

Interview with Ian Kellet, Farmer at Chapman House Farm, Finsthwaite

Graham Jarvis : Good morning, my name is Graham Jarvis and I`m interviewing Mr Iain Kellet at Chapmans Farm?

Iain Kellet : Chapman House

GJ: Chapman House in Finsthwaite on the 24th September 2018, and Roger Layfield is doing an expert job with the recording . Gordon (Wilkinson) tells me your family have been here at Chapman House for several generations.

IK: My father before me and my grandfather before that. Grandfather came here originally. He bought the farm did my grandfather. My mother`s side of the family, the Jacksons were here before that and how far before that it goes, I don`t know. I think it was the 1930s when my grandfather bought it. He came from Ulverston. He had a little farm near Ulverston. I`ve lived here all my life but my nephew`s farming it now. I have a few sheep just to keep my hand in really. Steven, my nephew, farms it at the moment.

GJ: He has cattle does he, dairy or beef? Did you have dairy cattle?

IK: Yes, beef cattle. Yes, I did at one time, years ago because I had a milk round but it wasn`t economical you know. I was milking about 17 or 18 cows but that`s not economical today though.

GJ: When did you stop having dairy?

IK: I don`t just know, I should have had a look really, I`d say 20 years ago now.

GJ Were they black and white cows?

IK: Aye, my father always had shorthorns originally because he was into pedigree shorthorns. Then they sort of went out of fashion did shorthorns, so we used a black and white bull after that you know. Then we went into Fresians. They were old type Fresians, not the Holsteins. Not the bony things you see today but they can milk, that`s the thing. They are just milk machines really.

GJ: Did you have cows?

IK: Yes cows and calves. I don`t know how many we had really, probably forty or fifty cows and followers

GJ Did you grow arable crops here? Did your grandfather grow anything?

IK: Yes, and my father would grow some, because of the war you had to plough some up really. When I was a lad, there was a little farm down in the village that we bought from Scales. We had rented from Scales and it had had hens on it for a long time. We ploughed it up and grew crops on that, but our ground is too stony for arable really. It`s all down to grass now.

GJ: It would have been fertile with hens on it

IK: Yes, I know.

GJ: And you would have started with horses?

IK: Aye, I remember working horses. They sort of went out when I was in my teens. My dad wouldn`t have got rid of horses, he was actually horse mad you know! He wouldn`t have had a tractor if he could have helped it really.

GJ: The tractors arrived in the sixties or when?

IK: Late fifties, early sixties, it would be.

GJ: How many horses would you have had?

IK: We had two latterly but we usually had two or three. In grandfather`s time the horses were worth a lot of money but they never had two good horses. Once one got to be a good horse, they sold it and they got a young one, or bred a young one. They had a good horse and a young one coming on and of course the horses were worth a lot to sell. My dad loved his horses.

GJ: When did you start making silage? It would have been hay initially?

IK: Yes, bailing hay but loose here originally. Then we got like a press, it didn`t even make it into a square bail just a string round it really. We pressed it up and put a bit of string round it. I can`t remember when we went into silage. I know we had one very bad summer when you couldn`t make hay so we started silaging then. When the round bails came in, Gordon and Donald (Wilkinson) used to make pit silage as well. They would put it into a clamp.

GJ: What`s been the biggest change do you think in farming in your time?

IK: Probably the loss of the dairy herd, and machinery coming in. There has been a big change in my lifetime. Sheep haven`t changed a great deal. Different breeds have become more popular but they haven`t changed a great deal.. It`s now Swaledales mainly. Steven, my nephew, has them and a few Kendal Roughs. My dad always had Kendal Roughs because you got a good fleece of them. Fleeces were worth a lot of money at one time and now they are worth nothing. They are a bigger sheep, the Rough, a bigger carcass than the Swaledale. With the Swaledale, they are breeding these Mule lambs with a Leicester ram onto them . Then they go onto the lower land to breed fat lambs. They are a good price, the Mules, but everybody is going into it now, that`s the trouble. This year they are down in price but I think that`s to do with the weather as well. It has been too dry in the south of England and they`ve had less grass than us.

GJ: Feed is going to be at a premium?

IK: It is indeed! Even the corn crops and that have been light, it`s been very light really. Over the years they have grown it so they don`t have as much straw as straw isn`t worth a lot really. Now they have started burning straw in these power stations so that made it more expensive.

GJ: I guess the income from the dairy and the milk round would have been a big part of your income?

IK: Oh yes, and then you would sell an odd heifer or cow. As you brought more on, you would probably bring four or five more on so you would sell an odd one or two to other farmers or take them to the auction. Farmers bought them and the dealers bought them.

GJ: Is it just you and your nephew working on the farm now?

IK: Yes it is now. My dad had a lad working for him but when I left school I think he left. We have usually had somebody, a lad about, yes. My granddad would always have somebody working but he did a bit amongst the timber and that, selling the firewood.

GJ: Have you got some woodland?

IK Yes, all the Finsthwaite Heights behind here and then it runs all the way over to Rusland. It meets Rusland Hall on the top, so there is a lot of woodland up there really. My granddad bought it in the recession and they said there is no way he could have got out from the farm and then after the first world war they sold so much woodland. I remember as a lad, them bringing timber off, right off the tops near High Dam. They must have sold some then.

GJ What`s the biggest change in farming in your lifetime?

IK: I think probably the dairying. There would have been into the teens of farms sending milk to the dairy round the area, like Finsthwaite, Graythwaite Hall and the Rusland Valley. Nearly every farm milked at that time.

GJ: How do you feel about those changes?

IK: Well it's one of those things, whether we are any better for it, it's what happens isn't it? You can't stop it really.

GJ: Has the landscape changed?

IK : Not really, no. It's pretty well stayed the same really.

GJ: There must have been some difficult times

IK; Well Foot and Mouth time, that was the first year I had ever sent sheep away for wintering, you know, wintering hogs up at Longtown . I took them up there and I lost those. Other than that we were alright really. We escaped but we didn't know whether we would. We spoke to our local vet and he said `well I don't think you have much chance because of the deer coming into the area` but in the end they found that they didn't find much Foot and Mouth in the deer at all. I think that they shot one or two and they couldn't find anything. So it was a blessing really.

GJ: The restrictions went on for a long time?

IK: Yes, you couldn't drive and you couldn't put cattle on the road. You had to put them in the trailer and take them wherever, when they were going out in the spring. It was really hot, it was a hot time and of course you had to have a vet here. When Foot and Mouth was on we had a vet here two or three times a week to check the sheep. He would go into a field and check three or four sheep, their mouths and their feet. No, it was hard work, and tense.

GJ: Did you go to school in the village?

IK : I went to Finsthwaite School to start off with, then I went to Leven Valley after that, at Backbarrow, a secondary modern. I can't remember when it closed.

GJ: Have you seen changes in the village?

IK: Yes, yes quite a lot of the village life has gone. The second homes have made a difference to it.

GJ: What was the life in the village?

IK: It was similar to what it is today. People have got it going again now but at one time it was really quiet. There was such a lot of second homes and even now when you go to the Bobbin Mill in winter it's like a ghost town. There are no lights at all as they are all second homes. People have bought them and had them as holiday homes and let them as well. This is the thing, you contribute to the village. There is nothing you can do about it. In Finsthwaite today, people who bought them years ago as second homes and then when they've retired they live here you know. There are more people who have come into the village.

GJ: Would there be dances and things in the village hall?

IK : Yes, hunt balls and things but there wouldn't be things in the village hall then because it was a school when we were youngsters. The Institute, they used to have, that was at Lakeside. They used to have things on there.

GJ: That's where you would have gone. Was there Young Farmers in those days?

IK: Yes there were but not here. There was Cartmel Young Farmers, there was Rusland Young Farmers and there was Lowick. Well at Leven Valley School, I met some lads from over Lowick area so I joined Lowick Young Farmers. It

wasn't the nearest. Rusland was really the nearest but I joined Lowick Young Farmers. When we were youngsters, we used to cycle to Newby Bridge and get the bus into Ulverston and places like that.

GJ: When did you first have a car?

IK: At 17 or 18, I had a van. My dad always had a car but we got a van then for the milk round. When we went into Ulverston, only farmers sons had cars. They were the bees knees were the farmers sons! Grandad would have had a horse and trap to get around. They would go down to Ulverston, I think, to market.

GJ: You still go to market on Tuesday? You all meet up?

IK: Yes, that's right. We more or less go for our lunch. Steven takes his sheep and cattle more often to Kendal and I'll sometimes go if he's selling. That's on a Thursday is the Kendal Auction. Nearly every Tuesday, we meet up at Ulverston. It's keeping in touch with old friends, Gordon and Donald. Well Donald has always gone really but Gordon, since he lost his wife, has come a lot more.

The Bobbin Mill at Stott Park, it's a while since that went, was one of the main employers in the village at one time. And the Blue works at Backbarrow, the Dolly Blue works. There was one or two out of the village that worked there.

GJ: Do you know how many worked at the Bobbin Mill?

IK: What full staff? Into the teens I would say. My uncle was the manager there Jack Ivis(?), he was the manager at the Bobbin Mill. It belonged to Cowards. Bobby Coward, he was no good at managing though so my uncle managed it. That would have been twenty years or so ago since it closed. (*actually closed 1971*).

GJ: Did he live in the village?

IK: Yes, he lived at Nethercroft, where the Potts's are now.

GJ: The Blue Works would have been a bigger concern?

IK: Yes, there would probably be a hundred working there. Quite a lot of ladies worked there because of packing the Dolly Blue. They worked in the packing area. That left an employment hole when it closed. I don't know where they went to work, I suppose they were spread out. Probably Glaxo was on the increase then, probably they would go there and places like that. It closed about 40 years ago. My brother in law, when it was developed as a hotel, he did the electrical work down at the Whitewater. Steven's in his forties now and I don't think he would be born then so yes, I think forty years ago, Do you talk to Ronnie Mein at all? Ronnie would work at the Blue Mill, I would think.

GJ: Thank you, that's been very helpful and very enjoyable.

Roger Layfield: Are there more tourists coming through the village compared to what there were?

IK: I think there are, Roger, yes. More walkers are probably going to High Dam. High Dam has been advertised so there are more people walk up to High Dam. They park, walk up and take the dogs up.

GJ: Is that a good thing?

IK: I don't think it is really. The Planning Board say it takes the pressure off such as Tarn Hows and places like that. It can be a blooming nuisance with cars parked on the road. We have had a bit of trouble with dogs. The trouble is they go up there and our land runs alongside, and they let the dogs off. Well, if they are not well trained they are over amongst the sheep. We haven't had a lot of bother but you get the odd one that's chasing sheep and that. We've put some signs up on the gates to warn people.

GJ: Thank you that was very helpful and enjoyable.

IK: Thank you