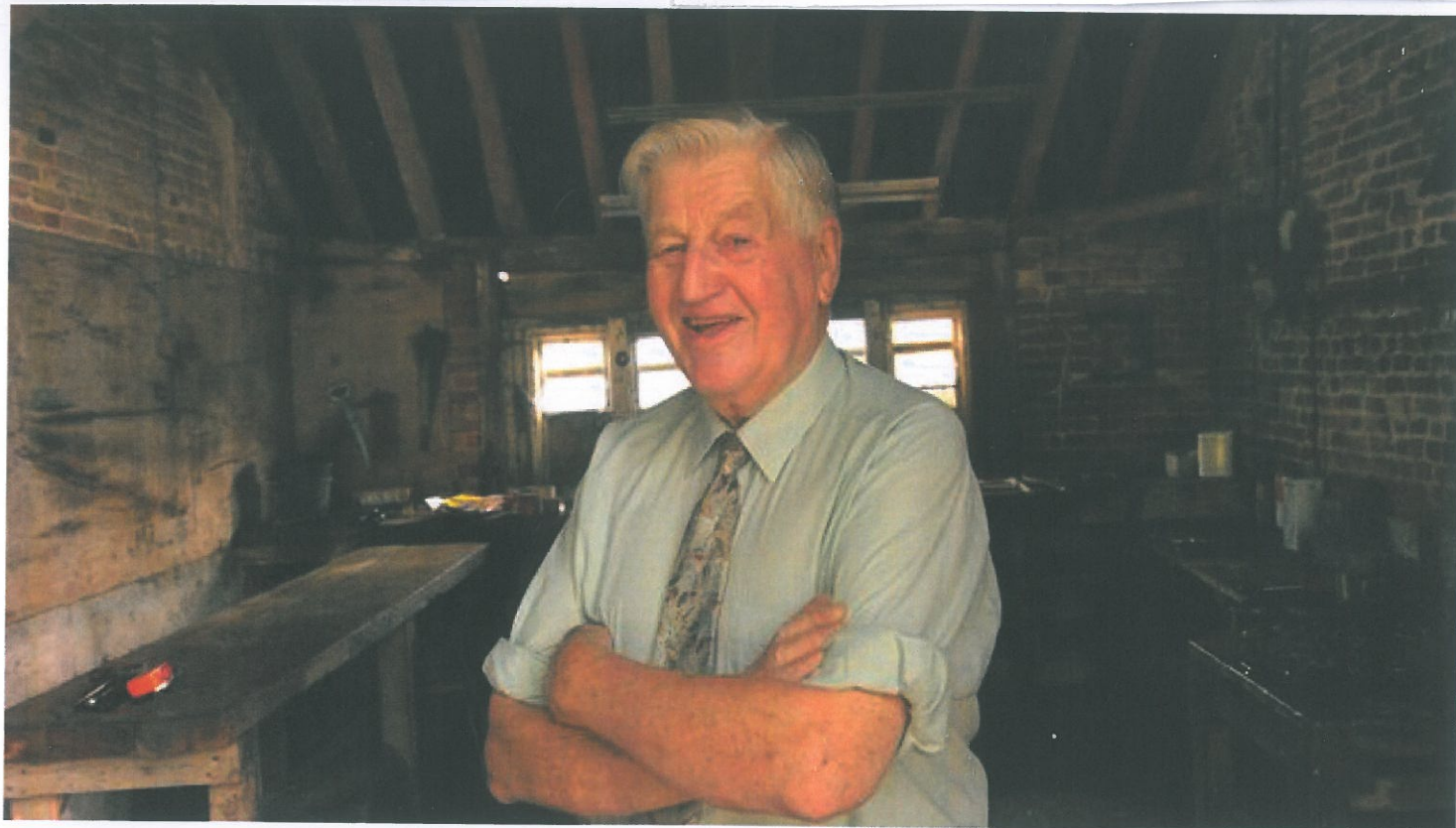


# Man who lost coin toss for family farm but became agricultural champion dies aged 94



Leading farm business manager Derek Pearce, pictured here at his farm in Kerdiston near Reepham

A champion of farm business management, agricultural education and an ambassador for the industry, Derek Pearce, has died aged 94. May 30 1926 to November 11, 2020

Influential on the national stage, Mr Pearce chaired The Farmers' Club, the Oxford Farming Conference, and in 1985 was elected Master of the City of London livery company, the Worshipful Company of Farmers.

He moved to Norfolk to the 436-acre mixed farm, The Oaks, Kerdiston, near Reepham, in 1964, where he became involved with local groups and charities as well as advising other farming businesses.

In October 1967, he was appointed general manager of Eastern Counties Farmers, then the country's second largest agricultural co-operative with an annual turnover of £15m. When he left in 1970 after a major restructuring, he had returned it to profit.

Despite leaving school aged 14, without any qualifications, he won a scholarship to the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester – and won the best student of the year award. In 1961, he went to the United States and became the first farmer in Britain to graduate from the advanced management course at Harvard University's Business School.

Born on May 30, 1926, he was the youngest of four sons. He was 17 when his father, a Gloucestershire dairy farmer died. He ran the farm for his mother until 1947 when his brother returned after war service. They tossed a coin to see who would carry on but he lost and left with £21 in his pocket to "make his own way" and "gain an education."

He became a tractor driver at Step Farm, Faringdon, then in Berkshire, and later managed the 120-acre holding. There, he met Nancy Ferris, also of a nearby farming family and they wed in 1952 – a marriage lasting 67 years.

Returning to his native county, he ran a 1,500-acre estate for the Earl of Bathurst where at a young farmers' club meeting, he heard a talk by a work study engineer from Bristol's Brunel University. It fired his imagination.

He then did a two-year correspondence course with the British Institute of Management, which led to his first book, *Farm Business Management – Applications and Principles* – published in 1958. It certainly helped his application to attend Harvard.

In that year, he moved further east becoming managing director of Frederick Hiam's 8,000-acre estate in Cambridgeshire. When he came to Norfolk, as he told the EDP in 2007, he hardly had a bean in his pocket. But the horses had just gone and he started by buying (well, leasing) four Ford Major tractors, each costing £400.

In the early 1970s, he quit dairying when the then EEC (the European Economic Community) paid farmers to quit milk. "I came to the conclusion that 100 cows was not then economic." Instead, he specialised on growing high value crops, cereals and sugar beet.

Having turned 80, he decided to retire from active farming. A long-standing member of Holt & District Farmers' Club, he always retained his interest in education and good business principles.

He leaves a widow, Nancy, three children, Shirley, Jenny and George, and seven grandchildren and five great-grandchildren. A funeral will be held on December 7. For details, contact [www.allcockfunerals.co.uk](http://www.allcockfunerals.co.uk) or follow online at [www.obitus.com](http://www.obitus.com)