

St Augustine's Centre, Halifax
English for Life in the UK

Season 3 - Episode 8 - Farming and Cheese-making in West Yorkshire
April 2022

(Music)

Mark

Hello and welcome to the podcast "**English for Life in the UK**". This podcast is mainly for people who want to improve their English by listening to native English speakers and, at the same time, to learn more about life in this country.

This episode may also be of interest to those people who just want to know more about the particular subject that we are covering. In today's episode, one of our team - Elsa - is interviewing a farmer and cheese-maker. These people come from a small town in Yorkshire, called Todmorden.

Although it is in Yorkshire, it's very close to the border with Lancashire - another large area on the western side of the north of England. The two individuals have quite strong accents which are a mix of the Yorkshire and Lancashire accents, but I think you will find them relatively easy to understand.

As usual we will produce a transcript of this episode which will appear on our website in a few days' time. You can find that at :

www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

and in this address, "Saint" is abbreviated to "S T". The transcript includes notes about some of the more difficult vocabulary and two of the words are picked up in our **Language Support** section, at the end of the episode.

So - now over to Elsa.

(Music) (2 minutes 34 seconds)

Elsa

Hello - this is Elsa from the podcast team. Welcome to another episode in my series: it focuses on the different aspects of food and drink in the UK. As an island nation, the UK has an evolving food tradition, going back over many centuries, especially from the 15th century onwards, when European ships were bringing spices and other new ingredients from all over the world.

Immigration has always played an important part of the food traditions in the UK and today this means that food from countries like India, Pakistan, Italy and China, are now a normal part of the

British diet, alongside more traditional dishes, like fish and chips¹ and shepherd's pie². Each region of the UK has its own specialities. And the area local to the St Augustine's centre, in Calderdale, is no exception.

In a previous episode, we heard about a family bakery business and in this episode we are meeting the owners of a small local farming and cheese-making business.

(Background animal noises).

Well, this morning, I'm up in the hills between Hebden Bridge and the border town of Todmorden. Todmorden is on the borders between Calderdale [West Yorkshire] and Lancashire. I'm delighted to be with two farmers - or one farmer and one cheese-maker. I have with me, Carl and Sandra - and they're going to tell us about their fascinating business as dairy farmers and cheese-makers.

So - I don't know who wants to start? Do you want to start, Carl and talk about the cheese-making? Or would you, first?

(4: 27)

Carl

We'll start with the farm. It's Sandra's family farm - we've been here since 1920 ... - what [when] is it?

Sandra

1926. Me, personally - I haven't been here since 1926! My family's been here since 1926. My grandad³ came as a tenant⁴. There's two "small holdings"⁵ together. He came as a tenant to Pex-tenement after the first World War and then, he bought it with his two sons in the 1950s, and then when my mum and dad got married, they bought Higher East Lee which is where we are now, where we milk the cows.

And unfortunately, both of the brothers have passed away⁶ but my brother and me carried on milking and then Carl started making the cheese.

Elsa

Pextenement is an interesting name. What's the history behind that?

Sandra

¹ the first "fast food" relatively cheaply bought, ready cooked, and so quick as a meal for working families often including the wife and mother, as women worked in the textile mills in large numbers.

² minced lamb in gravy, topped with mashed potatoes

³ grandad = grandfather

⁴ tenant = so he rented the land from the owner in order to farm it

⁵ small holdings = areas of land not quite large enough to be classed as farms but used in similar ways - supporting animals and food growing

⁶ passed away = a usual way of indicating "died"

Well - on and off⁷ it's been called that since the 1600s when it was built, but it has ... they have changed the names a little bit. Higher East Lee used to be Eastwood Hall and then they built Eastwood Hall, erm ...so they do change - but we believe that it means ... the "Pex" means "Pigs" and the "Tenement" means - a tenement, as in, a lot of people live there.

Elsa

Right, Ok.

Carl

In 1901, there were ten families lived in Pextenement.

Sandra

I don't know where they put them all!

Elsa

Well, We can just hear 3 or 4 calves - how old are they, these calves I can just see in front of me?

Sandra

They are ... erm ... between a week and two weeks old - they're babies.

Elsa

So, how many cows do you have on the farm?

Sandra

We have 60 that milk - obviously, not all at the same time. Some of them are waiting to give birth and we've got all the followers⁸ - probably about 30 - young ones, coming up.

Elsa

And what breed of cows are they?

Sandra

They are MRI - which is Meuse Rhine Issel - which is a Dutch breed and is named from where the three rivers meet, they come from there. And they are, strangely, they're really good on the hillsides, even though they come from a flat country. And the milk is very good for cheese- making. When we started having them - when we got our first bull, we didn't know that - we just wanted something that was different and sturdier.

⁷ on and off - sometimes it changed for a period and then went back to being

⁸ followers - unusual use of the word and presumed to be a farming term for cows which are part of the herd but not old enough to be productive

Elsa

You're what is known as - an **organic** farm; so can you explain for listeners, what that means?

Carl

Farming-wise, everything is done - traditionally done - without any chemicals, any additives. Farming-wise, you don't put anything on the fields.

Sandra

We don't use fertilisers. We're allowed to use ... erm, certain things - we have the soils tested - because our soil is quite acidic, we're allowed to use things like lime, if it's needed to bring the "pH" balance⁹ right. We can use seaweed - but we use mainly manure from the cows - it's a rotating, self-contained idea and it's what ... it's how farming always used to be, before all these extra things came in.

We're also PWAB - which is we produce milk without antibiotics. So our cows are not allowed ... - well, when you say, "not allowed" to have antibiotics, obviously if they're ill, they would do, but they would have to come out of the milking herd, if that was the case. They would have to stay and rear calves or something, if they've had any antibiotics at all. Because the way the world is going with antibiotic usage - in that, if it's used too widely, it no longer works.

(8:03)

Carl

And cheese-wise, we've got to - we're organic - ... certified with "Organic Farmers and Growers" - as the farm is - we've got a producer's licence. So we've got to prove that everything that goes into that cheese is **organic**. From the milk, is 99% of it, we get certain bacteria and **cultures**¹⁰ from France - they're all certified **organic**. Things like the water: we have to have the water tested, to prove there's no chemicals that can get into the cheese, from there. So it's quite a process, as a producer, doing **organic** products. And we have an inspection once a year to go through all this - and it takes a full day to get through it.

Elsa

You're quite a small farm - presumably, that presents particular challenges - particularly today, with all the regulations and bureaucracy?

⁹ pH balance - is a measure of the acidity or alkalinity in the soil

¹⁰ Cultures - see the Language Support section of the podcast, towards the end

Sandra

Yes. It is quite challenging - and as you say, there's not economies of scale - but there are economies of scale for the big farmers - everything that we do they have to do as well, but obviously - they can have four or five farms and they will only have to do it once. You know - it is quite - there is quite a burden of paperwork and regulations and things. My brother's always trying to say, it should be different for smaller farms, just like it should be different for smaller shops or whatever. But everybody needs the same ... all the same certification needs.

Elsa

Have things changed since the UK left the European Union? What we call Brexit?

Carl

On the cheese - there's no difference at all really because we get the milk from the farm and we sell the cheese within a thirty mile radius of the farm, so we don't export or we don't particularly import anything, to make the cheese. The **cultures** come from France but the supply of those has not changed at all, since Brexit. So nothing really changed. The farm is slightly different with the OMSCO - the milk co-operative

Elsa

So OMSCO is the cooperative that you sell the milk to?

Sandra

Yes - the Organic Milk Suppliers [Co-operative] - and they were sending milk - organic milk - to France and other continental countries as well and I believe there was quite a difficulty with that, at first. But, all those things, I think, have been over-ridden by Covid and the thing - the war in Ukraine, is the thing that is going to be most difficult, I think. So much of the - well, not just animal feed and 'person-feed'¹¹ - comes from the Ukraine and Russia and I think that's going to effect everything much, much more. It's going to be much more serious, I think.

Elsa

We're living in difficult times I think.

¹¹ person feed - this is not a usual expression but Sandra has used it as a quick way of including agricultural produce as well as farming supplies in what she is saying about imports from the Ukraine

Carl

Yes - the pandemic. As a cheese-producer, within a few days of it starting - the orders went completely berserk - the on-line shop with people buying locally things, because they were all stuck indoors¹². We spent day after day supplying cheese direct to peoples' houses. And the wholesalers - our wholesalers supply organic shops and those type of things - and the demand from them increased dramatically, during the pandemic.

Elsa

Can you tell me a little bit about the history of your cheese? Before we started this conversation, you took me into the cheese-making area and you showed me this wonderful exercise book that you have with the recipe.

Carl

Yes - we found it in a drawer - with all the old things that are stored on a farm - because nothing ever leaves a farm - we've got exercise books written out by Sandra's great aunt¹³ - what's she called?

Sandra

Annie

Carl

So, great aunt Annie - who wrote everything down. There was a recipe for cheese which ...- it was written out as a recipe for French cheese but they never used a French white mould, so the cheese that they made was similar to Lancashire, Cheshire-type cheese, Wensleydale or those type of things. They used to make those on the farm in the 1920s - it all died out in the 1940s.

Elsa

I think that's interesting because I see your products like Brie, in my local shops, as something I would connect with France.

So I was really interested to hear your explanation that there was a tradition here that was perhaps long forgotten.

¹² stuck indoors - at the start of the Covid pandemic, the UK government imposed a lock-down, which prevented people from leaving their homes for trivial reasons and many social and public activities were stopped.

¹³ Great Aunt - a relative who is an aunt to one generation is known as a great aunt to the next generation in the family. Similarly - grandparents are great-grandparents to the following generation.

Carl

Yes - I don't know where they got the French recipe from, but they did, and they wrote it out in the 1920s. That's basically what we make now. A few little tweaks on it - we actually get the mould from France and we make the white-moulded cheeses.

Sandra

I think all over the world though, farmers started making cheese. They started developing just to preserve the milk for a little bit longer - and I think things grew in different places without people knowing what other people were doing.

It's like you've got ¹⁴Feta haven't you - and we make a product called Pexo Blanco which is based on a South American recipe for *Queso Blanco*¹⁵, which is similar to halloumi, which is similar to paneer. And all these places would be making this product to preserve the milk, not knowing that the other side of the world were also making this product.

(13:28)

Elsa

Which is a really interesting example, for our audience? People who have come to the UK from all over the world and often listening to these podcasts around the world.

Carl

The reason that we make this thing called *queso blanco* which is a South American version of halloumi and paneer, is because to make it organic, it needs [to put] an acid in it to solidify the milk. It's much easier to get organic white wine vinegar which is what we use, in South America, than it is to get organic lemon juice, which is what they use in India, to make paneer. So we chose to make the South American version, simply because it's easier to get the organic products. That's entirely why we did that.

Elsa

So where do you sell your cheeses? You've mentioned on-line and local shops.

Carl

Yes - we have an on-line shop so that sells direct to the public. Most of the cheese goes to two wholesalers - one's called "Organic North" - based in Manchester, that supply all organic shops and restaurants, throughout the UK. And the other one is called

¹⁴ Feta - from Greece; Halloumi - from Cyprus; Paneer - from the Indian sub-continent

¹⁵ Queso Blanco - Spanish for "White Cheese"

"Wellocks": they supply restaurants. So - the main two cheeses that we make - the Brie and the Blue cheese - the vast majority goes to those two wholesalers and gets distributed then, throughout the UK.

And we do lots of - we're not doing as many as we did - but we do markets and food festivals and things.

Sandra

And we supply local shops.

Carl

Yes - and we supply local shops. Todmorden, Hebden Bridge, - it's everywhere in local shops.

Elsa

Hopefully, soon we will all be able to go to local markets and food festivals.

Carl

Yes - they are picking up¹⁶ a little bit. Before the pandemic and things, we sold ... the vast majority we sold was actually out at food festivals, direct to the public, and it all switched around during the pandemic. The wholesalers started selling a lot more.

Elsa

So how many people do you employ here?

Sandra

On the farm, there's my brother and I - we had an apprentice who's just finished¹⁷ so he's doing a little bit ... carrying on, doing a little bit for us. We've got a work experience¹⁸ girl who's at university who's ... you might have seen today, in passing - when she's home¹⁹, she works for us. Other than that, that's it.

¹⁶ picking up a little bit - becoming more frequent

¹⁷ apprentice - signs a contract with an employer for a specific period and programme of training with an organisation and "finished" indicates that period has come to an end.

¹⁸ people learning a trade might work for no wage or a very small payment to improve their experience of the real working environment - often in white-collar roles called "interns".

¹⁹ home - this means outside of university term-time when she is not available for work

Carl

And on the cheese, there's just me and a part-time assistant and Sandra does part-time on the cheese, as well. So basically, me and two part-timers, on the cheese.

Elsa

Typically, how many cheeses a week, or a month, do you produce?

Carl

We make cheese six times a month - we used to do 400 litres. I think over the year - we make between 2000 and 3000 kilos. Which is very, very small for a cheese maker. It's .. we could scale it up a little bit - but everything is just set for that type of volume.

Elsa

You have such a loyal following, locally - it's really delighted local people, that there is a cheese that comes from these hills.

Sandra

There's still quite a few people that don't know about us, that live locally.

Elsa

Hopefully,

Sandra

Every time we do something locally, somebody will say "oh, is this made in Todmorden?"

Elsa

Just because our audience are not English-speaking, as a first language: your accents - would you say you are typical of Lancashire accents?

Sandra

Well - here, from here accent - I was born here.

Elsa

This is interesting because it's border - we're very close to Yorkshire - well, we are in Yorkshire - are we technically in Yorkshire, here? But within a mile or so, two miles, into Lancashire.

Sandra

Yes - and their accent is very different there, aren't they [isn't it]?

Elsa

Absolutely, yes.

Sandra

I think my accent changes a little bit with the people that I'm with. Before I came back to the farm-working, I used to work for what was then Halifax Building Society and I worked a lot of people from Rochdale²⁰ and my accent changed very, very much, then, because I was with them all the time.

Elsa

It's interesting how we adapt to the people we're with.

Carl

We've basically got this unique accent in Todmorden - there's nothing like it.

Sandra

Well, it's an amalgamation I think of ...all of the people who have come to us from all different places. I mean Hebden Bridge, particularly, has got a lot of people who originated from the south of England, because there were incentives to get people to come to Hebden Bridge, because Hebden Bridge was a dying town, at one time. And so in the '70s [nineteen-seventies] a lot of people came from many areas of the country and abroad.

Elsa

This is great - you've such an interesting story - I mean, I've been aware of you - but I didn't know all the real details - particularly, the French heritage, behind the cheese and the history of it. I really appreciate your spending time, at a busy start to your day - milking time - happening around us.

Carl [is] about to start cheese-making, I think, are you?

Carl

²⁰ Rochdale - a significant Lancashire town near the Yorkshire border

Well, we've got a wholesaler about to come and pick some orders up. I've got to get all my order ready, this morning.

Elsa

Well, that's great. Thank you so much.

Carl and Sandra - Thank you.

(Music) (18:50)

Mark

Language Support

This is the part of the podcast where we choose some of the words or phrases from this episode and talk about them. Today, I'm going to pick up on two words that had a very particular meaning, in this episode, but which also have other broader meanings. And in this section, I'm going to provide a rather simplified version of these different meanings.

So the first word is **organic**. Now, in general terms the word **organic** usually means relating to, or obtained from, living things. In this episode, we were talking about organic food - that is food which is grown without the use of synthetic - that's man-made - chemicals, such as pesticides and fertilisers. To claim that food is **organic**, the product must be certified by an official body - that is, an official body will check that it meets the necessary criteria. There are many organic certified bodies in the world, most of whom work closely with each other. The best known organic certification body in the UK is The Soil Association²¹ - in this episode, we also referred to an association that was in America and there are also European ones.

However, the word **organic** can also have another meaning: we can talk about a business or an activity of some kind being **organic** - and what that means is: that it grows naturally - it develops within itself, without lots of outside influence, so you could say that a business was growing organically, meaning that over time, it developed naturally, within its own resources.

The second word I'm going to choose is **culture**. In this episode, we were using culture as part of the cheese-making process. **Cultures** are a group of bacteria introduced to the milk to make a particular type of cheese. And each type of cheese has its own **culture** - in many cases, these cultures go back many generations, as in the case in this episode.

²¹www.soilassociation.org

However, the word culture, as I'm sure you know, has other meanings as well. You can talk about the **culture** of a society or a group of people; so that's about the ideas, customs and social behaviours that are most common amongst that group of people, or society. You can talk about Western culture, for example. Or you can talk about the culture of an organisation.

And then there is the use of **culture** in an artistic sense. So we can talk about the arts in the broadest sense, as being cultural. So you can talk about the cultural activities of a society that often refers specifically to the arts - visual arts, music, sculpture, architecture - a whole range of artistic activities, can be generally described as culture.

Music (23:42)

Mark

That's it for this week. I hope you've found this episode useful. A reminder: that you can find the transcript, in a few days' time, on our website and that is also where you can find out more about the work of our charity, which supports, in particular, asylum seekers and refugees and - if you are in a position to do so and would like to donate or help us, in any other way - you can find out how to do this, on the website.

That address again is: www.staugustinescentrehalifax.org.uk

Goodbye for now - take care of yourselves and keep practising your English.

(Music) 24:55 (ends)