



THE MUSEUM
OF ENGLISH
RURAL LIFE



University of
Reading



Making Cheshire cheese in Nantwich, Cheshire, 1939

How did rural work change over the 20th century?

Working people's lives and stories

This resource explores the story of milk production as a particular case study. Your students will discover how war and government pressure to feed the country saw the cheese-making processes industrialised from the 1900s culminate with the introduction of 'Government Cheddar'. Students experience how physically tiring it was to hand-make dairy products at a time when workers used 'elbow grease' instead of machines. There are also opportunities to look more generally at rural work and tasks since the 1950s. Students will also experience the joys of celebrating annual traditional celebrations. Students can use the information they have gathered to write an imaginary diary or make an audio presentation.

UPPER PRIMARY | SECONDARY

Learning outcomes

By the end of this set of activities students will:

- have a better knowledge and understanding of what life is like, and was like, for people working in the countryside
- develop writing skills by writing a diary entry of a typical worker's day
- gain awareness of the impact of the seasons on farm work
- gain an understanding of Britain's plan and need for increased food production in post-war periods
- develop an insight into the processes and tools once needed to make dairy-based food products and how this changed over time
- develop investigation, evaluation and analysis skills.

Local facts on the importance of dairy for Reading

- The British Dairy Institute was based in Reading in the 1890s.
- Reading was a market town with important links to the dairy and agricultural industries.
- Dairy was a founding role of the University of Reading and it trained people in this and farming.

Pre-railway, dairies were found in towns and cities due to the short life of milk. Once railways appeared in the Victorian period dairies became rural as cows could be kept outside in the country with a better diet and more space. The coming of the railways enabled milk to be transported quickly. The image of green and pleasant lands with dairy cows is only a 19th/20th Century concept.

Post-war food production

Prior to the Second World War the Milk Marketing Board was founded to control milk supply and even prohibit restrict cream production. During the war food imports were low so domestic cheese-making was important. Farmers who had made cheese had to send their milk to industrialised plants known as creameries where it was made into cheese known as 'Government Cheddar'. Some farmers were concerned about this and viewed it as interference.

At the end of the war in 1945, the UK needed to maximize food production. Food rationing, including Government Cheddar, did not end until 1953. The government guaranteed prices for major agricultural products.

THEMES AND TOPICS

- Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world 1901 to the present day
- Social, cultural and technological change in post-war British society
- Local history study and a period after 1066
- Writing diary entries
- Industrial processes, making and understand where food comes from and seasonality.

LINKS WITH OTHER ACTIVITIES

This activity could also be used in conjunction with the 'How are different machines and objects, past and present, used in country life?', 'What industries have put Reading on the map?' and 'What was farming like before modern technology?' resources.

The 1947 Agriculture Act was passed and provided:

- stability for farmers through guaranteed prices and assured markets
- minimum prices for products such as milk for between two and four years ahead.

An agricultural expansion plan aimed to raise output from agriculture by 60% over pre-war levels. Given stability in prices and guarantees and lower labour costs due to increased mechanisation, farm incomes rose, giving farmers the confidence to undertake capital investments and utilise the latest technology.

The BBC's radio programme, *The Archers*, aimed to promote modern farming and was first broadcast in 1951 (see Gallery 5, Collecting Rural England).

Before your visit

- Read the character profiles of working people in the 1950s that are at the end of this document:
 - cheese maker (cottage/artisan worker)
 - farmer
- Students can sketch what they think they looked like and develop their drawings at the museum (the people photos featured in the character profiles are just examples).
Encourage students to spot these workers and their tools when they visit the museum, they could wear a sticker labelling their farm worker role.
- If you wish to adapt this resource to Lower KS2, read *Donkey's Busy Day* by Natalie Russell (Bloomsbury Books, 2009, ISBN 9780747595472). This is about taking over a farmer's daily tasks and doing chores on a farm. It can help with discussion and team working skills. It also has a healthy eating message with reward stickers.
- Give every child a glass of milk (take care to check for lactose intolerance issues or dietary preferences). It might be interesting to tell them about the 1946 Free Milk Act, which provided free milk to all schoolchildren. Talk about the nutritional benefits of milk. Together create a flow diagram of the dairy farmer's role in getting that milk to you the consumer using these steps so:
 - providing grass, water and shelter
 - caring for the health and wellbeing of cows by preventing disease and providing access to vets
 - ensuring safe movement of animals
 - milking cows every day

- storing milk safely
- arranging milk collection

Make your own butter!



Buttermaking, Berkshire, 1935

This is a simple practical science activity. It can form part of a pre-museum visit exercise which will demonstrate the need for tools and developing efficient methods in producing food and you can try the butter at the end. When you go to the museum find the butter churn.

Here is a link explaining the science behind your butter making, seriouseats.com/2014/10/the-science-of-whipped-cream-butter-creme-fraiche.html

You could play some farm-related songs to keep students motivated and thinking like a farmer! Or sing a dairymaid's charm:

Come, Butter, Come
 Come, butter, come;
 Come, butter, come,
 Peter stands at the gate
 Waiting for his buttered cake;
 Come, butter, come.

Purpose

Make butter using a jar and cream to emulate the churning process.

Prep time

5 minutes – pouring cream into jars.

Activity time

Shake for 5 – 20 minutes.

Resources

- Heavy or whipping cream
- Glass jar with lid
(x 15 for class of 30 – 1 per pair)
- Sieve

Step by step instructions

1. **Fill** your jar half way with cream.
2. Put the lid on tightly and **shake** it like your income depends on it!
If you hear sloshing it will be the buttermilk separating from the butter – so keep calm and carry on!
3. Turn the mixture into a cold, clean sieve and drain the buttermilk off well.

Top tips

- Baby food jars or preserve jars work well for bigger batches.
- Ensure your jars are sterilised. You could use a dishwasher or a microwave.
- Add salt if you wish and to your liking.
- Scones or homemade bread to slather the butter on and taste is optional! You could opt to use a bread maker.
- Students could design and make their own butter stamps from potatoes or collograph plate that could then be used to print from.
- The buttermilk can be used for baking or pancakes!

Visiting the Museum of English Rural Life

The Museum has a good range of collections related to the dairy industry. In particular we recommend exploring these two areas of the museum with your class:

Town and Country gallery: Dairy to Doorstep display

- Dairy to Doorstep tells the story of how milk from a cow was transported to your doorstep.

Forces for Change gallery

Find the image of Mrs Brown of Actrees Farm, Gloucestershire, in around 1950. Cheesemaking involves separating milk into solid curds and liquid whey using rennet, an enzyme found in calves' stomachs. Curds are broken up, heated, drained, placed into moulds and pressed. Some varieties are matured through wrapping, washing, brushing, or turning.

- Find out how farming was practised in the 1900s.
- Work out how tools were used – talk to a friend or a volunteer to help you. Act out by imagining how the tools were used and discuss with a partner. Was the work hard, easy, dull, skilled or repetitive? What other words would you use to describe the experience?.



Match the tool to the person's job in the 1950s and now

Then

Now

Ferguson tractor



Arable farmer

Cheese press



Cheese factory



Cheese maker

Butter churn



Butter factory



Butter maker

Salmon basket trap



Salmon farm UK



fisherman

Write a diary entry for one of the workers with a list of tasks for the day

The table below can help students create an exciting plot in the diary.

By using the 5Ws Story Maker Table below, students can mix and match Ws to create completely new ideas for the diary. For example:

There was no butter for dinner. It was dark but Betsy the oldest child ran to skim off the cream from the milk to make butter at home. There was an accident with the churn rolling down the steps of the farm but the farm cat licked up the cream.

Why	When	What	Where	Who	Who (number 2)
No food	Dinner	Butter	Creamery	Child	Landlord
Accident	In the dark	Milk churn	Factory	Farm dog	Farm labourer
Danger	Summer	Tractor	Field	Farm cat	Market seller
Weather	Snowing	Money	Farm	Government	Factory owner
Season	Wassailing	Fight	City	Customer	Aunty

- Make your own butter! (see page 3, Before your visit section.)
- After a visit, students could consider and mind map other ways to be more self-sufficient at home such as growing their own vegetables or herbs on a kitchen window sill.
- Students can 'interview' and record each other talking about their farm jobs.

Resources

- Sound recorder
- Hats
- Diary entries
- Worker 5Ws Story Maker Table

This could be used as a resource for discussion and as an introduction for other classes to enjoy. For students who have created a story table this could be used to build stories to tell.

When interviewing your fellow farm workers why not wear a hat or scarf to help you get into character?

Use your story table to inspire you.

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin black border, occupying most of the page. It is intended for a student to write or draw their response to the activity question.

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5Ws story maker table

why	when	what
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5Ws story maker table

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factory	farm dog	farm labourer
danger	summer	tractor
field	farm cat	market seller



5Ws story maker table

weather	snowing	money
farm	government	factory owner
season	wassailing	fight
city	customer	aunty

Children could record a soundscape e.g. record themselves shaking cream to make butter.

Example questions or prompts:

- What do you do most days?
- Where do you go for lunch?
- Tell me about the tools you use.
- How did you feel at the end of the day?
- Oral history homework – talk to your parents, grandparents or guardians about how they bought dairy products when they were growing up. Did they get them from the high street?
- Think about the farming year and the festivals that are part of it, such as harvest, May Day, Wassail and, these days, Apple Day. Discuss how the school holidays were planned to ensure children were available to help on the farms in work such as harvesting over a long summer holiday. Their labour would have been free.
- Encourage students to mind map contemporary jobs in the countryside. Are they different from those in the past? Students can watch the film on the webpage to look at countryside conservation jobs today and discuss the main purpose of the job and where this is the type of job they would like and why.



Our short 3.5 minutes film about Coombe Bissett Down, a Wiltshire Wildlife Trust nature reserve, on the webpage for this resource. The film shows reserve officer Ashley White (Wiltshire Wildlife Trust) and her colleague Dave Blake explaining in the field how they are reviving a rare chalk grassland habitat back to what it was like before it was ploughed.



Wassailing Song

There are several versions of this wassailing song. This one is based on text given in the *New Oxford Book of Carols* (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Oxford_Book_of_Carols). The verses are sung in 6/8 time, while the chorus switches to 2/2.

Here we come a-wassailing
Among the leaves so green;
Here we come a-wand'ring
So fair to be seen.

REFRAIN

**Love and joy come to you,
And to you your wassail too;
And God bless you and send you
a Happy New Year
And God send you a Happy New Year.**

Our wassail cup is made
Of the rosemary tree,
And so is your beer
Of the best barley.

REFRAIN

We are not daily beggars
That beg from door to door;
But we are neighbours' children,
Whom you have seen before.

REFRAIN

Call up the butler of this house,
Put on his golden ring.
Let him bring us up a glass of beer,
And better we shall sing.

REFRAIN

We have got a little purse
Of stretching leather skin;
We want a little of your money
To line it well within.

REFRAIN

Bring us out a table
And spread it with a cloth;
Bring us out a mouldy cheese,
And some of your Christmas loaf.

REFRAIN

God bless the master of this house
Likewise the mistress too,
And all the little children
That round the table go.

REFRAIN

Good master and good mistress,
While you're sitting by the fire,
Pray think of us poor children
Who are wandering in the mire.

REFRAIN

Character profiles **Cheesemaker Carole**



I have been making cheese on the farm for 20 years.
We are a small-scale cheese maker.

Who they work for	"I work on my own farm and sell to local people."
How many hours	"I work about 40 hours a week."
What is their pay	"My husband and I bring in enough to get by."
Appearance	"I am 65 years old, I have long grey hair which I tie in a bun. You'll always see me with an apron."
Characteristics (are they shy, loud, angry)	"I am a quiet person but cross about the changes to my work – I won't be making cheese much longer. I am not allowed to use 'farmhouse' to describe my cheese. I can't compete with the factories."
Family	"I live with my husband, another farmer, and our cat, Bobby."
Likes (food, people, tasks)	"Cheese. My community."
Dislikes	"Machines."
Hobbies	"Skittles. "

Character profiles **Farmer Len**



I come from a long line of farmers on this farm. Things are looking up for us with subsidies from the government which guarantee prices for my crops.

Who they work for	"This is my farm. I sometimes bring in labourers at harvest time."
How many hours	"I work about 55 hours a week."
What is their pay	"The farm brings in £15,000 per year. I am lucky I am not a tenant farmer, or I would see almost half of this go on rent."
Appearance	"I am 40 years old. I wear a flat cap in the rain and I always have my sleeves rolled up."
Characteristics (are they shy, loud, angry)	"I'm a hard worker and I am proud of my farm."
Family	"I live with my wife and two children and our working dog, Kim."
Likes (food, people, tasks)	"Trout from the river, my community, the pub."
Dislikes	"Bad weather as I can lose time and it stops me from doing some of my work."
Hobbies	"Kite flying at weekends."

MERL galleries

