

Retirement and Pestalozzi Village

In 1990 when I was 64 I decided to sell the farm and retire, as my father had died at that age. I was keen on doing pottery and repairing furniture. However I soon found out that I needed to be out in the open air and decided to get a job. I applied for a job doing market research for a well-known company. This was part time and the idea was to be on call to go in for a day or so a week. Usually questions were asked on one particular product, for instance, "Was it good?" There was one questionnaire on Harvester eating houses and one on sauces, quite a difference.

We had to interview people from different age groups and marital statuses, and also different classes. I went to one very rough area when no one else wanted to go, the sort of place which had upturned cars in the front garden and fierce dogs. I knocked on one door and the woman who answered said "Come in!" when I told her what I wanted and showed my identity card. There were two women in the house and they were busy answering questions when a man entered. "Who is this and what does he want?" He demanded in a most aggressive manner. I told him what I was doing, whereupon he said "You're not wanted here." I replied "That's okay, I'll go." He then said "You may as well stay," turned the television on full and left the room.

It quickly became apparent why other people didn't want to do this area. Mostly people were quite pleasant and no doubt if I wanted to carry on I could have moved up the ladder, but I decided it wasn't for me.

Just then a position became vacant at the Pestalozzi Children's Village only a few hundred yards away from my house. A new director had just been appointed. I went to see him and told him he needed a farm manager who was experienced. At that time the two people running the farm did not seem to do very much. They only kept a few chickens, one or two pigs and about 20 sheep, and grew a few acres of corn. This new director was supposed to be

the answer to all of the problems of this charity, but in fact matters got considerably worse as there was a depression and donations were drying up. Fresh people were brought in at high wages, so the expense sheet gathered pace but the income didn't match it.

When I first went to Pestalozzi¹ I found the sheep dip was very badly designed and it was difficult to get the sheep in. We used to get regular visits from coach loads of WI members. One day one of these women was watching and asked "How do you get the sheep in if they don't want to go?" To which one of the lads replied "We kick him up the arse!" This no doubt gave the visitor an insight into country ways.

One of the younger Thai girls, who had a bad chest, collapsed with the fumes from the dip and had to be carried back to the house. Organophosphates were then being used in the dip and really no one should have been allowed near without proper protective clothing. I installed a better dip with proper race² and tipping devices. This was very efficient and the operators did not have to get splashed or be in any danger of falling in. This cost, with the gates, over £2000, but we were given a lot towards this by the Agricultural Mortgage Corporation.

Some of the children had altered their ages to be able to come to England and when asked how old they were they would reply "Do you mean my age here or my age at home?" Some of them were only eight years old, but came over as ten. One day I was having difficulty lambing ewes as my hands were a bit big for the job. One of the girls offered to do it and in fact managed it very well without any qualms. Where they came from they were expected to help from an early age.

Each Saturday the children were split into groups. Some went to woodwork, some to metalwork and a group of up to 15 of them to

¹ In 1947, the British Pestalozzi Children's Village Association was founded by Dr Henry Alexander, a German Jewish refugee who moved to the UK before the Second World War, and Mrs Mary Buchanan, a British sociologist. The Children's Village at Sedlescombe was established in 1959. The focus was to provide accommodation and education for deprived European and British children. This then broadened out to include children from all over the world. For more information visit <https://pestalozzi.org.uk/the-pestalozzi-story/>

² A footway the sheep walk through from the holding pen.

the farm. I tried to make things interesting for them and really enjoyed teaching them. Sometimes we went round the farm identifying trees, and sometimes we learnt different knots, with the co-operation of the local rope-makers Marley Ropes who gave us several pieces of rope and a diagram of knots.

One day I felt especially sorry for these kids, as although they were supposed to work on the farm, they had been at school all week and needed relaxation. So I showed them how to make bows and arrows. This would have been frowned upon by the director, who thought all pupils should work all day Saturday.

We grew about fifteen acres of barley. This was combined by Dave West and sold to SCATS Countrystores for feed. After two years of barley I put linseed in to change the crop. This grain was only grown for the subsidy, as there was very little sale for the seed, and in fact it was given away.

The greenhouses had to be repaired before use. These were then filled with tomato plants, which did very well. Also in the walled garden we put in a large block of autumn raspberries. There were already some blackberries and gooseberries, and about fifteen apple trees and three plum trees.

Pestalozzi Village was a difficult place to organise efficiently as there were so many different things to be taken into account, and finances were always on a knife edge. Often the village was only saved by a large legacy.

The farm couldn't make money because included in the cost was the grass cutting round the houses, fixing things for various events, taking one man's wages and the cost of machinery and fuel. Whilst I was managing the farm I taught several of the older boys to drive tractors and gave out certificates to successful pupils. After I left and was renting the ground, one boy, who hadn't passed, drove a Massey Ferguson down the steep slope out of gear. It gathered speed and went into a fence, over a small field, through another fence and hit a concrete block, nearly turning over the tractor. He then hit a parked car and stopped. The owner of the car had waited a year to get it in a particular gold colour. She was in the

offices at the time and was rather shocked and upset to be told that it was a bit bent. The Pestalozzi insurance paid out.

One year I dressed up as Father Christmas to take presents round to the children at Pestalozzi. Dick and I decorated the tractor and small trailer, then made a reindeer out of hardboard and painted it. No-one had wanted the job because it was going to be on Christmas Day. As I lived very close I volunteered and enjoyed doing it. My elf was Thupton, who had come from his native Tibet with the Dalai Lama and knew all the children much better than I did.



I managed the farm for several years, but then they decided to rent out the land. By this time the director had gone. There had been rumours that he was behaving inappropriately. Eventually he was found in bed with two African youths of about sixteen or seventeen, who he claimed he was 'comforting.' He had come from a job working at a college for boys, and when he left went on to work in a school in Africa. They lived in Pestalozzi village. When I asked his wife why they didn't live outside in Sedlescombe she said she would never see her husband - at his previous job he had always been with the boys and didn't come home much.

After this a new temporary man was appointed. I bought the sheep, which were on the farm, and also the sheep quota, which you had to have to get the subsidy. Unfortunately, although it was okay for a time, the sheep business went through a bad period and it was impossible to make money. In fact we lost money. We decided to sell up and move nearer to our son William and his wife Amanda. We had to sell our sheep quota and also the sheep. Both of these made a considerable loss.



Family Visitors - Rod, Eva, Jack, Ruth and Ellen