

Kath Belfield

Kath was born in 1958 and now lives on a smallholding near Leek. Over the years she has worked in factories, as a coffin maker, at a slaughterhouse and knacker's yard. She even ran her own kennel business, but farming remained her passion and she was born to it. In this part of the interview with Sheila Hines recorded in May 2017, Kath talks about 'Farmers for Action' and the steps farmers took to try and get a fair price for their produce when the downturn hit.

Part Four – Farmers for Action

KB. Milk Board went. Milk Marketing Board went.

SH. That was the start of things going wrong?

KB. That was the start of things going wrong. Well, we stuck, rightly or wrongly, I thought we should all stick together, so we stopped with Milk Marque and most folk jumped ship for a penny and then we all lost 10p and the job went just downhill and we cut back. And you can only cut corners so far. We repaired where we could, but I wasn't prepared for stock to suffer. I thought if we start punishing stock, we definitely, we are not farmers any more we're on wrong road altogether. So, I took a job and went working up at Redfern's. Abattoir.

SH. So when did Farmers for Action come in? There was obviously a downturn.

KB. Well, yeah, I was getting up, milking at home, had to be at Redfern's for 6, (am) my cows were all milked and done. I also reared a few calves for a guy at Tideswell. I had a few spare sheds, so I reared a few calves for somebody; milked me cows; Redferns; I used to finish between 2 and 3 o'clock; get back; get some jobs done; milk; go out picketing most nights; well we used to go 3 nights a week demonstrating.

SH. Where were you demonstrating at?

KB. Tesco, Muller, Heinz. We did Heinz 57 up the motorway.

SH. How many people were turning out?

KB. Ooh 150, 200.

SH. They were good turn outs?

KB. Good turn outs. Good turn out from Wales.

SH. How long did this carry on?

KB. I bet nearly 2 years.

SH. That long? Do you think it did any good?

KB. No.

SH. I remember you were famously interviewed on TV as saying what would you say to Jack Cunningham who was Minister of Agriculture.

KB. Totally misrepresented; they interviewed me in Manchester, one night when we was playing football with the police and it was just a throw away comment that got all blown up out of proportion. We had a great night in Manchester. The police had a great football game going on, a great nights picketing. Great with the police and great with I can't remember where we was picketing. Folk, they sent food out for us and everything. Couldn't have been a nicer night. And when it come on telly, it was when some of our lads had gone down to London, and there had been scuffles with police, which I hadn't even attended and that's where my interview appeared, as if I had been in London having a scuffle with the police.

SH. Can you repeat what they said you would say to Jack Cunningham if you met him?

KB. You know I can't remember, something like I wouldn't have nowt to say to him.

SH. You'd head butt him?

KB. I would head butt him. I actually said something else but the television folk put that in cause mine was more expletive. I said I would have kicked him somewhere and they didn't like that on the telly, so they got me to say something else, which I very stupidly shouldn't have copied.

SH. You learn, don't you?

KB. Yeh. The press, they like to sensationalise.

KB. We went to Holyhead one night, to block the docks, to stop the Irish. Cause Irish stuff was coming in. So, we went and blocked the docks and we were having good relations with the local police. In fact the Anglesey policeman were stood talking to me and Billy Waters and then transit van loads of riot police come and they all sped in and we were looking down on 'em a little bit, we were slightly up, and they come up and down about 12 or 18 in these minibuses, all side windows wound down, they're shouting 'sheep shaggers' at us. So, I said 'What's all this all about?' He said "Oh the proper boys have come now, I'll keep me head down." And then there come 6 van loads of dogs, little escort vans were rocking, so 'owd Anglesey copper says "I'm in trouble tonight" he says "you lads are used to animals, will you all look after me?" So, I says "They shouldn't bite any bugger, they certainly won't bite me, I've just come from slaughter house." So, I smelt nice for a dog. So, Billy he says "Dogs sound nasty." I said "Put your hands in your pockets and look up. Don't look at the buggers, do not look at them dogs and don't show 'em no fear." I says, "They'll not bite you." So, word went round; there were thousands of us, so word went round if they let dogs out put your hands in your pockets, and look up even if they bite you don't look at 'em, they will let go of you straight away, don't look at the dogs, keep your hands in your pockets. So all these coppers come out and they all line up And they'd all got these shields and was banging with batons. I says " 'Appen they're Zulus are they." We are all having a laugh about it. All Anglesey police were with us, then they decided to charge. This big fella shouts charge, so we're not used to all this, all us farmers, so farmers just opened up and let 'em go through, because we're polite sort of characters,

aren't we. So, they all ran through, so then we all blocked 'em in. So, they says, "I don't think you were supposed to do that". What are they doing, they were trying to get through, we had of let 'em if they said, so they have done. So, then they starts, pinned us back to this fence and they start charging where they've got you pinned and they were whaling hell out of folk. Farmers are stood there, whaling hell out of folk. Well, you could see one, a big ginger haired un, cause he'd lost his hat, and he was whaling hell out of him. You could see his back bent up and he's whaling hell out of him. So, the next thing you see, he disappears.

SH. This ginger bloke, he goes down?

KB. Ah, disappears. They back off and we see ambulance come and we see him and another carted off. What's happened, ginger fella; well it sounds daft, gossip goes through two thousand folks in about four seconds. That ginger bloke had hit this owd fella from Gwyn somewhere or other up this Welsh hill. He's seventy-six and he said this young copper was hitting him. He's no electric on his farm, he still hand milks 15 cows, his hands are like shovels. He says, "I think he got his goolies." He didna like it, but he didna strike him, he just grabbed his goolies , he didna like it. Fancy a copper hitting a seventy-six year old. He didna like his goolies held. What's happened to other fella? Dogs bit him. So, then they back off. So, then all these dogs come and they're charging dogs at you, drawing em back, charging them up. Hands in your pockets, look in the air these Anglesey coppers are saying 'There stand in front of us, they've trained on us.' So, then they let these dogs go after they had charged them up, 2000 odd folk stood there like this and dogs come barking and carrying on sniffing round and everyone's been milking, they start wagging their tails and then there's all this commotion, get the dogs in the vans and pull them off, because they could do no good with them. But, on the way back, they start biting a copper or two and they are starting getting feared and apparently 9 went to hospital and said farmers had assaulted them and they were all suffering dog bites off their own dogs. Not a farmer got bit, not a farmer. Press, it was all over the news, as farmers had blocked Anglesey up and blocked the docks up at Anglesey and physically assaulted nine police. There were nine dog bites and one with sore bollocks.

SH. You know, it's like anything, you get as you don't believe anything do you after something like that?

KB. But it's so funny, they all came out doing all this, but once they got them pinned and pinned them back and once that one had got carted off, farmers said we're not having this, push 'em back and they pushed back. So, they backed up and they had another little charge. No, we're not having this, you're not coming abusing us. So, they charged, and they just stopped them dead and pushed 'em back another ten yards. No physical. With people that work with cattle and a little policeman. So, they backed up again and this fella says, "there's no point in charging, we're not going to get anywhere". They said these farmers are going nowhere, we will have to negotiate a time to go home, so they negotiated for 2 o'clock. Near end four rows stood till two o'clock and rest of us went home; we had a long way to go home from Anglesey. But,

police daren't do 'owt or there'd be a phone call and we will lock you up for days and it was all sorted all amicably. But on the news, it sounded like there had been a riot. But in actual fact it had been like an amusing sort of a night.

SH. It would have been great if you hadn't got your day's work as well.

KB. Yes, you could have done it for a living really. I met the old guy, who was 76, he was like our hero you know what I mean; he come round meeting everybody. He still farmed, it was a funny old name somewhere up in the hills, and he had no electric. And he said, him milking 15 by hand with no electric and his bulk tank, he just run the water straight of the hillside through it and he got a water wheel to turn the paddle and water running through it. So, bulk tanker would come and suck his milk, but there were no electric and he reckoned that would be the equivalent with having a lot less overheads, he reckoned it'd be equivalent of milking about 40 financially, cause he hadn't got no overheads.

SH. On the cheap?

KB. That's how he farmed and that's how he was happy farming. He was 76 and a fit man. Apart from his face, body wise you'd have said he was bloody 30, fit as a bloody fiddle, and all he'd done was maul.

KB. They bought them Welsh lads off. They give all them Welsh lads £5 a sheep to get them off the picket line. Them Welsh lads were backbone of picketing to be fair, and they stitched one or two of them up. We were very good friends with a lot of them Welsh lads, and we'd had meetings and talks, we tried to come up with new ideas as for what to do. One of lads come up with idea, send all kids wellies down to London to say we won't be wanting them cause there'll be no farms left. Parliament got about 20 million kids wellies all one weekend.

SH. Do you think it did any good?

KB. No.