

Sedlescombe



We decided to move from Biddenden after twenty-one years. This was not because there was anything wrong with the farm. We had built a small barn and concreted a vast area all round the other barns. The land produced good crops of grass and wheat. We would buy scruffy looking lambs in Ashford market in the autumn and because our ground was clean from sheep, they did well and fattened in the spring, selling as one year old hoggetts. However when Mark died it was a devastating loss to both of us, and indeed to William. Eva wanted to get out of the house, and in any case found farm work very hard.

We had an offer for the farm which we accepted and we were looking at buying another at High Halden, but nothing suitable had come up. We found the farm in Sedlescombe but it had no house, and we decided it would be difficult to live in the village with a farm truck. It was only at the last moment that the vendor said they had

a cottage for sale as well, so we went for it. It was two miles from the farm but otherwise suitable, but small and in need of repair. We then signed the agreement to sell our farm in Biddenden.

As time was of the essence we asked our solicitor to get a move on and we completed the purchase in ten days. There was no need for a survey, as the house obviously needed considerable repairs. In fact during the twenty years we were there we put in new windows, floors and ceilings, central heating, an extension and a new garage. We also built a timber building fifty feet by twenty feet with rubberoid tiled roof and water laid on. We bought three acres of ground from a neighbouring farmer, Dave West. We planted special trees like an Indian bean and a tulip tree, several plum and apple trees and an asparagus bed. We had planning permission to build another house at Sedlescombe, but in the end never did.

I continued using an old car for shooting after moving to Sedlescombe, and also got permission from Pestalozzi to use the rifle on its one-hundred and seventy five acres.

I went to help a neighbouring farmer. He had ordered a secondhand barn about one-hundred and twenty feet by forty feet. This was on steel stanchions with a plastic corrugated roof. The crew who came to erect this were inexperienced. They started by digging huge holes for the stanchions using my JCB. This would've taken tons of concrete. They then, for some reason, cut off about two feet from each stanchion. Then obviously the stanchions were too short.

To overcome these difficulties brought on only by themselves, forty-gallon barrels filled with concrete were put in so that the tops were at ground level. The stanchions were put on the top but not yet fixed. The whole structure was erected, held together with fairly light purlins and roped at the ends to keep it together. One man decided to slacken the rope at one end to adjust the spacing. Suddenly the whole thing collapsed like a pack of cards, narrowly missing a caravan. Luckily no-one was hurt. The supplier got rid of that crew and brought in more experienced men who welded plates on the bottom of each stanchion and bolted these into the

concrete on the drums. Then it was okay. As this building had been brought all the way from Wales it must have been a money loser.

One neighbour had an open day with various events in aid of charity. One of these events was a terrier race. This neighbour was the local hunt master, so these were terriers used in the hunt for digging out foxes and were keen to fight. For the race a fox's brush was pulled down a track and ended up under a large piece of hessian. The terriers lined up at one end and when the brush started to move they were released. On this occasion there was a hole in the hessian, and when the first terrier got there the fox tail was partly visible through the hole. The terrier grabbed it, to be quickly followed by the others, and a wholesale fight took place. This was more exciting than the race. No dogs were hurt but one of the handlers got bitten by mistake.

We bought an old JCB for ditching when we were in Sedlescombe. This was very useful, also for loading manure from a heap, and cleaning the cattle yard at the end of winter. When the hurricane came in 1987 I also used this to help other people clear fallen trees. Sometimes it would not go into gear because the selector was rather worn. This happened when I was halfway across the main road and I had to stop. It would then not go into gear. The only way to do this was to take off the top cover from the gearbox. The bolts were not tightened down in case this was required. So I was halfway across the road, completely blocking it, and traffic, including a green line bus, had to wait. This machine wasn't actually roadworthy. The brakes were practically useless. When Dave West, our neighbour, borrowed it, he came down a steep slope on his farm and lost control, knocking the end of his van. I kept this JCB until moving to Herefordshire. I sold it on to Dave's son.

While at Sedlescombe we had visits from our Canadian friends and relatives. Rod and Elen came twice, and Pat and her daughter. When Ken and Cathy and their two daughters came they were okay with the low beams until the last day when they had all cracked their heads and were found sitting down holding them as some doors were very low.

Another Canadian visitor was Peggy Magnone. This lady had a shop in St John's, Newfoundland, and spent a lot of time going round antique and junk shops looking for things to take back. She found a lot of different items and had a job to pack them all in her bags. We sent her off with a taxi driver to Heathrow and asked him to take care of her and help her with her luggage, which he did. We always enjoyed visits from both home and overseas.

We first went to Newfoundland in 1990 to see the whales, which are there in July and August. They eat small fish called caplan. These fish come right onto shore to lay their eggs, and it is possible to scoop up bucketfuls of them. They are quite good to eat, being similar to whitebait but slightly larger. Our first trip out to see the whales was on an old fishing boat called the Scademia.

The sea was very rough and the weather extremely cold. In fact I think it was really too rough to go out. We never saw any whales, and couldn't catch any fish. There was a small ceremony on board called a screech-in. For this you had to drink some of the local brandy (which could make you screech!) and kiss a cod. As we couldn't catch any fish we had to kiss the Newfoundland dog instead, and then got a certificate. The next day we went further up the island and went out on the O'Brien boat. We saw plenty of whales which came close and certainly weren't afraid of the boat. The people in Newfoundland are very friendly, and the traffic is slow, and this attracted us to return year after year. We hired a car as traffic was easy.

