

# *In at the Deep End. Impressions of farming in a year gaining experience: 1952-3; 1978-85*

Book

Supplemental Material

Overview of In at the Deep End

Harris, P. (2013) In at the Deep End. Impressions of farming in a year gaining experience: 1952-3; 1978-85. J Harris (privately published), pp240. ISBN 9780957519619 (includes essays of 41 students) Available at <http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/35835/>

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## **In at the Deep End: Impressions of a year gaining farming experience 1952-53 and 1978-85**

### **Paul Harris and 41 students**

Dr Paul Harris had a long and distinguished career as Lecturer in Agriculture at the University of Reading from the 1950s through to the 1990s and producing, amongst many other things, the classic text 'The Potato Crop' (Chapman & Hall, 1992, pp 909, ISBN 0412296403, 9780412296406).

Paul was always well regarded by our students and recognised by them, through the student newspaper, as one of the University of Reading's best lecturers in the period before such recognition became the norm in UK HE. He always took a close interest in the progression of agriculture students, exemplified by *In at the Deep End* (2013, ISBN 978-0-9575196-1-9) completed only weeks before his death in 2013.

The book describes a wide variety of students' experiences in their practical year prior to entering University to study BSc Agriculture. Until comparatively recently it was the normal requirement for all such students, whether or not they already had home farming experience, to gain a full year's experience of practical agriculture – and to write a report thereon. This record of 41 students' reports of the pre-entry year begins with Paul's own experience in the early 1950s before 41 reports from 30 or more years ago.

The essays provide compelling and fascinating stories, well-articulated with clear acknowledgement for most part of the humanity and the warmth with which each student was treated by farmers and farm workers alike, despite the difference in both age and experience (considerable!).

Paul tops and tails expertly with poignant comments about combining high agricultural productivity with care for soils, flora and fauna –not very different from what we would now call sustainable intensification.

The book is archived in the University of Reading repository (<http://centaur.reading.ac.uk/35835>) and can be downloaded freely.

The individual essays are fascinating and invariably 'a good read'. Through the medium of the internet, I hope the many authors acknowledged herein will be reminded of their youth and perhaps also a harder but kinder period of their lives. There are many "A\*s" to be awarded and whilst a year's experience doesn't compare with James Herriot's lifetime of experiences there are perhaps shades of "All Creatures Great and Small" 30-40 years on: for example, the cold.

'That winter was a true test of my enthusiasm, and although it occasionally thinned, it never died.' *Elizabeth White*

'..we suffered from quite bad snow, some days the diesel would freeze and then we couldn't clear the lane for the milk tanker.' *Linda Trehearn*

'Last winter was long and cold and left many experiences indelibly printed on my mind. Memories of the dark mornings when I woke at 4 a.m. cursing the alarm clock and staggered out into the snow and biting wind to find the roads blocked by drifts[.....]. As spring arrived such memories lost their sharpness.' *Penny Street*.

'Two very cold spells with temperatures as low as minus 10. One day even the milk froze in the pipelines and jammed everything and all the water pipes froze.' *Andrew Evans*  
'However the good days did make up for the bad 'Nature'll allus put it right' said the shepherd, most of the time and he was right. *V McAlear*

Warmer memories are also evident.

'The one thing that I've got out of the last five years is a total and utter adoration for my job which is one thing that very few people indeed can say they have.' *Joanna Lawton*  
'I realised that it was not a job at all but more a way of life. It was incredible how social, domestic and work spheres became totally integrated and how committed you become. It is a very good way of life though – totally rewarding and I learnt so much in the year.'

*Sara Brimacombe*

'My last day on the farm ended hot, hung-over and very, very exhausted, having spent it stubble burning. This called for the feet of Sebastian Coe, the conscience of Nero and a total lack of concern for personal safety. Oh, and a box of matches and a fork. Despite all this, I hope to be back next summer.' *J Franklin*

'I would far rather be a shepherdess in the Highlands of Scotland where I could savour the countryside around me than in an office or factory.' *Isabelle Pridgeon*

Thank you Paul for this poignant (see p. 241) and insightful compilation which is relevant also to today's students. And to Dr Ruth Urban and Dr Christopher Floyd in supporting Judy Harris to complete this lasting memory to Paul.

Professor Richard Ellis

Dean of Life Sciences

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