

John & Monica Abbott, "Rose Farm", Ipswich Road.

John Abbott

The first of January 2000 - the end of an era or a new beginning? No, I'm not talking about the new Millennium but my life. I have lived in Harkstead all my life and am married to a local girl Monica, the daughter of Annie and Bill Cornish; I am fifty-two this year. We have four grown up children with our first grandchild due at the end of June.

I have worked my farm since leaving school, at first with my father, Cyril Abbott, until he died in 1982, aged 67. We only have sixty-five acres or 25 hectares as it's now called, but with keeping pigs and growing potatoes, sugar beet and barley it gave us plenty to do. Father always referred to the "bad old days" in the 1930s recession when prices were so low, produce was either dumped or given away. Well, it seems these days are back with us again. The price of grain is half that of ten years ago. Sugar beet has dropped £10 a ton. Potatoes have always been vulnerable but this year with wholesale prices of less than £1 a bag it doesn't cover the cost of production, so this is probably one crop I shall not be growing in the future.



"I have worked my farm since leaving school"

The pig industry has been in dire straits for the last two years. Thankfully I gave up my own pigs twelve years ago, but manage about three hundred gilt weaners for Bibby's Ltd. This provides a steady income for little risk. Now Bibby's want me to increase my capacity up to about seven hundred. To do this a new shed is required. This however is causing a lot of controversy in the village at the moment and unwarranted in my view. My livelihood is at stake; if I don't expand I could lose that number of pigs I already have.

For the last five or six years I have contracted my labour out to a neighbouring farmer, so between the two of us we work about four hundred and fifty acres. He however, is nearing retirement age and who knows what will happen when he does retire. One of the largest farms in the village has already called it a day and let the land out to a neighbouring farm.

When I started work there were about twenty men on that farm, most of whom lived in the village along with farm workers and general labourers. Today many of the village people are retired professionals, although of late a few skilled younger couples and their families have moved in. Whichever way you look at it the way of life in Harkstead has changed dramatically over the last twenty-five years. House prices have risen way out of reach for local youngsters wanting to stay in Harkstead.



Harkstead's answer to the Beatles, 1964