

Interviewee(s): Gordon Hastie (GH)	Interviewer(s): Vivien Hastie (VH)
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REGION	East Lothian
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COUNTY	<i>East Lothian</i>
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DATE OF INTERVIEW	<i>15 January 2018</i>
INTERVIEWER	<i>Vivian Hastie</i>
YEAR RANGE	<i>1950-2019</i>
SUMMARY	<i>Vivian Hastie interviews her husband Gordon Hastie about his experiences of living in and around Ormiston and Haddington. As a lifelong resident of the area, Gordon gives his impressions of everyday life in rural East Lothian and of attending school in Haddington. Special attention is given to his experiences growing up on and later managing a farm which has moved from mixed arable and dairy farming to specialising solely in dairy as time has progressed.</i>

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VH: This is Vivian Hastie interviewing Gordon Hastie at Alderston Mains, Haddington. And Gordon perhaps you could give us a brief outline of where you've lived and where you went to school?

GH: Well, I was born in 1952 and I lived the first five, nearly six, years of my life at a farm called Melvin Hall near Ormiston, and then we moved from there to Alderston Mains, which is where we now are, in 1958. Since then I've gone to school in Haddington, both to the primary school and then into the secondary school, and from there went on to university in Edinburgh where I studied agriculture, and then after that degree I came back home and have farmed here, initially with my father and latterly with my sons. In the early days it was a mixed farm, but as time has gone on we have become much more and more specialist dairy farmers.

VH: So, you haven't always lived here at Alderston Mains. What can you remember about your pre-school years at Melvin Hall?

GH: I don't remember very much about pre-school. I do remember trying to help my father with various little projects. One time he was building shelves in the living room and I was playing in the corner with a hammer, and he had piled the shelves up neatly into a pile and I managed to nail the three shelves to the floor, one through the other right to the floor, and was not very popular! And the only other job I can remember helping him with, he was building a shed for a lorry and it was a flat roof and at the age of four, I suppose, I was up on the roof with him nailing things in. I don't imagine that I was being much help, but at the time I thought I was!

VH: And did you go to any playgroup or nursery or mix?

GH: I had no experience of playgroups or nurseries. We, apart from visiting friends who had children, I had no really, no real experience with contemporaries and consequently my first day at school was horrific, aye absolutely, it stands out still as being a horrible, horrible day. And I well remember the shock at when I went back home at being told I had to go back again the next day. Somehow, I had been building up to going to school for years, but it hadn't occurred to me that you had to go more than once.

VH: And what did your father do when you were living at Melvin Hall? What was his job, and did you have anything to do with that, were you involved at all on the farm?

GH: Well at that time my father and his three brothers were in partnership and they were farming what they called market gardening, but it was on a farm scale at that time. And so, predominantly the main crops were vegetables, and in the summertime strawberries. And my father was involved with the production of that, and actually day-to-day he often started his day at three o'clock in the morning by driving a lorry of vegetables to Glasgow and then being back home again in time for the staff to start working at half past seven or eight o'clock in the morning.

VH: Did you have any particular toys at that time that you remember?

GH: I do remember going to get my first trike, because we went in the lorry and, my father and I went in the lorry, and picked up a tricycle which I continued to cycle till I was eight I think. It seemed to be the case in those days that children didn't start cycling bicycles until they were older than is now common custom.

[phone notification sounds]

VH: So, you moved to Alderston Mains in 1958, as you said in your introduction. What was the farm at Alderston like when you moved here?

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GH: The farm at that time was a 250 acre farm and it was just at the tail end of the horse era and the beginning of the tractors, so we had, we still had a horseman when we came to Alderston and there were three Clydesdale horses working when we first came here, alongside two diesel tractors and one older petrol paraffin tractor. The biggest of those tractors was a Fordson Major, Power Major I think they called it, and I don't know, can't remember the exact horsepower but it would be somewhere round about 40 or 50 horsepower, which contrasts substantially with the kinds of size of machines that we use today. The farm, initially my father was still farming with his brothers so the farm initially was growing some vegetables and potatoes and grain, and fairly soon after we came here, in 1961, he set up a dairy herd of Jersey cows. And there were 40 cows in that initial herd, there were 40 spaces in the byre and the cows were all tied up in the byre in the wintertime and there was a man and his daughter employed to look after the cows. So that was a man and his daughter for 40 cows, which again contrasts with the staffing levels we would use nowadays for cows.

VH: So, after your family came here you changed from market gardening to dairying, or was a gradual change. How has the dairy farm changed then from those initial days of the 40 cows?

GH: We had Jersey cows initially because we, my father, managed to get the contract for Jersey milk being bottled on farm and being sold into Edinburgh and there were already two other Jersey herds in East Lothian supplying the same supplier. So, the milk was cooled on farm and then bottled on farm and it went off from us in bottles on milk crates. A few years after we started, in 1965 I think, the two other farms in East Lothian decided that they were giving up dairying one after the other in about a six month space of time, and so we were faced with the decision either to expand substantially to continue to supply the dairy with its Jersey milk, or lose our contract. So in 1966 the first loose-housed cow shed was built for the cows and the numbers were expanded from 40 immediately to about 65, and then fairly quickly up to about 80 cows. At that time those cows were milked through a milking parlour which had been built into the building that had previously been the byre and that was a herringbone parlour which was a relatively new style of parlour in those days, and there were four cows on each side. Subsequently over the years that was expanded, the same parlour was expanded to have six cows on each side, and then another parlour in a different venue was built with eight cows on each side, and we currently have a milking parlour with 24 cows on each side. So the number of cows has changed substantially as the herd has expanded.

VH: And how did that expansion in the cows affect your other enterprises on the farm?

GH: Initially we would be expanding the cows at the expense of the grain on the farm, but in 1968 my father and his brothers amicably decided to split their business and divide the business into three, so each brother became a farmer in his own right. And at that time part of that deal was that we would give up the vegetable growing and leave that to the two other brothers, and we would focus on the remainder of the farm which at that time was dairy, and potatoes, and cereal crops.

VH: So, to go back to when you first moved here. You said there were one and a half people involved with the dairy. How many people were here and involved in the farm at that time?

GH: We have six houses on the farm and at one stage I think all six of them had a worker in them, but that was only for a very short space of time. But there would be five houses, so there was a man and his daughter in one house, and there would be four other workers on the farm plus my father working on the farm on a daily basis. One of those was the horseman and he would look after his two horses, and then there were two tractor men, and an orraman who, the orraman did the jobs, the everyday jobs that didn't involve the tractors or the main pair of horses. And in the early days he used to have the use of the third horse as the orra horse to do the bits and pieces of jobs, whether it was helping with the cattle, or cleaning out drains, or cleaning out gutters, or whatever his particular remit for the day was.

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VH: And were you able to be involved in any of the jobs round the farm as a child?

GH: When we had horses here, as a child, I used to be desperate to get home in time to get out to where the horses were so that I could spend maybe half an hour at the end of the working day with the horseman, and then get to ride the Clydesdales back in. I'd get perched up on one of the Clydesdales and the horseman would jump up onto the back of the other one and he would lead, in the early days, he would lead the horse I was riding in, after a month or two I was allowed to ride the horse and given the reins myself. And I thought I was riding, but in practice the horse was heading back to the stable and no matter what I did, it was going back to the stable, but anyway I felt I was riding the horse. And when the horse should reach the stable, I could be involved in helping to feed them. The horses were tied in stalls, in the stable. In the winter time they were there all the time. In the summertime after work they went into the stalls and they got a feed of oats, and then they

were taken out to the fields. And I do remember quite often as a six year old or seven year old leading two Clydesdales down the road to the field at the other end of the farm, and when I got there I had to rely on them bringing their heads down so that I could reach the halter to take it off their heads and shut them in the field.

VH: And have you continued an interest in horses?

GH: Well that sparked off an interest, at that time, in horses and ponies and I had a pony from the age of eight until I was 18. There was one pony, and then it was a very old one the first one I got was 22 or 23 years old when I got her, and when she was too old I moved onto a very young pony that came from Ireland and kept him till I was about 18 when I went to university, and then he went off to pony treks somewhere I think. And since then I've always been interested in horses but I didn't have a horse until recent years, when I started to play around with another horse. I got a horse and was breaking her in and so on and had some fun at that stage.

VH: Going right back to when you moved to Haddington can you remember what Haddington was like at that time compared with now?

GH: I do remember some things about it. I do remember when my father first came here he commented that Haddington High Street was so quiet that you could move the car down. If you were going from one shop to another you just moved the car with you cause there was always plenty parking space, which was a contrast to Dalkeith where he had previously gone to the bank and done his various messages. So things have changed there dramatically because car parking's at a real premium in Haddington nowadays.

VH: And you had to move school after your initial day that you'd absolutely hated. You must have had some time at Ormiston school and then moved to Haddington Primary. How did that differ from Ormiston and what do you remember of starting school in Haddington?

GH: Well I must have settled into Ormiston school after a while because I remember getting on quite well at school, and then when we came to Haddington I started school in Haddington just a few days before my sixth birthday and I was the 48th pupil into the class. The teacher was heavily pregnant and was leaving at Christmas and I arrived at the beginning of December to be her 48th pupil and they had to, had some difficulty getting an extra desk from somewhere for me. And I remember her sitting me down next to a boy called John Durie and she told him to look after me, and John looked after me so well that we subsequently became best friends and he became my best man and has been a friend for life. So I remember that part of it, and that with 48 pupils in the class even at six years old we all sat in rows in desks all the time. There wasn't the movement round the class that you see nowadays. And I enjoyed school in Haddington once I got established there, it was, I don't have the horrific memories about the first day there that I have about Ormiston.

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VH: So, what about break and lunchtime at school. Did you have particular games in the playground, or what did you do?

GH: I don't remember the very early days what we did in the playground, but we often in later years, you know, in the primary school perhaps primary 4 and 5 we, I remember playing games like high tig, or chain tig, or aeroplane tig, various chasing and games like that. I also remember playing Romans and Caledonians, that must have been when we were doing a Romans project at school I think, that lasted for a while. Cowboys and Indians of course were the staple of all the television and the films back then, so we were all forever playing Cowboys and Indians, and I remember being always wanting to be an Indian which was not the popular choice at the time. Once we got up to primary 6 or so we would, we started having balls coming to school and we'd be playing dodge the ball or football or various other ball games, mostly team ball games. The girls often played ball games by

themselves, bouncing the ball off the wall or something, but the boys it was nearly always a team game. We also used to play British Bulldogs which was not popular with the staff at the school because it involved us knocking one another down and we were forever getting into trouble for playing British Bulldogs.

VH: Did you have a uniform when you went school?

GH: The primary school and the secondary school were all one at that time. In subsequent years they were divided but, they were all one. So right from primary 1 the school uniform was a royal blue blazer, the same as in the high school, and a tie, usually a grey shirt and tie, and grey shorts for the boys. Or the girls often wear, wore, either wore grey skirts, blue skirts or kilts, the girls quite often wore kilts. And that was what we wore to school right through the primary school. I remember one boy turning up in primary 5 with long trousers and getting so much teasing from everyone else that he didn't wear them for more than two days. And we all universally wore shorts until the end of primary 7, and when we moved to the secondary school it was almost a universal change to long trousers, but the uniform apart from that remained the same.

VH: And how did you get to and from school?

GH: We lived about two miles from the school which wasn't far enough away to get a school bus in those days. Even if you were five, if you lived closer than three miles then you weren't entitled to a school bus. So we were driven to school by my mother or my father, and were almost unique in the school at that time, I think we were one of the only three or four pupils that were driven to school in a car. And so that was quite different from everyone else. I remember children living further out from Haddington than us at the byres, which was just about three miles from Haddington but not quite, and they used to have, their mother used to walk with them to school. Three miles down to Haddington and then walk home, and then walk down for them and meet them after school and walk home, when we were in the very early days of early primary school. And very quickly they had to learn to walk the three miles home on their own, so by the age of seven I'm sure they were walking back home by themselves. That involved crossing the A1 as a seven year old.

VH: Did you play any sports at school?

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GH: Well, I talked about what went on in the playground, but team sports in the primary school we didn't play anything until about primary 6 or 7. I think there was a school football team, but they met after school and I wanted to get home and go and see the horses, so I didn't get involved with that at all, and so the first team sports I played at school were in the secondary school where rugby was the boys' sport. And I really enjoyed rugby, played rugby for the various school teams right through and then subsequently after school joined the rugby club and played for a few seasons with Haddington Rugby Club. In the summertime at the high school we had cricket and athletics rather than rugby. And so we had usually two periods of PE in a week and one of them would be cricket, and we played cricket matches against other schools at the weekend although I think the standard of cricket was not very high. And I found that in cricket I liked to be wicket keeper because you had something to do all the time and that kind of kept me concentrating on the game. At athletics, I wasn't the fastest runner in the world and the one thing I could do was high jump so I used to spend most of the time training to do the high jump. In those days we didn't have the landing facilities that they have now. So Fosbury flop wasn't even dreamt of back then and we mostly were jumping the new jump, the new high jump of the day was the straddle jump which had taken over from the western roll hop, or something, and that was the jump that we were learning.

VH: Did you, you remember any special activities or trips when you were at school?

GH: The only school trip I remember from the primary school was a trip to Dunfermline and that involved a bus going across on the ferry, and we visited lots of different things in Dunfermline and then came back, I think, by Stirling saw something at Stirling. And the long and the short of it was the trip was much, much longer than was planned, and rather than getting back at school time I don't think we got back till about half past seven or eight o'clock in the evening which was a bit of an embarrassment for all the organisers, but we had a wonderful time on the trip. I don't think they had planned food for us, after school time, and I remember that they stopped the bus and we got fish and chips on the way back.

VH: What about in school, did you have any special activities over and above your normal school work, concerts and?

GH: I've mostly been talking about primary school and in primary school I don't remember being involved in concerts. I know we had a nativity play and various things like that when we were in the infant school, but I don't remember very much about it. In the secondary school the music department was very active when we were there and they were running a, every year they were doing an operetta by Gilbert and Sullivan. And so I was involved a bit, initially behind the scenes, although I was a member of the cast of the Mikado in 6th year I think. Being one of the chorus, the basses in the chorus of the Mikado, so that was the big event the school ran every year. They had done the Pirates of Penzance, and they did Iolanthe, they did the Mikado in the time that I can remember, I'm sure there were others. And then every year also we had a fairly major concert at Christmas time, a carol concert in the St Mary's Church which was attended by huge numbers of people. The church was really filled full at that time. And we had to all learn the carols. Nowadays when you go to a concert the choristers have books in front of them with words, but we had to spend weeks beforehand memorising all the words. No one was allowed to have a piece a paper in front of them at all, so we used to spend ages memorising carols and I can still sing most of the carols nowadays without needing to refer to the hymn book or any other words, still from those days I think.

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VH: When you first came to Haddington there wouldn't be any supermarkets and suchlike, so where did your parents do most of their food shopping and what sort of things did you like to eat?

GH: Well the shops in Haddington were, I remember that were two Tait the butchers, so two different shops owned by the same guy that were butchers' shops, plus at least two other, three other, butchers' shops, so there were five butchers' shops in Haddington. And, of course, with no supermarkets there were grocers'. So the grocer's that my mother frequented was either Purvis's the grocer which was on the High Street on one side of the road, or on the other side was Bircher's which was more heading towards what we'd now call a delicatessen. It was a grocer's but that's where you would go if you wanted the fancier goods, the hams and the various other fancier goods. I think there were other grocers' in Haddington at the time, and over and above that there were, I think, three little shops out in towards the housing estates that were sort of stores for, convenience stores I suppose you would call them now, and we used to use one of those as well, commonly known as Annie's. And it still exists in Haddington, but is no longer known as Annie's store. The other shops, there was a hardware shop that we used to go to, and then there was the saddler's which back then was largely a saddler's with everything else you could imagine under the sun you might need on the farm as well, and so that's where you would go if you needed a spade, or a graip, or a fork, or a brush, or anything like that, shank for a brush, you would always go to Main's to the saddler's. And his shop survived till very, well the shop still exists, but the Mains actually worked in the shop till very recently.

VH: Did you have any travelling shops?

GH: Well, when we came to the farm we had the only car on the farm initially, so there were seven houses on the farm and we had the only car. Three of the other houses had motorbikes, and the others would just walk, so to Haddington, and get a bus or something. So there was a real opportunity for travelling shops to come round and we had, I think we had, a baker came five days a week. So there would be Laidlaw's the baker I think came three days a week, and the Co-op's bakery van came, bakery stroke grocery van, came twice a week. And the butcher's van came two or three times a week, that was Tait the butchers, sent the van round to all the farms. And there was a large grocer's van that came every Friday operated by someone called Ben Watson, and he was a great favourite of ours because he always gave the children a free bar of tablet, so when Ben's van came it was a great event. There was sometimes, there were fish van came round as well, so really a lot of the farm people bought most of their everyday goods from the travelling shops at that time.

VH: You said that the tablet was a great highlight, were there many children living on the farm then other than your family?

GH: Well, I had a sister and there was me, and then the dairyman that I talked about whose daughter worked with him, they had a family of boys, well his daughter plus four boys, five boys, so they used to get something from the van as well I think. And that same van used to buy eggs from my mother, so she had hens and would sell or would provide friends and family and various other people who came to the house with eggs, but any surplus went away on a Friday with Ben Watson's van. He took them and sold them on his rounds further round.

VH: Are there any other things that you'd like to record about your memories of your life here on the farm?

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GH: I could talk at some length about how the farming has changed substantially and the numbers of people employed have changed dramatically. Over the years as the tractors got bigger and we became more specialist and the staff numbers have tended to dwindle. We had three members of staff worked with us for more than 30 years, and they were all of the same vintage and retired very quickly one after the other. All turned 65 very quickly one after the other, although one of them continued to work with us until he was 75, I think. We got a new combine the year he turned 65 and he was the combine driver, and so he decided he wasn't going to retire till he'd had a few years driving the new combine. And so he stayed on with us till he was 75. And he was fairly unique because farmworkers get a medal after they've worked on one farm for 30 years, and Peter had already had a medal at the previous farm, he'd worked there from the age of 15 to 45 and then he came to Alderston and worked for 30 years, and so he got a second silver medal for working for 30 years. I don't think there were many people ever managed to achieve that.

When I first, when we first, came here, the grain was cut, in the very first season, it was cut with a binder and so the grain wasn't thrashed, it was just cut and tied into sheaves which were then stooked or stood up in sixes round the farm to further ripen and dry off. And then after it was all cut and all stooked, we had to go round with the trailers or carts, because the horses did quite a lot of it, and lead the grain in, talked about leading in. And so you piled the sheaves onto carts and these were built quite, it was quite an expert job building sheaves on carts, and they were carted into the stack yard and then forked from the cart onto a stack. The stacks were round and the heads of the grain were always put towards the middle of the stack, so the outside of the stack was the cut ends of the grain. And those were piled up, and then when you got to the appropriate height, must have been about ten feet up, they then topped them out by putting a conical shape on the top and that was then thatched with thrashed straw from the previous year and left in the stack until we got round to thrashing it.

The traditional way of thrashing was there was a travelling mill came in to the farm and then those same sheaves had to be forked out of the stack into the mill, and they were thrashed and the grain was bagged off. And there was lots and lots of chaff came out which was a very, someone had to look after the chaff hole, which was a very messy, dusty, itchy horrible job, and then the straw was bunched into loose bunches and taken away and stacked again. At Alderston we only used that for one year, because in 1959 my father and his brothers bought their first combine harvester. That wasn't a combine as we would think of today, it was tractor drawn, it had a six foot cut and was pulled behind the tractor. And it cut the grain and thrashed it, and someone stood on the top and filled bags of grain as it was thrashed into bags and the straw, there was a buncher on the back of the combine, so the straw was bunched on the combine and dropped out the back in very loose bunches. Not like the bales that came later, but very loose bunches which were quite difficult to handle. After you filled the bag with 12 stones of barley or 16 stones of wheat, you tied the bag from the top of the combine and then slid it down onto the ground, and then someone else came round with a tractor and trailer and two people and lifted these bags onto trailers and carted them into the steading. It sounds very labour intensive and laborious but at that time it was deemed to be the new innovation and very labour saving.

And so we bought that combine in 1959 and it wasn't big enough to combine all the grain on the three farms that we had, so it was used at harvest time on some of the farms, and some of the grain was still cut with a binder into a stack. But then later in the winter the stack was forked into the combine and so we didn't need the travelling mill coming, and the combine then thrashed it as if it was travelling round the field. And I remember that combine required a tractor with a live clutch and that was why the first new tractor was bought here. It was a Fordson Power Major that was bought in 1959 and came to Alderston to drive that combine. And the power meant that when you put your foot on the clutch the tractor would stop but the power drive to the combine kept going and there was a two stage clutch. So the first stage you just stopped the tractor, and if you wanted to stop the combine you had to push the clutch the next stage down, and that was the new innovation in tractors at that time.

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The potatoes changed substantially too. When we first came here we had I think 28 acres of potatoes or so, and they were lifted with a spinner digger which meant there was a blade that went through under the drill and a rotating wheel behind it scattered the potatoes across the ground. And then there would be a squad of people would gather the potatoes up into usually, initially into brats, and then into baskets, and then they were loaded onto trailers and carted in to the potato pit, which again in the early days was on the edge of the field. So you would put the potatoes into a long heap and then they would be covered with straw to keep the light off and to give them some insulation and then the whole thing was covered with soil. They dug a little trench round the pit and used the soil to cover the straw and to insulate the potatoes against the frost and to keep them dry. And they might stay there for a few weeks, or perhaps longer into, over the new year, although you had to be very careful with your insulation if you were leaving them through the winter period. Subsequently the spinner digger was fairly quickly replaced by an elevator digger where the, which was much more effective at separating the potatoes from the soil and leaving the potatoes on top of the ground. But they were still gathered by squads. Every member of the squad had a piece of the drill there to collect, which was known as their stent. And so when the digger went past they all bent down and gathered the potatoes in their stent, and when they got from the stick marking one end of their stent to the other they got, they would stop and stand up and straighten their backs and wait till the next pass went by. So some gathered very quickly and got a reasonable rest, and the digger inevitably came past just as the slowest pickers were finishing the last line, so they never got a break really they just had to start onto the next drill, they finished one drill and started onto the next drill. And sometimes if people took a bigger stent, they might opt to have a bigger stent and get some more

money, but that didn't happen very often, but occasionally that was known to happen. And if a boy or a child was digging they might get a shorter stint and they got correspondingly less money.

Initially, the potatoes were gathered into either trailers or quite often a horse cart. The carts were, the horses were quite popular for some of the jobs like carting potatoes or carting turnips because you didn't have to jump off and on to them to move them. You would just call to the horse to move off and it would move off, and then would stop at a call as well so you could, you didn't have to be jumping off and on a tractor to move it along a bit. Although it wasn't unknown in those days for a tractor to be set off going very slowly up the field and then for the driver to jump off and walk beside it, gather up the potatoes and every so often correct the direction it was going with the steering wheel. It would be highly frowned upon, quite correctly, nowadays, but it was quite commonly done back then. Or even occasionally we would take some, as a child I remember as a seven year old being stuck on a tractor and being told to steer it up the field. Again, I thought I was being very useful and helpful but I suspect that they thought that the safest place for child when there was a moving tractor around was sitting on the seat of the tractor. But that was, I always said that the first time I drove a vehicle I was seven driving a tractor and trailer in the field. And similarly occasionally they, when they were harvesting the vegetables, they would bring a lorry into the field. And obviously a lorry's not designed to move about in a field, so they would often be towed round by a tractor with a solid tow bar to the front of the lorry, and again I sometimes got the job of just sitting in the lorry and steering the lorry to follow the tractor round the field. And we would be loading, rather than loading into trailers and then carting them off, and then unloading the trailer and loading onto the lorry, we would load the crates of vegetables directly onto the lorry.

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VH: And what about the farm today?

GH: In contrast to then or? The farm today is a specialist dairy farm. We started working with 40 cows, we're currently milking, or we currently have 350-ish cows and we're just in the process of expanding herd up to about 450 cows. Which along with our followers will mean that the farm will be quite, would be totally dedicated by then to providing forage for the cows, and won't, we haven't sold anything other than milk or beef from the farm in recent years. We haven't sold any crops for about five years off this farm, which is quite unusual in East Lothian, where you know most of our neighbours are arable farmers, and almost all they sell is crop but. So the farm's changed quite a lot in that way. It specialised, as I think all farms have had to do, and we now have that number of cows. We're, I'm working with my two sons, and we employ two members of staff to help with the cows, and one member of staff on the tractors, and that's by far the most staff we've had for many years, and will be enough staff to cope with the farm when we get up to the full quota of cows which should happen in the next two or three years.

VH: Well thank you very much Gordon that's been most interesting and we'll switch off now.

00h 48m 17s