

The Land that Made Us is the story of eighty years of farming in the South West Peak. Christine Gregory and Sheila Hine have collated the personal accounts of local farmers and land managers, many of whom have lived and worked in this often challenging landscape for generations. In their own words, the farmers recall the changes to traditional farming in this remote and rugged landscape in the decades since the Second World War. The interviews also reflect the much bigger national story about the changing priorities in land use and food production.

The book and associated oral history archive created from these interviews were undertaken in partnership with the Farming Life Centre and the Peak District National Park Authority, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

John and Janet Stone - Onecote Grange Farm

PART 3 – The Future

John and Janet Stone farm at Onecote Grange Farm. They have a large dairy herd and some ground in Higher Level Stewardship. Their son, Andrew Stone, has also contributed to this oral history of the South West Peak.

In this third section, John and Janet talk to Sheila Hine about how they see the future of farming at Onecote Grange Farm and in the South West Peak.

Sheila: What about your family, what's going to happen with the farm?

John: Son Andrew is very interested in taking over, but he has a good job. He is interested in the cows and the dairy and all of that aspect, but he's got a good job so I wouldn't like to think of him giving it up just for the sake of a dairy herd, there's not enough money in it. He wants to take over when I move aside.

Janet. He does quite a bit now doesn't he, when he can.

John: I do delegate, I give him a lot more responsibility for ordering fertiliser and cow diets, building materials if we need it. You know he gets a good deal on things.

Sheila: I suppose his job benefits him in that he is learning, making contacts.

John: I think that's why he is as good as he is solving problems, as he goes to lots and lots of parlours in all different areas, so he sees good and bad farms, good and bad land, and good herds and bad herds. He does a lot of problem solving for those people, then comes back and tries to solve my problems, if I've got any.

Sheila: Looking round this area in the South West Peak you have got a lot of poor and exposed land, how do you see things going?

John: The changes we've seen in the last 35 years, it's phenomenal. We used to have one of those battery cases with a phone on top of it, which was as big as a brief case.

Now we've got mobile phones not much bigger than a small purse for doing so many little jobs, it's unbelievable. If it leapfrogs again in another thirty-five years, and there's as many changes again, I do feel sorry for the South West Peak, because I don't think there will be many dairy farms left. I don't think they will be viable farms, they will just be hobby farms for those with quite good salaries.

Janet: There will be just a few big farms, all automated.

John: Even our farm in 35 years time, when Andrew is my age, he might be thinking, can we take it any further. The way it's going there will probably be ten farms in each county milking two or three thousand cows each.

Sheila: Do you see any way of keeping the South West Peak going in a beneficial way?

John: Well, propping farms up with grants, that's not going to happen, is it?

Sheila: Doesn't look like it, but unless there is money, enough money put into the job to keep people working, especially for youngsters.

John: There is that. Not looking into a crystal ball or anything, but any youngster that is fired up and interested enough, will probably find a way into farming and just by sheer determination the odd one will probably be able to keep going, but I don't think there is much room for lots of young people in farming, there are just too many things going against them.

Sheila: Especially when they have seen their parents working all hours.

John: The thing which bothers me is the fact that we are milking a hundred and fifty cows now where we were milking one hundred ten years ago and sixty cows twenty-five years ago just to earn the same profit from them. How many will we have to milk in thirty-five years time to be able to continue with the farm. It worries me a bit because we are going to have to be more intensive or buy more land, which means all the time we have to borrow more money just to stand still and keep up with the Jones.

Sheila: There comes a time when you can't mentally or physically do it.

John: Yes, that's right.