

Old Boy of the Month – January 2008

David Greasby

Brymore 1958 – 62

**Deputy Head Boy; Head of Walker House;
1st XV Rugby; 1st XI Cricket; 1st Team Athletics**

After Brymore the ubiquitous 18 months pre college training was undertaken on farms in Wiltshire and Somerset. Originally destined for Seale Hayne Agricultural College in Devon – an administrative cock-up meant waiting a further year for initial entry. A stroke of luck (even fate!) resulted in a place at The Royal Agricultural College Cirencester – and 3 very enjoyable years were spent studying Agric Science and Advanced Farm Management – completing with a 1st Class pass which was my second wonder of the world – the first being passing physics/chemistry O’level at Brymore!



Married to Rosemary;
4 children and currently 3 grandchildren.

At school we had the usual round of Careers talks and I clearly remember being told that my interest in the Agricultural Advisory Services was probably not achievable. Anything is possible however – and I left ‘the Royal’ to join the National Agricultural Advisory Service in September 1967. I was posted to mid –Wales (Montgomeryshire) which initially was the end of the world – a girlfriend in London (eventually to be my wife!) and 170 miles between which definitely tested the relationship!

Wales was a tremendous learning curve for me and coincided with the huge thrust to improve farming economics and techniques generally throughout the country. This was the time of ‘blueprints’ for dairying /cereal production/machinery syndicates, hedgerow removal, land reclamation, draining of peat bogs etc – an era of change, aided and abetted by government grants and government policy. As an aside – we have come full circle with environmental considerations to the fore in everything that is being achieved.

During my training period I was moved to south Wales (Monmouthshire) and was given a District to run covering the eastern valleys and an area from Newport to Abergavenny. Again, a tremendous range of agriculture from the highly specialised to small scale part time operations. When the glass works at Pontypool or the steelworks at Ebbw Vale were on strike – I was worked endlessly by farmers wanting to increase their dairy herds by one or two cows or to base feeding regimes on cakes and bread waste from local processors! During this time the organisation of common grazing land including fencing of commons, grassland improvement and fertiliser usage involved a great deal of input –

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as did the reclamation and landscaping of the many slag heaps in my patch. Advisory work was aimed specifically at the well being and improvement of the individual farm business economics. How things have changed!

1970 – Was a very important year. Firstly I was married to Rosemary and we bought a brand new house near Abergavenny. Secondly – I was sent to Reading University (courtesy of MAFF who were looking to train specialist advisers for future changes within the Government structure) to undertake a post-graduate year in Agricultural Extension and Rural Development (full salary, housing allowance, expenses and university vacations – now that's the way to be a student!)



During my time at University NAAS became the Agricultural Development and Advisory Service - which totally changed the role of the agricultural adviser and the concept of free advice as had been previously been available. Many advisers left the service and I joined a firm of City based Investment Bankers specialising in agricultural investment, taxation and management - working throughout the UK. With the possibility of a practical farming

opportunity in Oxfordshire becoming a reality – there was a need to consider options and jobs that could be managed in conjunction with a farm business. Two opportunities arose and I was offered the post of Crops Lecturer at the then Berkshire College of Agric and also Liaison Adviser between MAFF and the Grassland Research Institute at Reading. Both I turned down on timing grounds which was probably a good thing as when we started our farm business I was totally immersed and full-time!

In 1984 I was awarded a Nuffield Farming Scholarship (Farmers Club of Great Britain Scholar) to look at straw utilisation around the world. This followed the major problems associated with straw burning and pollution, and the imminent ban on burning. My objective was to establish that straw could be incorporated into the soil with minimum investment and with existing farm machinery at a time when it was considered this was an impossible, if not very difficult technique. The simple techniques gleaned from many other countries and worldwide research establishments now form the basis of straw incorporation methodology as we know it today.

So for the last thirty years I have been a full-time farmer in a business that, because of limited land availability, has been very intensive and involved. We have been through the range of livestock enterprises – breeding and fattening of pigs, beef at all levels and now run an early lambing flock of ewes – in-wintered with straw fed as a basic fodder, grow wheat, potatoes and oilseeds and have an extensive diversification enterprise

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letting buildings as workshops. I have always maintained a close working relationship with Reading University, either as a lecturer or seminar provider – my specialisation being ‘decision taking’ and the use of advisory resources in UK agriculture. Most of my work has been with foreign agriculturalists visiting the UK on short courses funded through the World Bank or by the EU.

Like so many others, my wife and I are very involved within our local community. I have been school governor, parish councillor, NFU Chairman, Chair of Oxfordshire Farming Clubs and currently am a member of the County Council Access Committee. Farming is constantly changing and it is important to keep up to date – currently I am a Director of the Orion Farming Group, a buying organisation with some 320 members and stretch myself writing a little monthly column in the Farmers Weekly magazine.

Retirement? - The aim is to have more holidays and wind down but this seems to demand, in the short-term, greater involvement and a winding up to achieve the wind down. For sure – the next generation will need to be part-time farmers and have been encouraged to achieve elsewhere before contemplating a farming future. It will be my grandsons’ generation that will be the full-time farmers of the future. I am an optimist and convinced there are excellent prospects for anyone working in the agricultural industry – at any level. **Brymore was my springboard and for that I will always be grateful.**

David Greasby (12/10/2007)