



# 50 Years of Farming Memories in the Isle of Wight AONB



*“Farming Memories” is an archive designed to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Isle of Wight’s Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty designation in 1963. The archive, a collection of sound recordings and photographs, has been gathered by Natural Enterprise on behalf of the Isle of Wight Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) Partnership. Contributors include farmers, farm workers and people with fond memories of the Island’s wonderful countryside.*

*The archive has enabled us to produce a number stories relating to farming on the Island in the last 50 years.*

## Changes to Landscape & Buildings

The drive for greater productivity in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s meant that farms became specialised and their machinery got bigger and bigger. Particularly on arable farms this meant that some farms gates were widened, fields were drained and amalgamated, and larger sheds were needed. More storage was needed too, and silos were erected in farm yards. Silage and slurry clamps were built.

Mechanisation meant that some skills were lost. Manual hedging and ditching became unheard of. Hedges became narrower as they were flailed. However, in recent years stewardship agreements have meant that these skills are now back in demand.

During the last 50 years some of the crops changed. In the 1960’s cattle were fed kale, but this switched to cereals, and then the new ‘super food’, maize. Oilseed rape became a popular breakcrop. Instead of mixed farms, farms started to specialise and often grow in size, and so the landscape started to look less ‘patchworked’.

Hedges seemed to have survived in many of the livestock farms. One farmer said *“The hedgerows are all very much the same, we are not deliberately pulling hedges out as such”* and this was a common view. However, Dutch elm disease had a big impact on the landscape during this period; in the ‘70s, the elms that had stood tall above other trees died, and have never recovered to reach maturity.



Our pictures show a view looking at North Appleford in the 1960s and again in 2013. Although the hedgerows and buildings have changed, the loss of the elms give the landscape an entirely different appearance. We were told *“If you hadn’t seen the elms you wouldn’t realise what a presence they were – they were head and shoulders above the height of the oaks”*

*Milking Herd, Cridmore Farm Kindly contributed, Bill & Lynn Murdoch*



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*Cridmore Farm, 2013 contributed Carol Flux*

Stewardship schemes in the 1990s encouraged the replanting of hedges and woodland. Conservation margins and the decline in the number of grazing animals has meant hedges are getting wider again. The appearance of some of the Downs has also changed. Many have been acquired by conservation organisations. These are no longer ploughed or grazed to the same extent as they would have been in the 1960s and they are now more scrubby. At this time, it became popular to convert redundant farm buildings into tourist accommodation. The arrival of paying guests led many farmers to spruce up their farmyards.

The biggest impact on the 21<sup>st</sup> century landscape has been caused by renewable energy production. On the Island so far this has been virtually all solar PV, with arrays of panels appearing in fields (mainly outside the AONB) and on large barn roofs. With generous government subsidies for energy produced, one of our farmers told us it was his most profitable crop.



*Solar PV, Briddlesford Lodge Farm, contributed Carol Flux*

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