

Deeply Rooted in the Landscape

In a world increasingly dominated by urban sprawl and digital technology, a new book by photographer **Robin Mills** offers a fascinating insider's view of country life in Dorset.

In a Foreword to Robin Mills' *Deep Roots: An Insider's Photographs of Dorset Country Life*, which has just been published by Tanyard Publications, the highly respected journalist Kate Adie asks readers to take a close look at those who live on the land, those who carry tradition and knowledge in their way of life. She speaks of 'traditionalists, characters, innovators' and 'people wedded to a quiet, vital way of life.' Many of them are here in Robin's book. But it is the words 'vital way of life' that bring home the reality of Kate's impression.

Over the more than two decades that Robin Mills has been contributing to this magazine, we have seen the lives of people in and around the Marshwood Vale come to life through his lens, as well as through the fascinating conversations he has had with so many interesting people. He has contributed a wealth of stories from our collective human journey and captured them one frame, and one paragraph, at a time.

In *Deep Roots*, Robin has compiled a selection from his archive of photographs that have not yet been published, and also included a few of those that have appeared on these pages in the past. He has also

shared memories from some of the people that have farmed the land, those whose experience of this 'vital way of life' highlight the closeness of community ties, where families worked together to harvest crops or tend to the land.

For many rural areas, farming was not merely an occupation but a way of life that influenced social structures, economies, and the environment.

John Morris, a farmer from Sydling St Nicholas, remembers how 'In Father's day we were farming for production. Nothing else.' Today he is 'grasping the challenges of going the environmental route on the farm' and is enjoying the process of seeing the changes in wildlife.

In days gone by, Will and Pam Best from Manor Farm in Godmanstone grew organic wheat and saw their own organic milk sold from Penzance to Inverness. They had three vans on the road and a team of drivers but decided the food miles were 'completely ridiculous'. Today they have a few beef cows which Will says are important for the bird life on the farm.

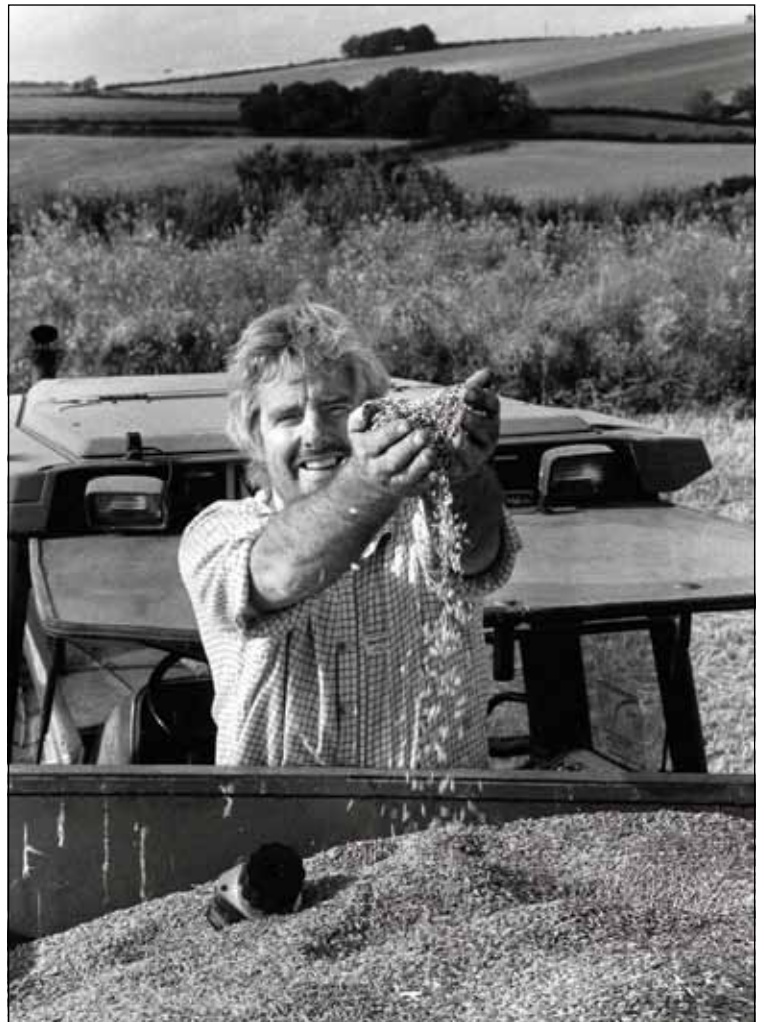
Jim Goddard, a farmer and steam engineman from Forston, remembers long days getting to and from



DEEP ROOTS

An Insider's Photographs of Dorset Country Life

By Robin Mills



*Above: Deep Roots: An Insider's Photographs of Dorset Country Life
Right: John Morris' Oats, Huish Farm, 2007
Below: Ed Rich and Sandy*



steam fairs and taking back roads. 'We were a bit too slow for some car drivers' he says.

Deep Roots provides a sense of continuity and belonging, linking the present to the past through faces, landscapes, and shared experiences. In a world increasingly dominated by urban sprawl and digital technology, the value of these photographs, documenting the simpler, slower-paced life of the past becomes even more pronounced. Robin's images offer a visual chronicle of daily activities and the people behind them, providing insight into the rhythms of rural life that have shaped and sustained communities for generations.

In his introduction, Robin says he wanted to attempt to document the characters and events which, only 20 or so years ago, seemed to be a feature of the Dorset countryside. Something that modernisation was fast eliminating. That ambition, over time, has coalesced into this selection of photographs. He describes it as an attempt to portray the essence of what it means to be a country person, someone for whom life in the city would be no life at all.

Deep Roots offers one man's view of people, not just farmers, whose lives are embedded in the countryside. As Robin says: 'Common to them all is their rootedness in the landscape they live and work in; their lifestyle, which although widely variable, identifies their belonging.' The other striking common identity is one of independence within the wider community.

Deep Root is an immersion into a shared heritage, an invaluable reminder of our community's cultural identity.

Deep Roots: An Insider's Photographs of Dorset Country Life has just been published by Tanyard Publications. To order a copy at £25 + £3.50 p&h, either email Robin at robins.mills72@gmail.com or telephone 07976 154101.





Alan Brown, Hurdle Maker, Waterston, 2017
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