

The Faces Behind Our Food

Interview with Spud Club members at Claver Hill Community Farm: Steve Jenkins, Caroline Jackson, Joy Warren, Kathy Barton, Victoria Frausin, Dionysios (Dennis) Touliatos, Andrew (Andy) Kay, Lorraine Grisedale & Patsy

Interviewer: Anna Clayton

Duration: 31 minutes.17 seconds

Date and time: 9th October 2016 3:00pm

Location: Claver Hill community farm, off ridge lane, Lancaster

Time (minutes.seconds)	Interview transcript
0.01	<p>Interviewer in bold, Spud Club members in normal type Interjections in [square brackets], other sounds and notes in (these brackets)</p> <p>OK, we are going. So can one of the owners introduce you and tell us a little bit about how Claver Hill came to be.</p>
0.12	<p>Joy: Well it was... I wanted for a long time to grow vegetables. And I used to brainwash Caroline every time we went to a writing class. And then one day she rang me up and she said "I have found our land". [hmmm] And that was the beginning. Caroline?</p> <p>Caroline: Um, yeah. I'm Caroline. Yes, I was, erm, idly looking on the internet for somewhere else to live and up popped 35 acres of land off ridge lane. And I thought 'I can't believe this', it had been on the market for a year and nobody had bought it. And that's when I just emailed. And that's what happened. Joy emailed back and said 'yes!' and we went to look at it, and it took us a whole year to buy it. [hm] So after, at the end of that year it was summer 2013. 2013? [yeah, yeah]. And we came here in October and, I don't know how, but we had put the word round – would anybody else like to join us. And we came to this field which we had decided would be a project field which would be given to charity and it was a bare field [mmm], and us and two people off the Ridge who came. Ummm, and we started digging. We didn't quite know what we were doing to say the least. And that is how it started- October 2013.</p>
1.39	<p>Kathy: It was a bit before then. Cause you got the land in August and Joy and I were down here in September weren't we? [hmmm] Picking up rocks!</p> <p>Joy: saying, we had a whole year buying it before</p> <p>Kathy: I know September 2013 is when we came down here picking up rocks.</p> <p>Joy: In that case we started in 2012 [yeah] then- we started trying to buy [Kathy: trying to buy it but yeah].</p> <p>Joy: It wasn't our fault. It was just red tape and awkward people who stopped us getting it. Right?</p>
2.03	<p>Caroline: And then we spoke to Alan Schofield about it, I asked a friend of mine who is a farmer, to come and look at the land before we bought it. And he dug a hole and he said "it's quite good land" [hmmhm] "but compacted and it needs work on it". And so we spoke to Alan who said it needed ummm deep, deep [Joy: mole ploughing], mole ploughing yeah. I can't remember... anyway, and so we got a farmer- Joy managed to find a farmer to come and do that for us - and then</p>

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	to seed with a mixture of rye grass and, well grasses and clover. And that was the first thing we did. And that's. that was the rock removing which Joy and Kathy did endless rock removing on a very, in a very hot summer- wasn't it?
2.54	Joy: yeah. And, and I would never recommend it to anybody- it's far too big a job for two ladies and one or two men helping occasionally. And er, when we finished, or finished as much as we could, somebody told us of somebody nearby who would have done it for us very cheaply [hmmm]. As you do! [Caroline: you learn, a lot]. [OK]
3.15	Ok, so Claver Hill is very different now. So, a few years have gone by. So what is Claver Hill? Would somebody else like to – say Kathy? What is Claver Hill? Steve: Well we are sitting here in the polytunnel of the Claver Hill project field and the field is a what, 5-6 acres of slopping land which is sub-divided into a number of different community projects now, which is amazing. It's still developing; there is still a lot to do. But it is quite remarkable how the ground has transformed. Ummm, I first got involved... I'm Steve and I first got involved when, I think it was Joy, and or Caroline... I think Joy approached me asking me to get involved in the Spud Club project. And I was really interested. I was looking for a, buying some land for myself to er, to have a 'no dig' area for myself, so I started to get involved in that. But, just around, not long after that, the, the project money for the polytunnels was all happening as well. And that I thought was a really important project because it really brought a lot of us together, working together as a more coherent team. So that was just fun coming and working with other people- building something together that, you know, just being lead on that and working on that together.
4.42	Caroline: we'd have to say thought that-that wouldn't have happened without LESS. [Steve: no. that's true]. Because, erm, Tom helped us work through the whole business of putting together erm a Lottery bid [indeed]. And, I think that without him we'd have found it difficult to get it, get it all right. And they did, did some work for us on, you know our area and consultation and so on, and the result of that was we had the funding then for the, for one polytunnel. And then, he was really good, he let us piggyback the second one, which was paid for separately. So we got two polytunnels which has meant lots more flexibility not to mention drainage. I don't know about the rest of you but I learnt that what's beneath the land is as important as what's on top [Steve: absolutely]. Ummm. And drainage has been a big issue. [Hmmm]
5.35	Kathy: And I don't think that we could have put it together ourselves without Robin and Tom giving us the guidance and the support in actually putting it up. They were experienced in doing this type of polytunnel and ummm, it's quite complicated really when you start thinking about how many holes you have to drill, and how many screws and nails... Steve: but it was a really good way for us to get to know each other [mmm] and to get to work together and to get to trust each other and so that when we are then out growing food and making beds, it's so much easier working together. But we did a lot of learning about what we were like (laughs). So it was a lot of

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	<p>fun doing that [hmmmm]. And it built a lot of ummm...(inaudible) Caroline: in fact...Kathy and I would probably never forget lying on the plastic along that side in a hugely high wind... Steve: some of us will never forget seeing you lying there! (laughs). Caroline: holding the plastic down whilst everyone else was 'bang, bang, bang'. As everybody else is trying to get it fixed down on the other side. It was very funny, erm, but als, a bit scary. But yeah, it was good working together on that.</p>
6.41	<p>Steve: So I remember at the start of Spud Club, we got together with Geoff, with a metre that could measure the ground, and banging in posts – marking the corners of the Spud Club site. And I've just today, several years later, taken one of those posts out that marked the corner. Because actually we didn't need it there anymore [Hmmm]. [And]. How long ago? Joy: It wasn't seven years ago, it was four. Steve: I didn't say seven. [[Joy: oh!] [Caroline: it was less than four]. [Steve: it was less than four. I said three or four years ago, didn't I?]. [anyway...] Caroline: It was another hard thing to learn – how do you measure ground? You look at it- well that's a big bit and that a small bit, but how big is it? And yeah, Geoff was really useful because he had this metre and he could explain to us how to do it. [OK]</p>
7.32	<p>And so Spud Club is one of the projects that is based at Claver Hill. How many members does Spud Club have now Kathy? Kathy: It's very difficult to tell because different people, if you're talking, some people are paid members and some aren't paid members but they still come. Erm, I mean we average about at least 20 usually on a weekend, erm but there are more volunteers than that. But some come at different times. So we are probably up to about 30 members.</p>
8.00	<p>And, what do Spud Club members get out of being a member? What's involved? Victoria: We get together and um, we work together and learn about how to grow things, how to cook them as well. And we have a nice cup of tea with cakes and we get our produce. So it's a lot- it's really good. [And that's, is it £10 a year?] Yeah, £10 per year. [And then you take as much as you want?] Yes, as much as, and as much as we have as well. I mean sometimes we have more. But um, sometimes we only work and work. But it is nice just being here as well. [Kathy: and we get a lot of parties as well]. Yes.</p>
8.48	<p>Joy: The ah, the important thing is that all seeds and tools- everything is paid for. So it's actually a very good bargain- it's a lot cheaper than allotments so you get advice and everything you need- we must be crazy! (laughs)</p>
9.05	<p>So everyone here is a member of spud club. Can I just go round and ask one thing that you enjoy about coming here and one thing that maybe isn't as good? Dennis: I enjoy community and, I don't enjoy the rain (laughs). [Cause Greeks melt in the rain?] Yeah (laughs) [we've noticed!] Steve: Um, I would say community, friendship. All of the new friends that we've</p>

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made. But I just love growing food anyway. So I would come for that, but I just love growing food. Something that I don't like? (sigh) Um, yeah, um, sometimes, sometimes the friendship can be difficult. (yes, laughs) So sometimes I love it and sometimes, oh god, its hard work! (laughs)

Victoria: Um, the thing I like most is sharing, I mean sharing everything-knowledge, um cakes, vegetables. Um, and the thing I like less is, well sometimes yes, as he says, it gets difficult. But weeding is the worst thing for me (laughs). [Steve: weeding?] (Laughs).

Caroline, what do you enjoy most about coming here and least? Um, just coming to Claver Hill- just being out in the countryside. I know we are right next to a housing estate but it feels like you are in the countryside. Watching birds um, listening to them. Hands in the soil- I love that. And yes, it's just a privilege just to be able to do it. What do I like least...people. Not people... people but, but sometimes people assume that if you are the one that owns the place, you ought to sort out the things that are most difficult. And so you go away every time thinking - oh I've got to do this and I've got to do that. Um, and I guess Steve probably feels a bit like that too sometimes. You know, it's that leadership bit, means that sometimes intractable problems like how to get a tyre off a wheelbarrow can really depress you when you are on your way home. But, it passes.

Andy? Um, I was attracted by a new way of working, of growing vegetables. I have had allotments before, but this is a way, a new, kind of developing a new way of working um, the bonus for me coming here was actually, yeah, it was a bonus – the friendships and the learning that comes with, with being with people who are experienced with growing. Which, you don't get that with if you just have an allotment. Um, and also, you know, it's also part of a vision, of a different way of producing food. Of a different way that we can look at running our economy. Um er in much more synchrony. But coming away, you get a...if you work indoors or you work on an ordinary, er, job that involves cars, a desk or anything like that. This is a great antidote to all of that because you are, as Caroline say... the birds..you are connected and you come away with a real, a real boost. That connectedness with the ground, the growth, and the nature and the things around it. [**Least?**] Least? Wind and rain yes. Trying to hold onto a um compost toilet that was er, yes, was blowing away. (laughs). Er, that was (laughs) yes (laughs). Yeah, as I say least, um there aren't really any leasts I don't really think, about it. I mean, you know, you do experience full different seasons here. So sometimes you do get wet and cold. But then, you know, that's just part of being really in touch with the seasons, which I don't think we tend to do out there much. People tend to go into the houses and cocoon so...

OK, Joy, what do you enjoy most and least? Least of all, er, is when I can't lift things- I'm not strong enough- and I want to get on and do things and I can't- I've got to go and look for someone stronger and that usually means a man, but they are all lovely anyway. All of the people that come on here - I think there is something especially nice about er, people that grow. It's just a special fellowship. The thing I like most is nature. In the evenings, because I am very, very often the last to leave, and at at dusk. When the erm sun is going down and the skies around here are just magnificent. And I like to stand by the gate and just have a look round. Erm, and the birds. Erm, yeah, yesterday I saw a grey wagtail er, there are loads of pheasants- we've had two in the polytunnel on

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	<p>occasion (they weren't welcome). We've got frogs and toads and we try to encourage them because they eat the slugs. And I want to praise Rachel, whose not here, because she can pick them up, and Chime, they can pick them up- even the great big huge ones with the orange skirts- they can pick them up and take them away. And I wouldn't do that for a king's ransom. (laughs)</p> <p>Kathy? There's hundreds of things that I really like about the place. Um I love just being able to have a free supply of fresh veg. Being vegetarian that's just a bonus upon bonus. I like the friendship, I like the learning. I like the nature, the fresh air, the exercise. But, um, I suppose the thing I like, one of the things I like the least is that um, I love it so much and I really want it to look good and I come down here maybe four times a week and I get too tired (hmmhmm). And my body aches, and I'm tired and, you know, I just do it. But, I don't like the fact that I'm getting too old really. And you can't do everything you used to do when you were 20. (laughs)</p> <p>Lorraine? Umm, I love the community side of things. I live alone and so everything is down to me in my garden and my home and I just like coming up here and being with a group of people – learning from them, sharing with them and it's just a really joyful part of my life. It's just five minutes from where I live and, ummm, I've had quite a lot of back problems over the last few years and like I wasn't going out at all very much- apart from going to work and coming home. And I eventually made it up here after wanting to come for about 12 months. And I eventually got here and it um, it's, it's really quite enriching. [What do you enjoy least?] Er, well I guess dynamics sometimes can get a little bit... you know, when you get a group of people anywhere there is going to be issues. So that's a bit taxing sometimes but, you just... I'm just very grateful to be part of, to be part of it.</p> <p>Patsy, what do you like most? The people. And I like coming down to help everybody and see the different vegetables all through autumn and winter and coming back, coming back each time. There's nothing I don't like about it, nothing at all. (laughs) [Great].</p> <p>Victoria: can I say something that I forgot? [Yes]. I came here for the first time when they were putting up the polytunnels. And although I had been maybe here in the UK for, or in Lancaster for three years, only when I got here I felt, um, part of a community. So it was my way, as a foreigner, to be part of something in the UK. So, that was really important to me. And it gave me lots of support to do all the things as well, so, yeah. That was, well actually that was the most important thing for me about Claver Hill. [Hmmm, thank you].</p>
<p>17.25</p>	<p>Ok. And so up here you grow food in quite an unusual way- you use a method called no dig. Can someone, I am looking at Steve, can you tell us a little bit more about that. What is no dig?</p>
<p>17.37</p>	<p>Steve: Ummm, well I became quite evangelical about no dig. I have actually, I've grown vegetable for about thirty years. And after about twenty five years I got actually quite despondent. I was an organic grower, I had done course on Permaculture, and I always felt really dissatisfied with the results. And then I went on a course with Charles Dowding, who is a commercial grower who grows using 'no dig'. And the very first thing he said was 'if you have to remember one thing, disturb the soil as little as possible'. [hmmm] And he had the most beautiful</p>

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	<p>vegetable garden that I have ever seen.</p> <p>So what do we do? Ummm, it related to what I learnt about Permaculture and about organic growing. The idea was to mimic what a forest does, put things on the surface of the soil, let the worms and the life in the soil do the work and provide the nutrients for your plants. By doing that- by not turning the soil- you are not compacting it, you are encouraging the life in the soil to help and aid and support the growing of the food. So, put simply, that is what we do. We, once a year, we try and add a couple of inches of composted manure. Ummm that provides a mulch which will hold in water, provide nutrients. The worms do the work incorporating it, and we can concentrate then on growing plants- putting plants into the soil. And its enabled us to grow a large number of plants all the way through the year. Which has been quite remarkable.</p>
<p>19.21</p>	<p>And so what do we grow here at the moment?</p> <p>Steve: Ummm, we are currently cropping 21 different crops which is quite remarkable. Ummm, from peas, beans, lettuces, courgettes, squashes, root vegetables, fantastic crops of parsnips, we have carrots, lots of leaves, ummm kale [Dennis: quinoa!], quinoa (laughs), quiona has just been harvested [Lorraine: really?], about 4000 onions [Andy: yes!] and we also have another crop of onions that have just gone into the ground- so there is another 750 or so there, ummm garlic, ummm [Andy: soft fruit as well]. Yes, [And did you mention soft fruit?], there have been soft fruits. We are going to have a lot more soft fruits next year- we have a lot more coming, so that will be good. [Kathy: Did you say potatoes!?] [Oh yeah!] (laughs). And of course one or two potatoes. [Joy: well it is called the spud club...] It kind of goes without saying. But there's a huge range [Kathy: sweetcorn] which people should be really, really proud of [Lorraine: squashes], [Victoria: Chard], [Dennis: pumpkins], [Steve: leeks mmm]. [Andy: runner beans]. [Steve: Kohl Rabbi]. [Dennis: peas]. [Steve: calabrese]. [Joy: most things really] [Dennis: kale].</p> <p>Steve: There is an awful lot of stuff and of course now we are getting into that part of the year when we have some over wintering plants that are going to carry on if we are lucky- with the kales and the chards will keep going and some of the oriental leaves will be going through for us. So, cross our fingers and hope they survive. And the lettuces...</p>
<p>21.02</p>	<p>Kathy: And if you are not talking spud club, we've still got some the best tomatoes and cucumbers going. (inaudible mutterings)</p> <p>Steve: absolutely – from the polytunnels, absolutely, fantastic tomatoes. So we have a huge, huge range and there is scope for more. And I, the new permaculture beds which we put in – when was it - the start of this year? Was it only the start of this year? Where the asparagus is doing really well thanks to Anna transplanting them, which are terrific. So we should, with luck, have maybe one or two we can take next year. And the perennial veg that are growing on there look absolutely beautiful- I am looking forward to that becoming an abundance in a year or two.</p>
<p>21.41</p>	<p>Joy: If you want to know all the things that we do here, and about all the very interesting and wonderful people, we would really need to write a book because we could talk all day.</p>

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	<p>I am the lucky one because I work in a polytunnel- so the weather doesn't bother me at all. Except that I have to get up and open the doors when it's very hot, or close them if it's very cold. Ummm, but it's been, our first year growing in a 60 foot polytunnels has been interesting, very rewarding and really educating. Because we are trying to become more self-sufficient- and so I try to raise money in there –ah money? Yes, I try to raise money. If you could plant money and grow it I'd do it. Ummm ah cucumbers and tomatoes- the best you can get in Lancashire. And they fetch a good price and everyone is very happy with them. And so we are trying to be self-sufficient as we should be. [OK]</p>
22.43	<p>So where does all the veg and produce go from Claver Hill? So spud club members take some away, but what happens to the surplus at the moment?</p> <p>Kathy: Some has gone to the People's Cafe, some to the food bank. Ummm, we take some down to the community centre at the Ridge [the Ridge] to umm share and take donations for.</p> <p>Lorraine: Some to the refugee meals on a Tuesday.</p> <p>Caroline: Some to the, the community meal on a Wednesday at the community centre [the Ridge community centre] on the Ridge.</p>
23.26	<p>And Joy, where do you sell your produce at the moment?</p> <p>Umm, I sell my produce to the Co-housing in Halton ah because they share a lot of our ideals and they want to buy their food from the nearest place possible. And er, they want food that is grown without pesticides- not quite organic- but as near as dammit. I sell at the Ridge, and I also take everything I can't sell to the Olive Branch. Which doesn't mean it's rotten stuff, it's actually very good stuff, and so the homeless get that. [OK]</p>
24.02	<p>And so everyone mentioned as one of the negatives- the people dynamic side of a community organisation. Ummm how have, how has the group tried to overcome that?</p> <p>[Steve: Hmmm, well]</p> <p>Andy: I think you can overcome, you know, different personality differences, because if you are committed to the same purpose, ummm, you can incorporate differences, diversions, you know, divisions in how things are done and views. And I think it's a good, it's part of the challenge, the challenge, like the same ways we are learning a different way of growing things, I suppose we are a different way of growing as a project of trying to, yeah, to, yeah, to work together. Which I find quite interesting, quite exciting. We do, there are quite a lot of meetings which are, ummm you know, I like, I like to come here and just work and grow stuff more because I do a lot of meetings in my life outside so, umm, but they are so important I think so that we can sort out what, what, you know, what we do with the surplus- there was a lot of discussion about that. And, work out, how we can divide the tasks the best way.</p>
25.27	<p>Caroline: I think we apply patience, persistence and ummm mutual support. Because, in any community group, people come because they have strong ideas, values, that are to do with their community, they are not all going to be the same. So inevitably, we would all be like automatons if we didn't fall out</p>

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	occasionally [hmmm]. Ummm but it's just keep coming back, and things get sorted ummm. And I think the Dragon Dreaming project – which I am sure somebody else will talk to you about- that also has been a really good project for, if you like, adding some imagination to that, just being persistent, patient and keep coming back. So maybe somebody can talk to you about Dragon Dreaming. Steve?
26.20	Steve: Ok, I will say something about Dragon Dreaming. I felt at one point that it was quite important, we got an offer to, by ummm Francesca Biondi, who was interested in taking on board a project ummm, to explore how we could benefit from Dragon Dreaming, and had long conversations with her. And, I already knew about Dragon Dreaming- it's kind of an approach to project development, project management. And it, it really was a way of recognising that our project needed to move from being a few people involved to- how do you engage all of the people who are now coming along so that its, so that everybody can own it, everybody can be a part of it? How can everybody share, share the dreams? How can everybody hear what everybody wants to do with this project? And that's what Dragon Dreaming is all about. It's about hearing everybody's vision, incorporating them together, working out what's most important to people, establishing some goals, some ummm direction for the whole project that is collectively agreed on and then moving that into- how that links to planning, how that links to how we work together, how that links to the jobs we have to do, and keeping tracking and celebrating about it. So we met for quite a number of months, once a week for quite a number of months. And even if some of those meetings only had half a dozen people there, some of them had many, many more. That was sufficient to carry us through to at least the outline of a strategy and a plan that would help the Spud Club move forward. And we are about to re-visit that and see what we have achieved. And if nothing else, it really helps people to appreciate the value of everybody who is taking part in the project, and that everybody has a right to be heard about what they are doing and be valued for how and what they do. And I think that is really important- that it's not one person's project, it's a community project. Anybody else like to add to that?
28.32	Victoria: Yeah, it was really important because, although we are very different, we understood that we are on the same page. We got together, we underst, I mean, we understood a bit more about ourselves, and, and we knew at that point that the project was, Spud Club, was more important than any small issue. And we were, we were happy to just to do whatever to put it in front so, it was really good. It was really good. [hmmm]
29.05	And are there any opportunities or challenges that are facing Claver Hill at the moment and Spud Club? What are the big ones? Kathy: I think there is a lot of ummm, a lot of challenges for us ummm, because we are still working out policies and procedures, and: When new groups want to come and set up projects- what do we do? Health and safety issues- what do we do? Fundraising- what do we do? There's still a lot of unknowns. But, you know, you can't expect everything to be solved in, even in four years. You know, there's things this big take a long time. Ummm, you know, there, there will be issues probably forever. But ummm we are working through them slow but sure. You

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	<p>know we want to make it more disabled friendly ummm, you know, there is more jobs than we have man power to do ummm [Steve: or even women power]. Or women power. It's just ummm – there's a lot really. There are still challenges.</p>
30.18	<p>Steve: yeah I think there is actually quite a lot of challenges you hinted at there about the land and accessibility. There is a lot of challenges in the physical aspects of the land you know- everything from hedge laying to tree management, to new plantings, to layouts of where projects are. Even just maintaining the outer lying edges of the field that aren't involved in the project or- [Kathy: there are areas of out nature trail which has been [yeah] so overgrown this year! Completely overgrown].</p> <p>Steve: Peter was out again yesterday strimming it, umm so, yeah after you were there filming it, so you may not have seen that he has done more work on it. So, yeah there is always lots and lots of issues to do with land management- you can make a list but you still end up with jobs that you can't fulfil and you know you want to take them forward at some point. But it's great stuff. [Yeah].</p> <p>[Ok, we can finish there. Thank you everyone.][Thank you, thank you...]</p>