

Crondall Society 2nd Article.

This year has been an unusual one. I am sitting writing this on the August Bank holiday week-end with harvest all finished. Since I have been working at home, about 20 years, we have only finished harvest by August Bank holiday once before and that year it was at the very end of the month. In 1976 my father finished harvest in July!

Spring was cold and wet so our autumn sown crops didn't start to develop at the end of February as normal instead it was mid-march when they really began to grow. We would normally begin sowing our spring crops in mid march but the ground didn't dry enough to allow it to be sown until mid April and we didn't finish until 4th May.

The rain then stopped, and hasn't really started again since. The crops went through their growth stages rapidly because of the warm sunny days. Unfortunately this meant that they didn't put down deep roots that would enable them to pick up moisture in July when the grains are swelling. The very hot days in July mean that the crops shut down, wheat shuts down at 23 °C, so every very hot day means that the yield is reduced. This year they started dying off almost a month before they would normally start ripening.

We started harvest on the 8th July, two weeks earlier than our average start date, and didn't really stop for the next four weeks. The crops were very dry and unfortunately about 15% lower yielding than our average. OSR has to be between 9% and 5% moisture to sell. If it is too wet we dry it and if it is too dry we can't sell it as it affects the oil content. We started cutting the OSR at 10.5% and by the time we cut the last field it was down to 5.5%, some loads were down to 4.5%. Wheat was similar. It needs to be below 15% to sell but we harvested a lot of ours at between 9 and 11%.

A dry harvest has two benefits. Firstly it means no drying costs, £15 per ton to take out 3%, and secondly the combines run much more efficiently. If you harvest wet crop it is slow and can be very hard on the internals of a combine often resulting in break downs. This year we had no major break downs and used half the fuel that we used in 2017, less than 45000 lts.

Although our yields are down the drought also affected northern Europe, Russia and Ukraine meaning the price has increased dramatically. Back in May this year the price of wheat was £130 per ton. Through June it increased and by the end of July it had reached £160 per ton. It peaked at over £190 and as I write this it has dropped back into the mid £180's. There was a worry of shortages but the later harvested crops have yielded better, the most worrying is that there could be a 500,000 ton shortage of malting barley which could mean beer will be short!

and grow as early as normal and we couldn't apply any fertilisers until the ground had dried and warmed up a bit. This meant that the crop was a month later starting to grow and then they raced through their growth stages to catch up.

Behind

we didn't start sowing our spring sown crops till mid April and finished on the 4th May a full month later than we would normally aim for.