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Surrey Farming Personalities

R.A. Buer Esq. – Norney Farm, Eashing

Ron Buer came to Norney Farm in 1935 when he was 40, to spend many years founding and building the magnificent Jersey herd of which he is rightly proud.

However, the story began many years before 1935. Most of the Buer family was in the farming business except Ron's father, who was a Wine Importer. Ron Buer was born at Hackney in 1894. When he was about four the family moved to Twickenham, where their neighbour was Mr. Poupart (who now farms the neighbouring farm at Elstead).

One of a family of two boys and seven girls, Ron Buer was educated at Malden Cottage and Bruges, Belgium. At this time he was intent on being a Doctor (like his brother) but, by the time he left school in 1909, he had already decided against the medical profession. He thus became a pupil on a 400 acre farm under Professor W.J. Malden (formerly Principal at Wye). Twelve months on this farm was followed by eighteen months as a pupil on the 2000 acre corn growing farm in Oxfordshire (Messrs F.J. Honour & Sons) and three years on a 600 acre dairy farm at Thrapston, Northants. (Mr Stanley Hawkins).

In September 1913, his father took a 100 acre farm at Great Chesterford, Essex and Ron started to manage this farm. No sooner had the job begun than the war came and, whilst father looked after the farm, Ron joined the Hertfordshire Yeomanry and saw services in the Dardanelles, Egypt, Tunis and France. He was out of the Army in 1919, and in the same year the Essex farm was sold up.

This was followed by a move to take the tenancy of Royal and Guinea Farms, Elstead – just over 200 acres. Here Mr Buer milked a mixed dairy herd and kept a flock of ewes bred to Southdown Rams for fat lamb. In 1928, Ron Buer married the eldest of the seven daughters of Mr W.F. Weller of Amberley Farm, Milford. Their son 'Buster' was born in 1930.

Then the Buer family was presented with something of a problem. In those days there was no security of tenure, other than by lease, and the landlord wanted the house and farm. Consequently, Ron Buer found himself without a farm and, for three years, ran his milk round from his father-in-law's farm. This unsettling period came to an end in February 1935 when he took the tenancy of Norney Farm. This 68 acre farm was once part of the Eashing Estate, bought by the then Lord Middleton about one hundred years ago. The tenancy lasted thirteen years until 1944 when Ron bought the farm with 20 acres of woodland and scrub. This has all been reclaimed and the farm is now one of the 88 acres, owner-occupied and farmed largely by 'Buster'. Ron considers himself in semi-retirement.

The dairy herd – pedigree attested Jerseys – is the main enterprise on the farm. In 1935 Mr Buer took over 9 cows and 5 heifers which he promptly sold. He cleaned up the place, decided to go attested, and bought 5 good cows by You'lldo's Volunteer and a bull, St. Julian. The herd was based on these animals and line bred ever since. Now there are 40 cows and 30 followers, and the herd has contained and does contain the winners of many prizes.

Clearly, these cows do well on a variety of systems of management. Cows and progeny which have been sold in order to found or enhance other herds have produced very high yields under conditions of high level feeding. Not that there is anything wrong with yields on the farm of origin – far from it – but here the policy is the best yield possible from home grown foods with some limited purchases of protein concentrate. Cows are fed mainly off the farm with silage, hay and barley, and average 850 gallons of high butter-fat milk on this feeding.

Cropping is normally 20 acres barley, 10 acres kale and the rest in high yielding Lucerne leys.

Grassland is the predominant feature. The reader may be able to pick out in the distance, in one of the photographs, some field officers from the Grassland Research Station, Hurley, with whom Ron Buer works to mutual advantage. There are also trial plots for the N.I.A.B. on the farm. Good grazing, good silage and good hay bring a good deal of milk at comparatively low cost, and maintain 70 cattle on 88 acres.

One problem is to milk 40 cows in a cowshed for 20. The answer is simple. Bring 40 cows into a collecting yard outside the cowshed, and then let the first 20 in. A hook, a piece of rope and an iron bar outside the door, then direct the first 20 cows out and away from the rest when they have been milked. Move the rope as a cow leaves, and the way is clear for the second batch. Photographs show the herd on the way to the cowshed and in the yard. Maybe there ought to be a parlour – but in the interest on a piece of rope and an iron bar is somewhat higher!

The other enterprise is pigs – a dozen Wessex sows and a Large White Boar. At one time the progeny were fattened for pork, but are now sold as weaners. There are also 300 hens. The staff consists of one cowman and one pupil.

Ron Buer has a wide range of interests, apart from the N.F.U. such as the Surrey Grassland Society (founder Member), Jersey Society, Cranleigh and Thursley Farming Clubs. Several times the winner of the Surrey County Farms Competition in the class of small farms, and eight times winner of the similar competition in the Cranleigh & West Surrey Club. Since 1955 these prizes have been won by 'Messrs R.A. Buer & Son'. Eustace ('Buster') Buer married Wendy, second daughter of Mrs George Lyon (late of Orange Court Farm), and now has two children.

The farmhouse is an interesting 15th Century building which Mr Buer thinks must have been an inn at one time; part of the original property, no longer standing, might have been used for brewing ale, and the cellars are commodious.

Ron Buer is extremely keen on public relations. Both local and London schools visit the farm regularly – the local school every Monday afternoon (except when Mr Buer visits the school). The farm is known to schoolchildren much further afield as the basis of 'Stonebridge Farm' on the BBC Schools TV programme. The efforts of the Buer family in public relations do a great deal of good; may they continue. Certainly those children who are fortunate enough to visit the farm regularly will get a picture of good farming and warm hospitality which reflects well upon the farming community in general and on Ron Buer and his family in particular.