mark in the road, and I just hesitated and I looked, of course went past the

second and there was this do that come on me head, went down the hill and the man from the grocery shop come up hill and he shone his lights and he couldn't understand why Hilda hasn't acknowledged me. And I was looking down and I'd got this do on my head, course I was lucky, I didn't kill anyone. Hit the bridge, and if I'd gone in, I should have been killed. Of course, I got over that and I don't know if I had another little do or something, I was taken to Stepping Hill hospital for something anyway and they gave me my dinner and gone for some pudding, I'll call it, while they'd gone for this pudding, well I had one of these dos, curtains were around me. And I remember this doctor saying we'll get you better again, I'd had one of these epilepsy dos. And of course, they found out at Stepping Hill what it was. And of course, I've got to take a tablet morning and night for this epilepsy, and touch wood I've been well ever since.

CG: I wonder if you could just describe your farm to me. Describe what it was like and how beautiful it was, because I know what a lovely area that is?

HC: It wasn't modern and the cows, you cleaned them out with wheel barrow, and me father had to fill the muck cart, I'll say, and took it out in fields in heaps and that's how you spread it. And then you chain harrowed it. Very old fashioned, whereas now they go with a sprinkler or something, don't they?

CG: So, that's what you remember, and you remember the peace, it must have been a very peaceful place?

HC: Oh yeh, very peaceful. Only just walking with the cows on the road, but we knew nothing else. And of course, I went to school up the fields and I know me father's relations were at Warslow and went staying with them. You'd walk from home at Brund from Sheen through the fields this way on your own. It's not safe nowadays to do that and you'd think nothing about it when you were young.

CG: When the tractors came in, did you feel that was the end of your big involvement with the farm? I know that you did drive a tractor, but did you feel that you didn't have so much to do on the farming activities once the horses went?

HC: When the horses went, that was it really, cos I couldn't drive a tractor very well, but when me brothers went to Ashbourne, I had to do a bit and I kept getting more involved and of course I got, well I could drive a tractor well, because me brother when he had this dementia, I had to drive the tractor.

CG: What's your best memory of being a young girl on the farm?

HC: Well, working with the horses, I think, working with the horses. They were peaceful then. Mind, it's peaceful now perhaps, but it's not the same. I'm getting ninety, I mean, my life's gone, I wonder where it's gone.

Part Two - Driving

HC: Well, me mother wasn't very well after John was born, me youngest brother, and he bought a car for to take her out. He said he were going to learn first. He got a license for that period and me sister did. He said he would learn first and then me sister. Well, he started driving in a field with a neighbour the first night. The second night, he weren't going in the field, he were going to Leek where he went on Wednesday. Of course, I must sit in the back with me sister. He went down Buxton Road and up the next street and turned left into the car park, and of course he didn't tell this neighbour he was changing down, he were going where he was going to go on a Wednesday, turns left and hits the wall. I thought, "if I can get out, I'm not going to ride with you anymore". Of course, I sent for a license and they let me have one for twelve months. And I applied again and it were only three months the license that come out then and they were stopping this twelve months, you had to have a test. Ooh, I thought, "I shall never pass a test", but I sent for a license, this three months and of course this three months were up and I hadn't had me test and I went to some neighbours, "what should I do". And he said I should apply for another three months, it'll tell you something, which they did, but anyway I applied somewhere and I had to go to Leek. I was by Eleven Lane Ends, me father says to me, he took me and me mother and me little brother, and he says "I'll tell you to stop when we go so far up the road". He tells me to stop, I kept going, I couldn't stop. He says "you'll pass no b... test, what have you applied for". Anyway, I was sat in car with my father waiting for this gentleman to come out down Broad Street, out of a building this man with a package under his arm, same as they do, and I finished off with passing me test. He gave me this paper and me father comes to car "what have you done". Well, I says "I don't know, he's give me this paper". And I looked at it and he looked at it "well, you've passed". I shouldn't nowadays.

CG: Not very many women then passed their driving test. Not many at all.

HC: No, there were not many folks with a car in them days, in 1947.

HC: When I left school of course, I worked with me father along with the horses 'til one of the neighbours had got two boys, of course they must have a tractor. After the big snow in 1947, they had a tractor. Anyway, the year after me brother being the next one, he hadn't the patience with horses, had a tractor. Of course, it were all tractors then. I did learn with me brother what I farmed with, I found that I could drive a tractor well, but it weren't like the horse days. Me brother sort of took over and I should do with me father bits of jobs with horses, but as time went on he got doing them with the tractor and no patience with horses.



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HC: And then you see another thing, I started driving the car, perhaps ruination to me, but I did the errands and I loved driving. But not as I went far, only to Leek or Buxton or Bakewell, something like that. I never went very far, but I went to Manchester odd times. But nowadays I'd struggle, it's not safe for me. Of course, I've had bits of accidents. I was driving until eight years ago and driving sixty years and I had this bad accident, hit Hulme End bridge. It's known as Hilda's bridge now, because I knocked the bridge down. But I had my license taken off me. They found out me trouble was epilepsy and of course they stopped me driving.