

## West Countryman's Diary



With LES  
DAVIES MBE

IT'S damp and misty in the mornings, but by about mid-morning the sun is still managing to get through and make its presence felt. By mid-day it can be quite warm in the pleasant autumn sunshine that still holds some of its summer strength.

I always think that sunshine at this time of year is a blessing and although there is nothing quite like a summer, such as we have just had, the bonus of fine autumn weather is always well received.

The days are shortening and time moves on with the coming of autumn – already the leaves are beginning to change colour. Would it be too greedy to ask for a splendid autumn as well?

This is the season of Harvest Home and of the ploughing match, both of which celebrate and give thanks for another good year – and this one has been a good year. I had a wonderful day with everyone at the Wedmore Harvest Home, the pictures of which appeared in last month's issue.

Other communities are having their celebrations as well. It's something that is so very English, and so very rural. Long may such a tradition remain on our calendars. I'll write more about the Mendip Ploughing match in next month's edition, suffice to say we are all hoping for good weather on the day.

Such is the power of the press, that as a result of my article in last month's *Mendip Times*, I have been contacted by Eric Brain from Clutton about the old Victoria stationary engine that I wrote about last month. Eric writes for the Stationary Engine magazine and was able to tell me that this engine has been restored and is residing in Rangeworthy near Bristol.

It was one of only a few 7hp models made and is estimated to be post WWI, although the serial number is no longer legible. Eric remembers it from the days he used to deliver cow cake, in an old Albion lorry, to Hales Farm in the 1960s, stacking it in the very building I was talking about.

It must be a couple of years back now that I wrote about the discovery of the old Bedford lorry from Hales Farm. It's has now been restored, and haulage contractor Jeff Manship took it for its first outing to the Mid-Somerset Show in August. Jeff has done an amazing job in restoring this vehicle, even reinstating the sign writing on the cab doors – WG McEwen-Smith and Son, Hales Farm Tickenham Som. I've got to thank Mark Adler from *Mendip Times* for taking the trouble to go and see Jeff and sending me some photographs.

Another member of my family has departed this life. Geoff Tavener (my uncle) died in the early hours of August 21st. Geoff was well known as a postman in Nailsea, but it was his farming background that gave him most pleasure in his lifetime. You may be able to take the boy out of farming, but you will never take farming out of the boy!

This sentiment was very strong with Geoff and his connection with Hales Farm in Tickenham stayed with him throughout his life. He had many other jobs, but underlying them all was a connection with the land.

When he started school, at the age of five, Geoff had to



walk to Wraxall School from the farm on the Failand road every day. There was a family at the top of Tower House Lane who were meant to take him, but they rarely waited. So it was that Geoff would take himself to school, but oh how many distractions there were on the way. So many things to see and places to explore and, as often as not, he would arrive late at school. He wasn't destined for an academic career on leaving school – he was destined for the land.

As a small boy I spent a lot of time with him and other members of my family on the farm. I was able to be involved, and learn, in a way that would be impossible in today's highly mechanised and health and safety dominated world. He drove the first tractor that I can remember, an old Fordson Standard with cast iron front wheels. The smell of TVO (Tractor Vaporising Oil) still takes me back to the time I spent perched alongside him on that old tractor.

My first driving experience was on this machine. With my legs dangling from the cast iron driving seat, I was instructed to steer a course across the field, as he pitched hay off the trailer for the cattle. Any deviation from the desired course was rectified by Geoff who, with a pitchfork that came past my ear, would turn the steering wheel in the direction he wanted to go.

I could write at length about him and his antics, but will close this short tribute with the observation that he was a kind man who helped others. He gave his time freely to the North Somerset Agricultural Society as a steward, both at the show and their annual ploughing match. Above all he liked animals. Not everyone who works with animals is an 'animal person' but he was.

The picture I've chosen was taken of Geoff in 1957; it's from my collection and is in my presentation 'To Follow the Plough'. Geoff is with a Shorthorn bull he raised from a calf. With the pedigree name of Tickenham Herald, he was known to Geoff as simply 'Pup' and I remember him as a very gentle animal. When the time came for him to go, Geoff was devastated and became infuriated with the cattle lorry driver who used a stick to drive the bull onto the lorry. He hated cruelty and for him this was just too much to bear. I think the driver was lucky that day!

We've laid him to rest with his wife, mother and father in Tickenham church. It's a reminder that we should all appreciate those who are around us, for they will not be with us forever!

You can always contact me through my website: [Westcountryman.co.uk](http://Westcountryman.co.uk)