



50 Years of Farming Memories in the Isle of Wight AONB



“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.

The Weather



The Big Freeze, 1963, Cridmore Farm, Kindly contributed Bill & Lynn Murdoch

The Big Freeze of 1963 coincided with the Island’s AONB designation, and is still clear in the memories of those people farming at the time. It snowed on Boxing Day and never really thawed through to March. So there were two types of stories to be told, the chaos caused by the initial snowfall, and continuing life in the big freeze.

After the initial snowfall, farms were cut off, and with most farms having dairy cows, there was an issue of what to do with the milk. We were told *“The snow drifts were straight over the hedges – the whole road was filled in”*. Jane Phillips remembers that Compton was cut off for a week, so they put the milk in plastic bags and made butter and clotted cream. Nothing would stop the Reeds at Queenbower from delivering milk. Young Michael heroically put the milk bottles on a sledge, and no-one was let down!

John Reynolds at Marvel Farm was able to get through to the dairy in Newport via the Blackwater rail crossing. Steve Cowley and the other farmers in the vicinity of Wellow and Thorley eventually managed to meet the milk lorry at Hill Place Lane. At the same time Cridmore were putting their milk on the back of a tractor and taking it through Appleford and Rookley to meet the lorry. They would pick up bread for their neighbours on the way back. At Newnham, the Cleavers had to wait a week to be dug out from the 8’ drifts.



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*The Big Freeze, Cridmore Farm, 1963
Kindly contributed, Bill & Lynn Murdoch*

After the initial fall, the problems continued throughout the winter. It was the coldest winter since 1947. Both Dickie Griffin at Briddlesford Lodge farm and John Brett at Park Place Farm remember lighting straw fires to keep the pipes from freezing. John's employer Albert Flux grew potatoes. These were stored in a lean-to barn encased in straw, three bales thick. The frosts were so bad that only the ones in the centre were any good. The mangle clamp was obliterated and the kale was solid sticks. John remembers spilling a load of milk churns from a trailer, and before he could get them upright, the lids had frozen to the ground. The cold weather knocked the Cleaver's crops right back.

At Lee Farm the drought of 1976 meant the land was bare all summer. Then on Bank Holiday Monday the rain came for 10 days, and it was too wet to let the cows out. The cows at Marvel Farm looked better for the lack of grass – they had to forage. Queenbower Dairy couldn't get enough milk from their cows to supply the milk round. At Briddlesford Lodge Farm, instead of making 5000 bales, they were only able to make 2000.



Shepherd's Cottage, Dunsbury Farm, 1987 kindly contributed, Steve Fruin

Den Philips at Compton Farm slept right through the hurricane of 1987. So did Michael Reed at Queenbower, despite the fact that trees were blown down and they lost the gable end of the dairy. Dickie Griffin at Briddlesford Lodge did wake up, and saw the power lines arcing and his corrugated sheds disappearing down the road. It broke off half the farmhouse roof at Lee Farm. Newnham Farm lost a lot of oaks, roofs were taken off and roads blocked. John Cleaver said *"It cut swathes through the woodland ... old oak trees were piled atop one another"*. It took several days to restore power to some of the farms.

More recently, the years 2000 and 2012 were very bad for growing crops because of the cold wet weather. Michael Reed at Queenbower Dairy laments *"The last few summers ... disastrous summers when it was wet, when you get rain, rain, rain its no good"*. In 2013 some farmers ploughed their crops back into the ground.

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