

# CLAYDON CUSTOMER FARMFOCUS



Eric Lewis (left) with his agronomist of 32 years, Stephen Earl of Agrii, viewing the new Claydon T6c drill during the 2019 Claydon Open Day.

## The Claydon System enables 80-year-old farmer to keep doing what he loves best

At an age when most farmers would have long given up an active role on their farm, Eric Lewis remains as keen as ever to do the job himself. He carries out all the work at Hill Farm, Knights Green, near Dymock practically by himself.

A heart attack in 2012 made Eric reflect on life and slow down a little, but never did he consider selling up or having a contractor farm the land. Instead, he looked for an alternative that would allow him to keep doing the job he loves. Now over 80, Eric has no plans to call it a day and continues to invest in the future. Just before harvest in 2019, Eric took delivery of a new Claydon T6c Opti-Till® trailed drill. This, he emphasises, is the key to keeping farming. "This is my life and I simply wouldn't want to do anything else," Eric states. "But if it wasn't for the Claydon System I would have been forced to give up; it minimises the time and physical work involved."

### A LIFETIME IN FARMING

Eric moved from nearby Colwall Park Farm to Knights Hill in 1980, converting a mixed enterprise into an all arable unit five years later so that he could carry out most of the work himself. Crops were established using a plough followed by a power harrow/drill

combination. This was hard work and took a lot of time. It consumed a huge amount of fuel and panned the soil, stunting crop development and yields. In 2000, Eric changed to a min-till system. This was based around an implement which incorporated tines, discs and a packer roller behind his 230hp Massey-Ferguson. Wanting more output, Eric upsized to a 370hp MF 8690 and 5m version of the same implement. But this was not the right solution. Eric found that the min-till system increased blackgrass and having to work land down ahead of the drill created a huge weather risk. Eric was also working very long hours.

In 2009, Stephen Earl of Agrii mentioned that some of his clients were operating the Claydon Opti-Till® System of direct strip seeding. It was only after Eric was fitted with a pacemaker in 2015 did he consider this more closely. "At that point I knew I would have to change. I could no longer do what I had been doing and at 75 didn't want to spend all my time in the fields", says Eric.

### LEADING TIME KEY TO DRILL'S PERFORMANCE

After attending the 2016 Claydon open day at the company's factory and farm



## FOCUS GLOUCESTERSHIRE

### FARM FACTS

Farmer: Eric Lewis

Location: Gloucestershire

Area farmed: 350 acres

Soil: Loam

Cropping: wheat, oilseed rape, linseed, oats, phacelia, cover crops

in Suffolk, Eric had a 4m Hybrid drill on demonstration. He also visited a local Claydon owner to find out his views on the drill. Eric then ordered a 6m mounted model. His 370hp Massey-Ferguson was more powerful than was needed to pull the drill, but it was a bad time to sell and the tractor was paid for, so Eric decided to keep it. The 6m Hybrid quickly proved itself at Hill Farm, which produces 170 acres of winter wheat, 70 of oilseed rape and 50 of linseed, together with organic apples for Westons Cider at Much Marcle in neighbouring Herefordshire.

"It didn't take long to realise that I should have changed to the Claydon years ago", Eric states. "Jeff Claydon is very clever and you only have to look at the company's products to know they have been designed by a farmer because they are simple, practical, easy to operate, very well made and cheap to maintain. The leading tine is the key to the drill's performance because it creates an ideal environment for the seed and fissures the soil between the strip seeded bands, so roots develop without restriction."

Stephen Earl of Agrii, adds: "The Claydon System is ideal for Eric and his farm. The objective was to save time, effort and cost





Eric drilling cover crops with his Hybrid T6c, autumn 2019



A bumper crop of winter wheat at Hill Farm in 2019



Eric with his Claydon 6m TerraStar and 7.5m Straw Harrow

while maintaining yields, all of which have been achieved. Like many other farmers, Eric had a low level of blackgrass and using the Claydon System is helping him to stay on top of it. I have not changed how I approach things from an agronomic viewpoint because of the Claydon System and Eric's results speak for themselves."

### ESTABLISHING CROPS NOW NEEDS SO LITTLE POWER

Having experienced the benefits of the Hybrid drill, Eric purchased two other components of the Claydon System, a Straw Harrow and TerraStar, a simple, low cost, low disturbance shallow cultivator.

"My 7.5m Straw Harrow is very fast, cheap to use and moves just enough soil to get the weeds and volunteers to germinate, but in dry weather some of the heavier ground needs a bit more working and the TerraStar is just the right tool.

"When you buy a Claydon drill you must take time to understand how it works and how to use it, then give it time to work, allowing air and water to get into the soil and the worm population to return to where it should be. Cover crops have been grown here for three years and helped with that process, as well as bringing many other benefits. Phacelia, for example, is loved by bees, without which none of us would be here.

"The land has got better and better in terms of its structure and condition since I introduced the Claydon System. Its high output allows me to wait for just the right conditions, rather than feeling that I must press on regardless just to get crops in the ground. That isn't necessary now because I can easily drill 70 acres in a day, on my own, although the Hybrid could do comfortably much more. Establishing crops now needs so little power that I sold one of my two 550-gallon fuel tanks because it was no longer needed."

### SOILS AND CROPS ARE THE BEST THEY HAVE EVER BEEN

After three seasons with his original Claydon drill Eric took delivery of the latest OptiTill® Hybrid T6c trailed 6m drill. Delighted with his new purchase, Eric states: "My soils and crops are the best they have ever been. Wheat averages over 4t/acre, but I think this will increase with the T6c. It will also allow starter fertiliser to be placed in the seeding zone when drilling oilseed rape, which will help the crop to establish more quickly and reduce overall fertiliser use. The T6c's single-point depth control allows all five depth wheels to be adjusted simultaneously, so it is easier to use and more accurate.

"The Claydon System is much more than just another way of establishing crops, it is 'My System' and I hope to be using it for many years to come."