

Voices of Hickling

Interview Transcript: John Tallowin

Interviewed by Ann Louise Kinmonth on 9th April 2016

ALK: So, John, it's very kind of you to help out with this project...

JT: It is indeed... it's a pleasure.

ALK: Thank you. And, just to start off with, could you say your name and your address.

JT: **John Tallowin. Lived in Hickling all my life down Stubb Road. When we got married we moved to a cottage from Willow Farm, moved into a cottage on the farm, and then when father died in 1981 moved back to Willow Farm where we are now.**

ALK: Thank you. So can I take you back to your earliest memories, and where you were born. What do you remember?

JT: **Well, I was born in Hickling and spent all my life on the farm.**

ALK: Tell me about your parents.

JT: **Mum was a London girl, who was head girl of her school, so she was obviously brighter than the average and, so, she was a nurse. She was engaged to be married, but I think her fiance got killed in the war. Er, she worked with my dad's sister as a nurse in London and came down one weekend, met my dad and they used to go round... She always used to say arm in arm. He had a shotgun and pipe in one hand and her on the other and, er, they obviously got engaged after that and got married in 1946, just after the war.**

My dad farmed at Rackheath, on light land. Er, when my son Paul got married, he worked on a farm for a chap called L P Sampson who said - the first time he met him - said "Over Wroxham Bridge to Rackheath and ruin..."

So I said "exactly right", I said "it's where my dad used to farm, it were light land, and in 1946 or 1947 they bought this farm at Willow Farm which was then about 220 acres, I think. And by chance about 10 years ago we got a sales particulars for the farm in 1910 and it was advertised as a small sporting agricultural estate at 220 acres with sailing in the summer and skating in the winter and there was a picture of the old boathouse so that in those days, obviously it was colder and skating was more the norm, which we can talk about later on, because we used to have a lot of fun skating on the Broad in the sixties and seventies. Of course, since climate change, well, I haven't skated for twenty or thirty years on the Broad, though one or two other people have.

So, I came along in 1947, was born either in Norwich or Hickling, ostensibly Hickling anyway and lived here all my life. Loved the farming life. Used to go to market with my dad as a boy. Used to love all that. He used to take me round with him, so I obviously enjoyed farming, right from an early age.

So, I've got two brothers, and obviously being a small farm, the other two weren't that interested in farming and I think to be a farmer you've got to be dedicated to the life and enjoy it. And obviously on a small farm there wasn't going to be room

for the three of us, so I think they were advised to seek work elsewhere. I was more suited to farming and the other two weren't.

ALK: So, going back to those days, where did you go to school?

JT: Duncan Hall, which I didn't enjoy.

ALK: Where's that?

JT: That's at Scratby, Great Yarmouth. So, I was a boarder, a weekly boarder and I think, er, they were the worst days of my life. I didn't enjoy it at all

ALK: What happened?

JT: Don't know. Just didn't enjoy it. Too much restriction in the classroom, I think. Always looking out the window, wondering what's going on outside.

ALK: How long did you...

JT: My mother was very keen on education and, er, you can understand with her being Head Girl and all that, she thought that education was a prime thing, which of course, she was right with hindsight, but, er, you're too young to see that at the time. And I know when our children went away to school, or didn't go away to school, they were day boys at Greshams, she was really pleased because she said, you know, education is the finest thing you can have and it's obviously made them what they are, which is two fine young boys. They are quite confident in the outside world and can speak to anyone and are full of confidence - not that I can't speak to anyone or have got no confidence, but, er, education does give you that extra bit, doesn't it?

ALK: So what happened next then after you left Yarmouth?

JT: Well, I left...

ALK: How old were you then?

JT: I was sixteen. I went to City College, in Norwich, er, to get GCSEs, which I wasn't very keen on. So I had a year there, then I had a year at Pathood's Farm in South Walsham. Not South Walsham - Salhouse, Woodbastwick, yes. And he was very kind to me. They were all good people. Pat Deane and Pathood's wife. they were the Raynes' girls, in fact there's 4 or 5 girls. And Judy Saull was another one, and, er.

So, anyway, I went and worked there for a year and Pathod gave me quite a bit of responsibility on the farm for a sixteen or seventeen year old. In those days they had horses and we used to go sugar beet harvesting with a single row harvester and I used to drive the tractor and trailer alongside. We had little Fergy tractors. So that's quite good. And then I'd go on the Acle marshes and cut the hay and one thing and another, turning the hay, which I thought was great for a sixteen or seventeen tyear old...

ALK: What did you turn the hay with?

JT: A hay turner, of course. Not by hand. Well, I have seen it done by hand on the marshes on the farm here when it was really wet and when we employed four or five people sometimes if the hay wasn't making, you'd turn it by hand if it was all lumpy, because they had the old-fashioned rakes which lifted it up and down and turned the rows over. Sometimes if it got wet and lumpy that wouldn't work.

(6.40) So, anyway, after that I went to Writtle for a year, did an HND

ALK: The Agricultural College?

JT: **The Agricultural College. Bernie [ELLIS] went there at the same time as I did...**

ALK: Is that where you met?

JT **Well, he bought... His father had a farm Beccles, Ashby way I think, and he came here in 1967. I think. They bought Jack Borretts farm for - the farm that Jack Borrett lived in - for £30,000: I remember going to the auction with my dad.**

Jack Borrett was sitting there nodding his head and saying "I can't go any more, I can't go any more", and Roy Ellis bought it. And Bernie came down, we were a similar age so we sort of got pally, and, er

ALK: That was when you were in your teens?

JT: **Yeah, must have been. It was '67, so I was 21...**

ALK: He was younger?

JT: **18 or 19 I suppose when we went to college. Bernie did two years, I did a year. And, so I came back here on the farm, and we employed 4 or 5 people in those days.**

Then in 1967, I should think, we bought Dick Chettleborough's farm -or Dad did - which was another 120 acres, so that made us about 350 acres then and, er, just if you want to know how many people we employed, there was... We had George Brooks, Eric Brooks (they drove the dumper). Their father was the head cowman at Ingham for - what's his name - Bruce Dean?, Michael Dean? They lived down in the council houses at Stubb Road.

So it was Eric and George Brooks. I remember George: he was in the army, he went to Cyprus, so whether the timing is right, er, when they had the troubles with the Turks and the Greeks or whatever it was. So I remember him in his uniform years ago. What's happened to him now?

And then there's Eric Brooks, he helped, Noger Greenacre - he worked on the farm, he used to do the chickens. For our cattle, Jack Greenacre. Leslie Pye. Then when we bought the other farm, George Stimpson and Colin Stimpson, so I don't know: is that 6 or 7? Yeah.

So they were involved with our farm and then - just as an aside - the number of people who worked on the farm or were employed in agriculture down Stubb Road, there was Harry Chapman plus our six or seven who I've just mentioned. Then there was Jimmy Lincorn who had the Twin Oaks I think it was called at that stage. He used to have some currants. Herbert Dove, he used to have a few blackcurrants and a pig, and his son Martin Dove, who fell down a hole at The Pleasure Boat and got badly injured, and then when he came back from Yarmouth, he then got hit by a bike so that turned him "a bit mental" and he used to sit on the side of Stubb Road swearing and carrying on and throwing stones at people and one thing and another and going picking stones from buckets, so he lost it in the head, poor old Martin, but... So he was a character.

And then there was Jack Thane. He was a builder: he lived down Stubb Road. He married Herbert Dove's daughter, Mary. She was a little bit eccentric as well. [She]

was Brenda's mother, er, Brenda Beales, that is. Sorry, that's the wrong way round, isn't it? Arthur Beales married Mary. Jack Thane married another sister then. he had a bit of land with a house called The Beeches which was sold just recently to Faith's for about a quarter of a million, I think, and they haven't done much with it since.

Then, I can't think of the chap's name, we bought another two or three acres of land off someone who had some blackcurrants down there, so he used to come down every now and again. And Herbert Dove. And there was Mrs Youngman's farm, who Colin Shingles worked with. Mrs Youngman had 60 or 70 acres down there plus some marshes and some more land. Henry Mayhew used to work there. Then there's Jimmy Lincorn.

Ted Piggin was the Warden on the Nature Reserve. He used to do the gamekeeping.

And Leslie Pye who worked for us and Jack Greenacre weekends. They would go and help him with a bit of reed cutting or mucking out pigs or anything like that in their spare time, so that was part and parcel of their lives. Leslie used to help Colin Shingles a lot, reed cutting when they used to cut reed on the Hook Marshes, which Colin used to hire.

Gerald Nudd used to come down there and he used to cut reed down on Cotton's Marsh, and Colin Shingles I would imagine. And of course those reed beds are all gone now and they've grown from reed beds into woods in my lifetime.

ALK: So that would be over, what, about 20 or 30 years?

JT: What? 20 or 30 years ago?

ALK: The transition.

JT: No, 40 or 50, isn't it?

ALK: It is. I just wondered what kind of time period it took to move from...

JT: Well, I remember there was just 4 or 5 oak trees in one corner, and then since they stopped cutting reed and the marshes dried out the trees have all come and it's grown up. You'd never recognise it. It's a wood now, whereas it used to be reed beds. But in those days, of course everything was cut for the horses - you know, marsh litter and that sort of thing.

And then I think on the Nature Reserve, the Norfolk Wildlife Trust they call it, where Arthur Beales used to work swinging a scythe through the winter, they used to cut about 15000 bunches of reed, well, of course now they don't cut any: all they do is cut a bit and burn it. So they used to have a sales income from there, which - I don't know what a bunch of reed would be worth now, £1.50, £2 - that would have been £30,000 shall we say of income which paid for their wages. Well now of course they get so much money balance they've no need to work. So they have helpers who go round and have mechanical scythes and they row it up and burn it.

ALK: Is that for conservation purposes?

JT: Yeah, I think so. The reed is probably not good enough quality...

ALK: Do you have any reed on your farm?

JT: We used. No. Dad and Les, they used to cut reed at the end of the Broad by the mill, and we always said we had reed cutting rights on that corner from Roland Green's Mill as we call it, to our boathouse. But we haven't cut reed for many years,- but I remember them cutting reed on there. And Jack Nudd used to cut a lot of reed around the edge of the Broad. He was another one who used to do the reed cutting.

Old Jack, and Billy Nicholls, that was all part of how things worked if you were self-employed. (13.25) They would do reed cutting from January through to March and then they would go hoeing sugar beet, then they would do a harvest, then they would go on the herring drifters or on the boats out to sea, and then they would probably do a sugar beet season, so they'd ... There was a lot of people in Hickling involved in that sort of lifestyle of, you know, hard work, really, and earning a pound where they could.

ALK: And how did you relate to all of them, because your position was a bit different?

JT: In what way?

ALK: Well, you were farming this piece of land.

JT: Yes.

ALK: You weren't going off on the drifters

JT: No, no. Well, I was rooted here. I was in the fortunate position. I've got inherited wealth, in a way, whereas they had, I mean they could only...

ALK: They were more "crofting"?

JT: No, they were working by their muscle, they were doing

ALK: Seasonal work.

JT: They were doing seasonal work, er, they were self employed.

ALK: Who were your friends? When you were young, when you were starting off. You said about Bernie. Who else? Who were the people you'd have a... I don't know what you did: did you go to the Pleasure Boat or the...?

JT: Young Farmers, really, was the social life in those days, where I met...

ALK: So talk me through the farms that were around.

JT: What - the the farms in Hickling?

ALK: You know, the ones that neighboured onto you.

JT: Well there was Dick, the butcher in Stalham. He owned Brackenbury and Plummer's Farm, so. years ago there would have been two farms there, wouldn't there?

So there would be Plummers Farm, Brackenbury Farm, and then there'd be Willow Farm. And then there's Hook Farm and Eye Farm. So I mean we probably nearly farm most of the land down Stubb Road now apart from Mrs Youngman's. We bought 30 acres there three or four years ago now. Thirty or forty acres belonged to Hook Farm, but I think we farm most of it down Stubb Road now.

ALK: Then up the other way. Hickling Hall, East Farm, Calthorpe Street. Would you know the farms up there?

JT: **Yeah, we've got a little bit of land down Calthorpe which Viv and I bought many years ago, 4 acres. And then Geoffrey Mace had a bit of land: that's how it came about. Dear old Geoffrey Mace, he had a little smallholding there. See, he's another one who had rabbit hutches and a goat and a pig and a cow...**

ALK: There's still a bit of that kind of farming up there.

JT: **Yeah. Yeah, probably is. And, er, so he came and said "did we want to buy his bit of land". So we bought his bit of land and he rented a bit of land off Mr Disney and so he took that on and he's got 8 acres down there. And then in - I don't know when we bought the land at Ludham - 1996.**

I came home from college and we had broiler chickens, dad had, don't know how many he had. I used to do them. We had about 20,000 I think in two old sheds, which have now fallen down and been replaced actually. And so we had those. We had a few pigs. We had a few cows. In fact I don't think we had cows. I remember when I came back I said right, we ought to have some cows and old Alec Dawson the vet said "well, you don't get involved in them, Geoffrey" (which was my dad) so I did the cows, I think on the marshes. So we had about 40 cows at one stage on the 50 or 60 acres...

ALK: Was that dairy cows or fat...

JT: **Not, fattening cows; no. Suckler cows, so you had the calves off then reared the calves for fattening.**

ALK: When did you get your bull?

JT: **Our what?**

ALK: Your bull.

JT: **What, the one we've got now?**

ALK: Not that one. The first...

JT: **Well, we always had a bull with the other ones. But, following on from the cows, I suppose, in the seventies, Viv and I, we met through Young Farmers. As I say, that was all part of the social life.**

Then James came along in 73 and Paul in 75, so we had two sons.

Dad died in 1981, so in 1982 I think or 1983 we moved down to Willow Farm

ALK: Did he head the farm until he died, or did he...?

JT: **Well, he was very good. He let me have my way...**

ALK: He was alright?

JT: **Yeah, he was good. And the other thing we did in the seventies was sprouts: we decided we had to get more money coming in and, you know, of course we were employing several people.**

Of course sugar beet was a major thing. Dad always wanted to have enough people to hoe the sugar beet which that was all hand work. So all the beet were drilled in long rows and multi germinated seed, so you got perhaps three or four plants grow out of one seed. So, in April, May you had to single them out so they were about 10 inches to a foot apart and that was back-breaking work. I expect we grew 30, 40 or 50 acres in those days and perhaps get 20, 25 ton an acre: would have been a very good crop. Well, nowadays you're looking at 40 tons an acre, which is 100 tons a hectare, which we seem to be achieving quite regularly now due to James's fine farming or whatever, but that's another story.

And then when we were growing, if you like 25-30 tons an acre or so yields, and our knowledge of how to grow the crop through better fertility, better sprays... monogerm seed came in so you could then plant the seeds in a regular interval so we got a Stanhay Drill which is very good to place the seed every 6 or 7 inches so you had 80% germination, so that ended up - you wanted about 65, 75 to the chain, (which a chain is 22 yards)- I don't know how many metres that is, 20 metres approximately.

So you got paid piecework and that was all done hand hoeing - back-acheing work. Glad to see the back of it. Sprays gradually came in, as I say, monogerm seed came in and that made life a lot easier. Of course we used a tractor hoe head - we had little tractors with little wheels on, you'd have a hoe on the front and the tractor would push that head and cut the weed, so you would try to cut the rows really close so that when you came along to single them you didn't have so many weeds and that. The closer you get to the beet with the tractor hoe for the chaps coming along hand hoeing. I used to do the tractor hoeing - I loved that. And, so that's one of the little jobs I did.

So, the sugar beet's seen a revolution as you get monogerm seed and you just drill it and lift it, spray it and it's job jobbed, and you get 100 ton a hectare. It's not quite as simple as that because you've got fertilisers and all the other things to get it right.

So, that seemed quite a revolution and that's why a lot of the labourers left the farm, because it's so much easier.

Everything's got bigger, quicker. We've got 550-odd acres which you can farm it any way you wanted. You can have a contractor come in and farm it. You can do it yourself and farm it. And then whichever way you chose would be cheaper because years ago small farms employed several people; now those days are gone and anyone who had 4 or 5000 acres was a lord or a lady. Now there are many farms running that sort of size of operation, contractor charging £150 an acre, or £100 an acre or whatever the figure might be. They're supplying all the machinery.

We like to row our own boat, so we, my son James is now running the farm so we go back to where we were really in 1980 when dad died and I then took over but I was then 31 or 2, 33.

ALK: So, put yourself back there: what was your dream, what were the things you thought this is what i am going to do with the farm? How did it go forward

JT: Well, I don't know really. I was a bit sad about poor old dad dying...

ALK: Fair enough!

JT: He'd had cancer and he took 2 or 3 years to... That wasn't very nice. Wasn't very nice for him or us. It was sad.

Anyway, by him dying when I was young [I could] do what I wanted on the farm, which many of our generation didn't have, or my generation didn't have.

Father and sons, you know, it's difficult if you're running a farm and you've got different generations

I had a certain amount of autonomy. I know Bernie, Bernie's father gave him a certain amount of autonomy as well. So we were both very fortunate in our young days when we were 30 or 40, we could run the farm, we could do what we wanted, really and, er, so I expanded the chicken side of the business which I thought would be a good thing too, because we could grow good crops, because we are on very fertile soil.

The other thing we did when I came, was we underdrained a lot of the farm. There were grants for underdrainage, so we took advantage of those for most of the farm because as you know, Willow Farm, there's Stubb Mill and there's also Roland Green's Mill: Roland Green's Mill was the drainage centre for Willow Farm, Hickling and then, when that ceased, the water from Hickling was drained through the Nature Reserve, through the main drain down to Stubb Mill and then pumped into the Broad down Meadow Dyke. But that caused a conflict of interest because the Nature (Reserve)... We wanted the levels down because we had spent a lot of money on underdraining.

But that was resolved by putting a pump in at the end of the farm so we lifted the Willow Farm water into the high level drains on the Nature Reserve so they were happy - they had dams in so they could keep the water levels up on the Nature Reserve. We were happy because we could then keep our land farmed.

And then later on, following on from that line of thought, they decided that the pumps weren't working very well at our end, on the Willow Farm end onto the Nature Reserve and the Drainage Board (24.30) designed a scheme that would take our water under Stubb Road down into the Twelve Foot, which is the main Commissioner's Drain. Then it goes down towards Eastfield Pump, via Eastfield Pump, where it used to go and Stubb Pump used to split either way, but now it goes right round to Brograve Mill, so all our water from Hickling goes into Horsey Mere. Amazing, really, when you think that's travelling by gravity most of the way to the pump to be lifted up.

So, that's that little bit out of the way. Then - so where have we got to, 81 or 82 - yeah, that's right, the kids were going, would have been 10 or 11 or something. Anyway they were going to school and Viv and I decided we wanted some money for them to go to school - they went to private school - and we put up two chicken sheds, broiler sheds, which held about 14 or 15,000, 20,000 broiler unit. I think they had 10,000 or 11,000 in the two old sheds that dad put up in the 1950s.

So in 1983 or 4 we put up one shed and then we put another up the year after that and we called them James and Paul because the income from them was sufficient to pay for their school fees and that worked quite well and then later on we put up another shed, so we now have got about 80,000 chickens - which sounds a lot - but in the scheme of things there are other people at any one time, so you know, that's...

We've fallen behind on the size of the thing, but it fits in well because we were getting enough broiler muck out of the broiler unit to put onto the farm, so it matched the size of the farm. And the broiler muck is very high, is high in nitrogen and high in P and K as well, so that meant we didn't have to buy bagged fertilisers, so we could farm quite economically through the chicken side. But when I talk about the chicken side, we actually rent out our sheds to Banham Poultry, so we

lease them out and so we get paid a nice steady income which is what we wanted after father died because we had death duties to pay and one thing and another, it's nice to have a nice steady income stream rather than take the fluctuations of the market.

So that seems to have worked quite well, though of course nowadays the rent has fallen behind. Once upon a time we could buy a tractor out of the rents we were getting. Now a tractor is £70 or £80,000, you know, so I mean that's... Inflation has bitten into all the rents and everything else so really we made the decision to - instead of putting money into chicken houses and making Banham a little richer, we ought to be - and the chicken sheds would fall down in time-, we ought to be buying some land.

So we bought some more land in 1996 at Ludham. Really it's the thing because we wanted to buy Mrs Youngman's farm, or thought that would be inflation proofed. We thought that when Mrs Youngman's farm came up, we would sell the land at Ludham and perhaps buy that. But that didn't work out quite like that because we bought 50 acres over at Ludham, nicer than Hickling because that's lighter land over there and if it's wet we can get on a day or two over there. So we got another opportunity and we bought some more land: i think we bought another 80 acres over there. So we've now got 180 acres over at Ludham - 150 acres over at Ludham, which worked quite well and then when Mrs Youngman's farm came up we actually didn't buy it because that was sold with the house and one thing and another and someone else was going to buy it and we were going to do the farm and it all fell through.

And when we sold Plummers Barn we bought,- put that money into buying- some of the land at a later date, but at three times the price we could have bought it at... But it's no good looking back, is it?

Anyway, that was that, we couldn't really afford to buy Mrs Youngman's at the time because we were then paying for the land at Ludham, so, but we wanted the land at Ludham more than we wanted the land at Hickling, if you know what I mean, so that worked out quite well.

ALK: So if you think about the things that you produce from the farm, what's the kind of balance across, like, sugar beet and chicken and...?

JT: Quite well, now.

ALK: Would you still call yourself a mixed farm?

JT: Oh, yeah.

ALK: One of the last family mixed farms?

JT: Yeah. We've got roughly 80 acres of sugar beet and a hundred acres of wheat and 100 acres of barley and a few cattle, 20 cows.

ALK: It's quite traditional?

JT: Yeah.

But the chickens have really been quite a good backbone to the business in a way because they finance quite a bit of things and now since - where have we got to? - the boys have gone to school and Paul, I'd have said we've only got one small farm. So 96, well how old was James then? He rang up and said - we were on holiday in Canada and of course we never had time for holidays - well we couldn't go away

because we had the chickens and all that so we were very much tied to the farm holiday-wise and of course you want someone to help look after the livestock and its responsibility.

Then it got to a time when we used to go, have a week away if we could. We used to go down to Exeter, Scotland. Took the boys up there: that was all good fun. I'm trying to think how we must have worked them. We must have gone when the chickens were out or something or other. But the chickens and things have been quite a big responsibility really because if you've got livestock you've got to...

ALK: I want to take you back a bit further because I want to go back to those older memories of dealing with the farm when there was an extremely hot summer or an extremely cold winter and tie that in with what you were saying that you had so much fun on the Broad and I imagine you were perhaps involved with the shooting as well. so, thinking of the seasons a bit, are there particular stories that come to mind of something you had to deal with?

JT: (30.20) Well I remember how wet it used to be because Stubb Road really used to be quite wet and I remember the tractors getting stuck and riding on the front of the little old tractor to keep the - I used to sit on the bonnet to stop the front coming up...

Nowadays you've got a big machine that just more or less floats over the land and they take six rows at a time but we used as I mentioned earlier when I was at Pathood's, we did single row harvesting, we had a single row tanker and that was very weather reliant: you could only go when it was dry and very often you'd go, you know, it's - like - November or December, wet and cold.

Then we progressed onto a three row harvester and then the chains used to break and it was wet and cold mending them. Life's a lot easier now with these bigger machines. They just get over the land: I mean, we can lift - for argument's sake the contractor can come in with a six row machine which would cost him £300,000 or £400,000 now, so obviously no farmer could afford... Well, farmers do afford to buy them, but on a large scale they're lifting 1000 or 1500 acres of sugar beet, er, well, the same with potatoes because the machinery there has got big as well and everything's completely different.

So a six-row will come in, he'll lift 20 acres a day, we can be ploughing in behind him and that field could be sugar beet one day and corn in that night. So, within the space of 12 hours that can all be done, whereas with a single row you could - I forget what we used to do, but it seemed very tedious and take all winter to be lifting sugar beet - and horrible!

ALK: And do you lose whole harvests through the weather, through the rain or through the heat?

JT: No. Not really. It's just timeliness. You've got to get on and do it when the weather's right, I mean, but the modern machinery does allow you to farm with the weather rather than against it, whereas before you were always up against it if it rained: you still had to think well, how are we going to go, or can we leave it another week, whereas now the machines just come in and do it. The same with combine harvesters or anything. You can do so much in a short time now with modern machinery.

Well, I mean, we used to think if we could do 50 tons when we were filling our bins, 'cos I can remember we had sacks in these barns out here and everything used to be gone through the corn dresser and you'd be carrying sacks and two men would

have to put them up three high, and then you'd have to take them out and Mickey Burton would send his low Thames Trader here and they had the sack lift on the back and then the man would hold it on his back and carry it to the front of the lorry.

This sort of thing dear old Billy Nichols and all these guys - because they worked really hard and tough, tough guys - did. Used to load the sugar beet lorries by hand: Thames Traders. 10 ton, fork them all on by hand, then fork them off.

Anyway, one of the other memories I had was taking a barge load of sugar beet (as friend of Christopher Nicholson from Neatishead, or dad's, I think, he's dad's godson) and we picked up a barge of sugar beet which I should think would be 30 or 40 tons that would come from, that would come from Irstead I should imagine, Neatishead.

And I think we picked them up at Acle Bridge and went across Breydon Water with one of the old wherries - not a sailing wherry, an old puff puff wherry to Cantley factory and I remember going across Breydon and the water was coming up to the gunnels - wet and horrible, a bit like today, really!

And, er, what were we doing? We got down to Cantley - because that's quite an expedition. I wasn't that old - 10, 12, maybe 14. I don't know. Anyway, we went - must have been one of the old Thaynes, but I forget who the old wherry boy was now. Went to Cantley and had to grab the sugar beet out of the wherry and transport them into the factory. And it was raining and there were sparks flying and everything else, but I remember that. That was a good trip!

So there was a lot of work done by hand on the farm. Thinking about the sacks, and you'd get mice in them and on the wet days, the men would be repairing the sacks the mice had got into.

ALK: How did you manage rats and mice and so on: what was the set-up?

JT: I don't know really. I don't know. Poison, I suppose.

ALK: Did you?

JT: Yeah, but in the old Brackenbury barn we used to have sacks in there and then we had, then we went from sacks. Sacks because we had a bagger combine, so the story was then, probably a six foot wide cut and Nigel Greenacre used to be on the bagger and he used to have a little - cause they'd all be in the muck and dust and if the wind was blowing the wrong way, that would all blow round and there's be dear old Leslie Pye with his Farmall {tractor}, sitting on the front of this B64 combine and they'd be working in the muck and dust and it was all bags, so they had to tie the bag up and when they's got two or three bags on the platform, they'd drop them off, so they all fell on the field and then we as boys and girls - and Viv used to do it with her dad's - would go round driving the little Fergies or the small tractors and then you had to hump the sacks onto the trailer and bring them back to the farm and hump them off.

Then of course when the bulk combines came out, the tanker combines, everything went... We had a tank on the trailer and so we could then put the loose corn into the trailer and then that would be tipped up and augered into a bin, so that was a Godsend! So you had bins that held 25 tons and you could dry it in the bin...

ALK: Did you have a drier?

JT: Air drying. We had a sack drier. Dad bought this I think Jeck (?) Sack Dryer which had ten sacks on it. There were pipes on it and you put a pipe in the sack off this big tube on the thing and it ran off propane gas. So you'd have probably a hundred sacks in rows of ten and you'd put these pipes in and blow the hot air through. So that was a tedious little old job and then you had to tie all the sacks up and hump them up and down...

So, when bulk storage came in with bins that held 25 or 50 tons you thought that was great because you'd done away with the sacks and you augered it in and that sped the job up. So that was one of the other smaller revolutions, really, going from everything being done by hand and manual work to sitting on a tractor. And dear old JCB - you know, Mr Bamford - I would never begrudge him pounds, or Harry Ferguson -when they brought out the hydraulics and the oil mechanism of lifting and things because that just saved so much work on the farm, so much work.

ALK: So do you remember, some people talk about, you know, a sort of sea of rats running through Hickling?

JT: No, no.

ALK: You never saw that, or you didn't have?...

JT: I saw coypus, giant rats. We had coypus round here which were a menace on the Broad walls, and they used to eat the sugar beet and there was a big campaign to eradicate the coypu and I remember Leslie coming round here holding up coypu showing my mum. "What do you think of this, Mrs Tallowin?" he said, "Look at this" and that was the last one we ever did see, because they were great long things I think they weighed about 19 or 20 pounds, great orange teeth they had. Dad used to have traps and they used to trap them and they used to have a... He had a little 2.2 pistol. He used to have in a holster and he'd go round shooting them, you know, once they were trapped h'd shoot them in the cage and bring them home because I think they were a pest. No doubt about that because they were holing the river banks and eating the vegetation and eating the crops.

ALK: And you did a number of things with conservation in mind. Was that because you were next to the...?

JT: Yeah, I think we were always interested in that sort of thing anyway and James has really carried it on.

ALK: So what are the motivations there? What are you doing there?

JT: Well, let's go back to when - when did James come in here? James when he was in his twenties went to Shuttleworth College and then came... He was always interested in farming, so he came on the farm in the nineties I expect, when he was in his early twenties, anyway and we bought some more land at Ludham when he came back, so that was in 1996 and that helped us make a bit more room and we put another chicken shed up as well, so that helped and gave us more income to provide for the family.

The other son, Paul, he went to Wye and he met his girlfriend then, Sam, at Wye and he married her in... I don't know when they got married now. And that was quite fortunate - we were lucky as a family that he found a nice girl and they were farmers down in Essex, so he moved down there and the aforementioned L. P. Sampson who we met, who was his boss thought Paul was a good young man and who was very kind to him and took him into the business when he married Sam because L.P. had got no family.

Sam's father was employed by him as a farm manager and they had two or three thousand acres in those days, but that's a bit of a different story...

L.P.'s brother used to build boats for people down in Essex.

ALK: And you're telling me about conservation and James...

JT: I'm not at the moment. I'm just thinking...

ALK: I noticed that!

JT: No, I was just thinking there's also a story about Paul going down to Essex so that left room for James to farm here and Paul to farm down in Essex

ALK: No, I understand that.

JT: Otherwise Paul might to have had to come back here, or whatever, so that was quite a nice let out for the family in a small farm. I remember speaking to Philip Almey, and I said we haven't got room. He'd got three or four sons all involved on the farm when the boys were at Gresham's.

I said "I'd love to come around, Philip", because he'd got a lot of cattle. He said "come along and have a look". No, we're only a small farm, we've only got room for two boys on the farm, not room for both of them.. Oh, my dear! You can't say that - No,. No. No. You mustn't say that - you must make room for them. But the economic reality of it was they wouldn't have been, they wouldn't have got... I don't think they wouldn't have got on anyway. So it was quite nice that Paul married a farm manager's daughter down in Essex- made a lovely life for themselves down there and they've been very fortunately able to buy land and he's been given a good opportunity and he's leading a better life than he would have been if he stayed here.

And James is leading a better life because he's gone, as well, so that's worked out well and James is... So James came along and he demonstrated that he's quite keen on farming and married Min, who is a trained accountant, so that's quite nice.

She works away from the farm really, but she's recently come into the farm partnership, which is good, so there's continuity there. Hopefully she'll carry on when we're gone., so that's quite nice.

But James is very good. He - and you were asking about conservation - he's obviously taken the farm forward. One of the first things or second things they did after he got settled in I decided that I used to do all the spraying and one thing and another, it would be better if James took on the spraying because he's more computer literate and everything's got to be done now on computers. So there's no point in him going to college and losing... So he did all the spraying, did all the bookwork, did the farm record keeping and that sort of thing, which he's more apt to than me, and there's so many rules and regulations nowadays and boxes you've got to tick and things you've got to - you know Environment Agency you've got to do this, you've got to do that. It would be a nightmare for me who's one of the old school and couldn't care less, but these youngsters are all very much up to date in pollution control and spraying and all the rest of it.

But he's also interested in Conservation, so we've joined HLS schemes, we went into the ESA which was an encouragement in using less nitrogen - or no nitrogen - bringing the water levels up, so in fact trying to turn the clock back to what it was 50 or 60 or 100 years ago, primarily driven by water quality and wild life on the Broads and in the area.

Halvergate Marshes was the instigator of it with Andrew Lees when they were chaining themselves to bulldozers and a lot of the youngsters decided this wasn't the way forward, we don't want to see the marshes cropped, and that brought everything to a head because some of the farmers wanted to see things cropped, and some people didn't and the conservationists won in a way because it brought out - which is a good thing - it brought out the idea that if you're going to give up the right to crop your land as you wanted to, the Government introduced a scheme saying we'll pay you £50 or £100 an acre to not crop it.

So you are forfeiting the right of cropping it by raising the water levels.. So it was what they called and ESA, an Environmentally Sensitive Area agreement. That changed the whole face of farming on the marshes in a roundabout way because a lot of people took the green pound, as it were, and whereas we'd kept 40 cows on our marshes and we'd been using nitrogen and things on there, we stopped all that and the water levels were raised and you made the marshes wetter. I mean, our marshes we did actually crop once or twice, but they're peat marshes which aren't really compatible to that. We got the combine stuck once or twice down there.

So you see marshes are marshes for the reason that they're not really fit for cropping although some of the firmer marshes on the Halvergate Level were very good, but that did bring in the idea of this compensation for not cropping which had been government in that thing. So then the ESA, and we went into the higher level schemes which mean we had margins round the field edges and you farm in less intensive areas, so you had areas where we farmed intensively and at Ludham, for argument's sake, we'd got a light bit of land which wasn't cropping too well and another heavier bit on a clay cap, we put those down to grass and we put them down to wild bird mixes.

James is well interested in all that. In fact he's just had the BTO [British Trust for Ornithology] bird ringers and they've trapped up 70 birds on there, 70 little finches - two of which came from Norway. So that was quite interesting, and he gets a lot of pleasure out of that.

And barn owls. We've put barn owl boxes up and had nine barn owls reared on the farm two or three years ago, but then last year, or the year previous to that we had a very cold April and a lot died, but I think they have come back a bit.

Yes, so I mean, although we farm intensively and we farm for a profit, because you've got to live, but also I think James gets a lot of pleasure out of the conservation side of things.

We do a bit of shooting on the farm, which there again, that dovetails in. I mean I've fox control, predator control. The one major thing that the conservation side of it that's a real success story, especially down on Stubb Marshes - we bought some marshes down there, so we farm next door to Bernie and we actually drained some of Bernie's marshes for him - is the return of the cranes which is a completely different story but, unheralded really, John Buxton did a lot in encouraging them in the seventies and eighties...

ALK: Tell me a bit more about that story.

JT: You know, farmers in the seventies, eighties and nineties were really having quite a bad press because they were ploughing everything up and pushing hedges down. We pushed our fair share of hedges out, you know, although our fields are not big, are probably average sized. When we pushed in, our fields were mostly 10, 15 acre sized, and we pushed out one hedge to make it into 20 acres, so when we did quite a bit of drainage on the farm.

But by lifting up the water levels and the cranes - which, as you asked the story about the cranes - two cranes or three cranes landed at Horsey and John Buxton realised what was happening and kept very quiet about it. And the same thing with the marsh harriers over there, because we do actually live in a special area on the reed beds and the marshes and over a period of time the cranes nested and bred, stayed here and bred, so there was quite a number of cranes that nobody knew about (apart from one or two people) and they tried to keep it really quiet for 15 or 20 years and they were quite successful in that and the outcome is that there are about 30 or 40 cranes that come from the original pair, I should imagine, or drawn more in.

Last year I saw 39 cranes in the air at once, which I thought was quite a tribute to John Buxton in his...And I know they have a little bird book in the... Down at Stubb Mill there's an embankment where you get - especially in wintertime going watching the harriers because there's about 50 to 60, - 70 harriers go and roost in the reed beds at the bottom there, and that's another tribute to John Buxton in that the harriers returned. And conservation in general - and it's quite an unsung story really.

Everyone's quick to condemn the farmers who put all the sprays and everything out.

Marsh harriers. The old keeper, Jim Vincent, he, in years gone by I should imagine, they would show people the harriers' nests and then perhaps the eggs might disappear, or the chicks might disappear because they didn't want too many about from a shooting point of view, because Hickling was a shooting estate. I'm now talking about the wildlife - the place was a shooting estate and there were one or two people round here who used to work like that. So, those days have definitely gone and the main thing you see around here are raptors. There's more crows, there's more harriers, there's more buzzards and they wonder why they're not seeing the avocets nest on Hickling: well you're not going to have avocets nest when you've got 30 harriers trying to find for young to feed. I think they had six or seven pairs of harriers nesting on the Broad which there again is a good thing.

Nowadays I should imagine the holiday trade and the visitors and people walking and cycling - this is another thing that we've seen a great change in: you'd never see people walking thirty, forty years ago. Now people are walking everywhere, more people, everyone's more mobile. Definitely a lot more people walking through the farmyard, taking interest in what's going on, so I think you've got to encourage that a bit rather than...

ALK: Well, we'd better stop, because we've been going for about an hour

JT: Have we really?

ALK: And clearly you're just getting into your stride, John, so we may well want to have a little return trip...

*This transcription has been made to back up, not replace,
the audio tapes that form the main record output of the VOH Changing Village project 2015 to 2020.
The transcribers used their best efforts and checked back for proper names and places.
We ask for forgiveness for any errors...*