

INTERVIEW 7

INTERVIEWER: Pat Hughes
Yondover Farmhouse
Loders

DATE: 1989

MR PERCY BOWDITCH B.1909
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Was common at Upton Manor Farm and featured in film
'Winter on the Farm', made in Loders in 1942/43
Original film held in National Film Archives
Copy of film held in Loders Local History Group Archives

Subject of Interview: Changes in Farming Life and
Methods

Interview with Mr Percy Bowditch, B 1909, dairyman at Upton Manor Farm, Uploders, from 1940 to 1947.

Interviewer: I have with me here, Mr Percy Bowditch, who used to work as the dairyman at Upton Manor Farm at the time the film (Winter on the Farm) was taken in the winter of 1942/43. Where were you born, Mr Bowditch?

P.B. East Bolton(?), near Wool.

Int. Have you got any family connections with Lodders?

P.B. No, we just come 'ere to work at Upton Manor Farm.

Int. What age did you first go to Upton Manor Farm?

P.B. I was 30, I think.

Int. What year were you born?

P.B. 1909.

Int. How many years did you stay at the farm?

P.B. Seven years, I started work there in 1940.

Int. You went there after the war had started. You'd been a dairyman before.

P.B. Oh yes, I worked at Crichel, near Wimborne.

Int. How did you train as a dairyman?

P.B. My father and mother, at their place, they were dairy farmers and they made butter and cheese, the Blue Vinney cheese.

Int. Can you tell me how that was made?

P.B. Yes, well, in those days, before the separators, they put the milk into vats, skimmed the cream off, used the cream for makin' the butter and the other milk, which was part cream, because skimmin' it di'n' get all the cream arf, so they made that into this Blue Vinney cheese, which is not like the cheddar, because the cheddar is yellow, like the full cream, but that was white cheese. It was like, put into a vat, which was like a cheese press, like that, you see and the thing come down an' pressed it. And it has to be stored for six months for it to turn blue. When it's turnin', tha's the time to sell it, tha's the Blue Vinney cheese.

Int. How did they make sure that it was going to come blue?

P.B. I think they put somethink with it to turn i' a little bit blue, can' remember tha'. They put one of these spirals down it and you dron it up when it's turnin' blue, then they either sent it to market or they sold it to shops.

Int. There was a time, until recently, when Blue Vinney cheese wasn't allowed to be made.

P.B. Tha's right, then they stopped it. The Milk Marketing Board started about then, then everybody sold their milk, which was easier. Both my grandparents, they were all in farmin'. What they did those days, they rented the cows. A big farmer

would just do the corn and they rented them out to their dairyman, they paid so much, about £10, £11 a cow, I remember. And then the farmer found the cows in the hay and a certain amount of cake and then the proceeds the dairymen usually had big families and of course 'e did all the work, the butter and cheese making, and sold the milk.

Int. So the farmer owned the cows and the dairyman rented the cows and had the milk.

P.B. Tha's right. You had to have alot o' men on the farms, y'see, I mean, used to be about twenty or twenty-five men to do the other farm work, t'was all done by hand, y'see, then and usually a dairyman 'ad five or six or more children and as they grew up, they 'ad to help do the milking. Y'see, if you 'ad fifty cows, you'd want about five or six milkers.

Int. So each person would milk about ten cows, morning and evening. How long would that take?

P.B. Well, round about two hours, I should think, two or two and a half hours, I sh' think, yes.

Int. You came to Upton Manor Farm in 1940, when you were 30. Can you describe a day in your life, on the farm.

P.B. Yes, gettin' up at ha' past five and pickin' up the landgirl and the young lad an' makin' a cup of tea for them and goin' out, gettin' the cows in. They would come out and light the boiler and get some warm water and we washed the cows udders and teats, see they were clean, anyway. Milk the cows, that took about hour an' a half to two hours.

Int. How many cows did you have?

P.B. 45 then. 'Cos there was only the three of us, doin' it, then. Course they di'n' give so much milk, like the cows now.

Int. How much milk did they give, at that time?

P.B. Two to three gallons, a day, that was. Now they give six, seven or eight, praps ten gallons a day.

Int. What sort of cattle were they?

P.B. Rich Ruby Devons they was called, 'cos they were very red, dark red cows, pedigree cows, with horns, 'cos we hadn't started gettin' rid of the horns by then.

Int. Were they milk cattle?

P.B. Milk and beef. We reared some bull calves to sell to different farmers for beef. The heifer calves we kept and some we sold at market.

Int. What other sort of animals did you keep?

P.B. Pigs - I kept about ten sows and a boar with their young. Always 'ad good luck with them, nine or ten to a litter.

Int. It sounds as though you liked your pigs. They're very intelligent animals, I think.

P.B. Yes, yes they are. They were saddlebacks. Each one had it's own sty. The boar, he was very quiet, we could handle that alright. We had a landgirl come round to put the poison down for the rats and she was fascinated watchin' the pigs! They were never vicious, very quiet.

Int. What did you feed your pigs on?

P.B. We 'ad meal come, from the millers and we grew broad beans and alot o' that went for the pigs, because they had their teeth, they could chew them up, they were so hard. They did very well.

Int. Did you feed the beans to any other animals?

P.B. No, the cows, their teeth weren't suitable for them. I always think, we had a man called George Tolley at the farm. He ground up some o' the beans with some oats and we fed them back to the cows.

Int. I suppose you were experimenting with feed, as it was during the war.

P.B. Tha's right, and we 'an' fed beans before, we never grew them. It was because of the shortage of the meal.

Int. Did that carry on after the war?

P.B. We gradually stopped it, really 'cos it wasn't economical.

Int. What did you feed the cows on?

P.B. Hay, mangles and silage and ground up oats, during the winter with some cake we could buy, we were rationed with the cows' cake, but we did mix that in with it as well.

Int. Silage was something new.

P.B. Yes, we started it there and we had demonstrations on how it was made.

Int. Was it the Ministry of Agriculture that wanted you to start the silage?

P.B. Oh yes. They found that we had such a big farm and plenty of grass and plenty of men to work it, 'cos it was a long, laborious job, then. Grass wasn't very tall, it was short grass an' you had to cut so many fields to get any amount of grass. That was before they ploughed up land for the new lathes(?), that was before that came in. But now, these days, 'course, the grass cuttin' is artificial, makes the grass grow much more.

Int. How did you feed your grass?

P.B. Oh, we cut it and brought it in with the wagons and put it into a concrete pit, silage pit, put in two or three loads and put molasses on the top, summin' like black treacle, which was sweet. Then we fed so much a day, each cow had so much.

Int. Did the cows like it?

P.B. Oh yes, they did, 'twas very nice, they di'n' waste alot.

Int. How did you feel about sileage, when it first came in?

P.B. Well, we wondered whether 'twould help at all, but we found that it helped, because with too much hay, it was dry, too much

bulk, but with the silage it was more damp, wet, better. More nourishment.

Int. Tell me about who ran the farm and the family there.

Lentall P.B. Mr Lentil, 'e di'n' ave any sons but 'e 'ad this one daughter, but she di'n' help very much on the farm. Each man 'ad a certain job. There was Alec Peach, 'e did all the hedgin' an' the ditchin'. Charlie Dowell, we 'ad one tractor then an' 'e drove the tractor an' seen to the other implements an' the thrashin' machine, cleanin' all that an' then there was Frank Crabb, 'e was the 'ead carter, with 'is two 'orses an' Fred Crabb, 'e 'ad two 'orses an' did all the ploughin' an' tha', an' then there was Harry Crabb, 'e was the general labourer an' then there was Bill Reed, 'e was the shepherd, looked after the sheep. That was rather hard work, 'cos they grew turnips and swedes for the sheep an' 'e 'ad to hurdle them every day, had to make a compartment of hurdles. That 'ad to be put in an' perhaps the groun' was hard, frosty, 'twas a very 'ard job. You di'n' use 'lectric fences those days, all 'ad to be hurdled.

Int. Who made the hurdles?

P.B. They di'n' make them, they bought them in.

Int. Getting back to the cattle, you used to breed bulls, I believe.

P.B. Oh yes, I bred several bulls. We 'ad the real pedigree Devon bulls, we 'ad one run with the heifers an' the other for servicin' the cows an' then we thought we'd buy a short'orn bull and mix some of the cows up with some short'orn, so we did so many of the cows like tha' an' introduced the short'orn breed. after rearin' them, the heifer cows, we sold them to market 'cos there seemed to be a craze for them in those days, shorthorns. So that was another source of income.

Int. That was a shorthorn cross with the Ruby Devon.

P.B. Yes, it turned out to be a roan, a mixture of red and white.

Int. Like the cows in children's picture books. You had one special bull, can you tell me about him.

P.B. Yes, the white bull, the short'orn bull, 'e was all white, we called it Snowdrop.

Int. Did he live up to his name, was he gentle?

P.B. Yes, quieter than the Devon bulls. I liked it better, for one thing, it 'ad shorter horns!

Int. Do you have any stories about the bulls?

P.B. Yes, two of the bulls, the one that run wi' the heifers an' the other one, they got together in the field, fighting away, so the only thing I could do was to charge straight at them with a long handled fork. I went in an' shouted at them, made as much

noise as I could, went straight in, never 'ad no fear whatsoever, an' I did part them an' off they went, just like that.

Int. That was quite a brave thing to do!

P.B. It was, it was a brave thing to do, but I di'n' think about it. I knew, they'd got together, I mus' part them, I thought p'raps one'd kill the other, with those long 'orns, you see, that's the trouble. I thought the more noise you make; they say attack's better than defence.

Int. Well it worked anyway. Did you have fun and games at the farm, were they nice people?

P.B. Yes, they was, very pleasant. During the day in the summer, the land-girl and the young lad 'ad to go help with the haymaking and the harvest, you see. One day, the girl came runnin' back, "Oh", she said, "I can't stand it any longer, Alan", that's the lad, "he's chasin me, I've come back for protection!" "Right" I said, "I'll find you another job!" (laughter).

Int. How did the landgirls get on, they hadn't done any farming before?

P.B. No, they 'adn't, they did very well. The first girl, she was very good, she was alright until she left to get married and then we 'ad another, who had been a typist at a factory up in the Midlands, she came, but she di'n' care for it alot, she couldn't get used to it, so she left an' then we 'ad another girl who 'ad done some farmwork and she was real rough and ready. She wore wellington boots without any socks in them, oh, she was a really hardened girl. A jolly good worker.

Int. Did they learn the milking quite quickly?

P.B. Yes they did. When I started first, I wondered how I was going to get it out, but once you get going, you soon find out.

Int. Did you get much in the way of cattle disease in those days?

P.B. Redwater was one thing. The vet said there was a streak through certain fields, where the cows could catch it. It was a tick in the grass, where they got it from ad when they passed water it was red. One year it was so bad, I 'ad to be so good at catchin' them and of course you 'ad to ring up the vet and 'e come and inject to stop it and it usually cured it. We di'n' 'ave any die or anythin'. The other thing was mastitis.

Int. How did you treat mastitis then?

P.B. I rubbed salt water in their udder, I 'ad to find out me own ways until penicillin came in. It made the hardness go down and eventually we got it right. It was a real worry. But we 'ad a strip cup, which was a cup with black plastic on the top and before we started milkin', we took the first strippings out of each teat, then we knew then by the colour of it, I could tell instantly, 'cos if one was comin' up with mastitis, it would be

landgirls