

“Farming Memories” is an archive designed to celebrate the 50th 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.

Arable Farming & Horticulture



Briddlesford Lodge Farm, 1996 kindly contributed, Dickie Griffin

In our discussions with farmers, we noticed how much they loved to talk about their tractors and other machinery! These have changed massively in size, power and looks since the 1960s. Farmers told us how uncomfortable and cold they were. John Brett, working on the Downs near Rowridge mast told us, *“We never had a cab on the tractor ... my legs were so cold I thought I had landed on my knees”*. John Cleaver remembers digging the farm out of the 1963 snow on a tractor with no cab, and nothing but a duffle coat to keep him warm! Our archive shows how tractors have changed.



Compton Farm, 1960s, kindly contributed, Jane Phillips

Three farmers discussed growing kale for cattle food, a practice that has now stopped. Cridmore and Briddlesford were milling cattle feed on the farms in the 1970s. Steve Cowley detailed how he used to get three cuts of Italian rye grass in the 1960s and ‘70s, but then the climate changed, the summers got drier, and they didn’t get the yield, so they switched to maize. Michael Reed was having similar problems with yields in the 1980s, so he switched to making silage.



50 Years of Farming Memories in the Isle of Wight AONB



Park Place Farm and Marvel Farm were growing potatoes in the 1960s. They were also grown at Cridmore Farm, where they grew early potatoes. The boys from the Remand School in Yarmouth would come in and help with the harvest. Cridmore got the first potato harvester on the Island in the 1980s.

Some of the Island Farmers formed a Potato Group. Bill Murdoch became its marketing manager, and he recalls how they would sell as a group to Southampton, where they would get a better price. There are not many potatoes grown on the Island now, it is very labour intensive.

Several of the farms went into cereal growing in a big way when they sold their dairy herds. Changing to arable necessitated larger machinery and fields. Machinery has got bigger, more powerful and is far more comfortable.



Stubble burning was banned in the early 1990s. This had been treated with apprehension at the time. It killed many useful insects as well as the bugs, and made the land easier to cultivate, so was it good or bad? We were told *“Straw burning was a hot topic but once everybody stopped it was fine”*.

New Baler, Little Thorness Farm. Kindly contributed, Nigel Hayward

The years 2000 and 2012 were very bad for growing crops because of the cold wet weather. The Isle of Wight Grain group provides a useful storage and marketing facility and is a great help to smaller arable farmers on the Island. John Cleaver at Newnham Farm told us, *“We are members of Isle of Wight Grain, have been for many years ... it works very, very well”*

Crop varieties are constantly changing and the yields are increasing. Farmers are putting less nitrogen on, and in a more controlled manner. More sophisticated farm machinery allows this precision farming.

If anyone can help by adding to the horticulture and arable archive, particularly with pictures of horticulture, please call Carol Flux on (01983) 201563.

Further details of the Farming Memories Project can be found on the Natural Enterprise Website (www.naturalenterprise.co.uk) and the AONB website (www.wightaonb.org.uk).