

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.

Peter Slack 25/7/2017

Peter Slack is the son of Arthur Slack. Peter farms with his wife Sylvia and two sons, Sam and Matthew, at Overton Farm at Taxal above the Goyt Valley. As well as farming, he makes a supplementary living as an after-dinner speaker.

We are a normal family farm—120 dairy cows. I farm with my wife Sylvia; we've been married for over 30 years. Met at Young Farmers Club like a lot of people do. We've got 4 children; the two boys Matthew and Sam are farming with us. Our youngest daughter Olivia has just started work in a butcher's farm shop in Edale but she is working with us as well like kids do when they live at home and are not at work. Our other daughter Lydia has finished at University and starts working for a charity in London.

It's very much family orientated; all the children are involved in agriculture, even Lydia went to agricultural college. Her degrees are in agricultural business, international food and water science policy and management.

The two lads are really I suppose, running the farm, which has its ups and downs. They spend money like it's going out of fashion and want everything yesterday which with a volatile milk price isn't always achievable. But we tend to let them get on with it as much as we dare. They do most things brilliantly but sometimes make odd mistakes; you don't have to get excited about it—that's life.

Farming has changed a lot; when I was farming with father the best days of the year were turning the cows out in spring and finishing hay making. Now it's passing your TB test and the Single Farm Payment landing on the mat which at times when the milk price is volatile does help pay some bills.

Apart from the farming we have diversified into after dinner speaking which takes me all over the country and stems from speaking in YF competitions and I've spoken to all sorts of organisations. Sometimes you wonder why people want to hear you; I'm usually only speaking about rambles and courting a hill farmer's daughter—a light hearted speech. I'm surprised people always find agriculture interesting; they have an affinity and can relate to it.

Where I used to speak to a lot of agricultural audiences, now they tend to be mostly not so. The latest booking is with the Hull Institute of Chartered Accountants and the last one I've just done is the Townswomens Guild AGM in Sheffield to 1500 women of a certain age at Sheffield City Hall. It went down very well; they were a brilliant audience.

Speaking to an audience in a theatre setting is far easier than speaking to an audience in an after-dinner setting. After dinner audiences can be hard work; it's the worst environment to speak into—I go on late at night after everyone has had a meal and something to drink. The vast majority go brilliantly but the odd ones can be a disaster—a bit like a hard calving and you can't wait till it's all over and you can get back into bed.

Lydia has made a bit of a career of it that has funded her through university. She's got a speaking agent like I have who deals with a lot of bookings and her biggest audience this spring was to the National Inner Wheel to an audience of 2,500 people at Nottingham Civic Theatre; she closed the conference there and she's closing the conference at the Rotary National Convention next year and that's their last convention—she'll be their last speaker.

SH (Sheila Hine, Interviewer). So it's actually a financial sideline.

PS. Yes, can be. It's very seasonal, all in winter and usually an inconvenient time—you're walking out of the house dressed up going to dinner and a cow's calving and you've got to leave your family to it. Financially it's an expensive hobby sometimes because you say yes to a dinner because you want to help out. I've said yes to a hospice at Market Drayton in January which means I've got to drive there and I'm getting nothing for it because you do one or two for nothing. And if there's 6 foot of snow in January.....

SH. So the other three that do it, it could become a useful financial sideline?

PS. Possibly, its hard to say. Sam's just won the National YF after dinner speaking competition—best speaker but his speech is based on a character which he performs. You really need to talk about what you do and how or lifes experiences or the funny side of life whereas his is more like an act though he could probably go on stage with my speech and do better than I could.

Sometimes it's not the actual speaking but the writing which is the hard bit. They've all cottoned on how to write a speech and make people laugh and Olivia spoke to a cancer charity dinner recently to over 100 people—spoke for about 25 minutes. She's 19; she did her first one aged 17 and really enjoyed it but when you start out there's no pressure, no expectations but when you start charging a fee and one or two in the audience might have heard you before and put word about that you were very good, it puts on pressure to perform. That's life and you've got to always try to say yes to things and if it doesn't work out, learn from it and don't do it again!

The lads play a lot of cricket as well—every weekend (during summer) and are heavily involved with YF. I do think it's important to get time away from the farm and let off steam. Sylvia sings in a choir and really enjoys that.