

*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, supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

## **Adrian Rochford      Interviewed December 2015**

Adrian used to work for Natural England as an adviser on the Higher Level Stewardship Scheme. He now works part-time for Trent Rivers Trust as Tittesworth Catchment Adviser. In both of these roles Adrian developed a strong collaborative approach in his work with farmers.

In this interview, Adrian talked to Sheila Hine about the changes that have taken place in the administration and delivery of the various agricultural and environmental schemes as they have evolved over the years.

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Transcript Begins:

To me, the most important part of an HLS adviser's role is to get a really good understanding of a particular farm and the particular habitats there, then tailoring the land management prescriptions to help maintain or improve these habitats. I feel it is important that the adviser is able to spend time on the farm and engage with the farmer to get to know them well and explain the reason for the management prescriptions —not just tell them what to do from a drop down menu. I was lucky that when I was there I knew some of the people in the National Team from my previous work in the National Land Management team, so I had no hesitation in phoning the national specialists. They'd advise me that it was intended that we should be able to tailor prescriptions based on specialist advice and site-specific requirements. So I altered the prescriptions, after discussing with local colleagues, and worded them to be more user-friendly to the agreement holders.

In late 2010, due to cuts being required to Defra and its agencies, Natural England had to reduce its staff by 400, mainly by voluntary redundancies. I applied and was allowed to leave at the end of May 2011. Before I'd even left, I was being head hunted by Trent Rivers Trust to take up a part time role at Tittesworth near Leek in the Staffordshire Moorlands as the Tittesworth Catchment Officer. The objective of that role is to work closely with farmers to help them not to pollute the reservoir (and boreholes) with pesticides and organic pollutants like slurry. I try to do this with a light touch approach, just discussing how best to overcome issues such as slurry or pesticide pollution, and describing examples of best practice, or methods that have been shown to work on other farms, and encouraging

people to consider such methods. The results of monthly water sampling, mostly from standard sampling points but with the option of additional investigational points, often gives an indication of the source of the nutrient and pesticide pollution, which I endeavour to pinpoint the origin of, and advise on how best to avoid in the future.

The farmers that I work with are principally intensive dairy farmers and they are trying to squeeze productivity out of every square metre of their farms. There are very few areas that they feel they can allow to be valuable habitat, but having said that, there are a handful that have got HLS agreements; some of those are actually intensive dairy farms and they have got land management options which, for example, might benefit snipe, lapwing and curlew; and perhaps some remnants of heathland. Some also have ELS and UELS agreements, with options relating to boundary features and low input grassland for example. One or two farms that have got very high quality HLS agreements tend to be beef and sheep rather than dairy.

I think that loss of valuable habitat such as moorland into relatively intensive grazing or silage ground has mostly happened several decades ago. In terms of soil damage to the intensively managed grassland, I would say that most of the switched on farmers aren't really damaging their land; they know that good structure is important and they realise that it's sensible not to traffic on land when its soaking wet and that timing of slurry applications is important. Such understanding has been improved by various events organised by Natural England through Catchment Sensitive Farming, and by Trent Rivers Trust through events funded by Severn Trent Water. There are I am sure other events, organised by other organisations, that have helped too, as of course do regulations such as Cross Compliance, and various guidance documents. That doesn't mean to say that there aren't times when the rules go out the window, like in 2012 when the summer was wetter than a typical winter; tremendous damage was done to soils that summer, but most of the farms have healed pretty well since then. If the farmers feel that they are damaging their land they are making efforts to change their systems; invest in lower ground pressure tyres, soils loosening equipment and umbilical systems (of which there are pros and cons), but they are mindful of the need to minimise damage to their soils. I'm not suggesting that everything is perfect, because it isn't. But the trouble is that most farmers are under such pressure to increase stock numbers and maximise output that this puts immense pressure on the soils and the surrounding ecosystems. If only they could be guaranteed a good income for the meat and milk they produce, many farmers would perhaps reduce stock numbers, and settle for a less stressful life? Maybe I am not being realistic!

SH What about the smaller farms that have been on these stewardship schemes such as ESA and CS for 20 to 30 years and because the new schemes are very complicated they are not going to take them up. Are we going to see a greater loss of flower meadows and species rich pastures from the few that are left?

It depends very much on the mind-set of the current owner and whether they've got many years ahead of them. There will be some who so strongly believe that it is right to manage the land in an environmentally sensitive way that they will keep doing so with or without Environmental Stewardship support. But if they simply cannot afford to keep on managing

the land that way, then valuable habitats could be lost. It's very worrying because if there is no environmental stewardship money coming in, most farmers won't be able to afford to manage the land in an environmentally sensitive way. Some may decide to sell up and rent the land to intensive dairy farmers who will manage it for two or more cuts of silage and tanker thousands of gallons per hectare of slurry onto it. That would be very sad, after so much has been invested into improving the habitat for flora and fauna.

The likelihood of uptake of the new schemes, which will replace for example Upland ELS, is negligible because there is no money in it for the farmer; they can't entertain it. I don't understand the scheme in detail, but from what people have told me, there is a lot of obligation put on the farmer and very little in terms of income back for it. It's just a non-starter. Interestingly, in the arable lowlands the uptake of field margins is I believe massive, and a lot of farmers have taken up options such as pollen and nectar mixes on headlands, these are really good for bees, butterflies and birds and farmers buy into it.

From what I hear on radio and TV from national government politicians, they don't seem to be too bothered about the natural environment, being more interested in "efficiency and output" but listening to my former colleagues in NE, they are very bothered indeed. There seems to be a feeling that there is some sort of conspiracy to make the new schemes completely unworkable. If that is the case, it is very short sighted and tragic. There is a lot of worry and concern amongst many people involved in the environmental sector.

SH As you travel round in the Staffordshire Moorlands, what do you see about potential young farmers taking on the farms?

I can only speak for a few farms where I know the youngsters are likely successors; they are knuckling down to working as a key contributor to the farm but not necessarily lined up to be successors. To most, farming is the only thing they have known, and it's what they want to do. They are going to college, working at home and off the farm, and I guess hoping things will improve.

SH How many will want to carry it on?

Some probably are still keen now, how long that will last if the dairy business doesn't start picking up soon? If things don't improve soon, then carrying on will be a totally unsustainable aspiration, so it just won't happen,

Some of the other things that I do in my self-employed status: From the very first year of being self-employed, I was asked by NE to tender for some meadow enhancement work on HLS agreements. It's actually using a plot based methodology rather than a whole field method, whereby you introduce seed into three prepared plots per hectare, a plot is typically one metre by four metres. NE is including this as a supplement option to their HK7 and they pay the farmer the cost of the plot seeding. They also insist that the seed is of local provenance, i.e. it has got to be collected from not only the county where it's going to be planted but from the area within the county. Whilst expensive, this importantly ensures seed of appropriate local origin is used.

In the first year, I didn't win the main tender but I got contracted back by the person that won it to do delivery of over 100 plots (in the White Peak) and every year since I've actually picked up all the work because its been smaller numbers of plots, all in the SWP. I collect seed from various donor site locations in the Tittesworth Catchment during July, August and into the beginning of September. That has formed the basis of my seed stock for the plot work and I've done up to 100 plots a year each year since 2011. I've not been able to assess the success of the plots, but if they're managed well, with late season aftermath grazing and a hay cut at the right time, e.g. after mid-July, they are almost certain to be successful based on observations of plots I've established myself at home, and in a local nature reserve, which are very successful.

Another thing I do is hedge laying, if I get the opportunity to deliver it during the winter months. Most of the work that I have done has been on hedgerows that have got the hedgerow restoration option under HLS. Without that, most farmers can't justify the cost of paying someone to do it. I've done a lot in the White Peak and some in the Staffordshire Moorlands. I'm a great believer that hedgelaying is a fantastic thing to do; it really rejuvenates the hedge with lots of new growth from the bottom. A really old leggy hedge is not much use for birds to nest in because if sheep can go underneath and disturb the hedge, birds won't contemplate building a nest there, whereas if its thick in the bottom, the hedgerow is a much more secure nesting site. Often the restoration comes with fencing both sides as well, so the dense rejuvenated hedge has protected habitat on each side as well, offering food and shelter for invertebrates, small mammals and birds.