

Communications

Not allowed to be cudswilted!

The annoying thing about me at school, I'm left handed, but they wouldn't let us use my left hand to write. You know why?

Using ink in your left hand you'll smudge it out with your little finger, you see. So you had to use your right hand so you left your ink writing nice and clear. And I didn't want to. I kept changing it when they weren't looking!

John Common, who went to Harbottle School until he turned 14, at the start of the Second World War

Creative communications

My grandfather was at Lorbottle Steads, and his brother farmed Bankhead, so would be about a mile apart, and they had a hedge at the bottom of the garden.

Everybody goes to Kelso Ram Sale. If you were going, you would put a white sheet on your garden. And my uncle, if he was wanting to go with you, he'd put a sheet on. If he didn't put a sheet, it means he wasn't interested.

There was no telephone in those days, but that was what they used to do, the two brothers, to communicate with each other.

John Murray, whose family has been farming near Thropton for 150 years

Tea towel tales

When we first got married, we lived in an ancient farm cottage. My landlady, the farmer's wife, used to hang a red tea towel on her line if she wanted a chat, a white one if she wanted shopping or a blue one meant the rent was due!

Carole Scott, whose family lived at Fairhaugh from about 1940

First past the post

My mam used to tell a story about leaving a stone on the gate post on the way to Windyhaugh School from Fairhaugh, to let the Telfer bairns know they'd beaten them to school!

Carole Scott, whose mother went to Windyhaugh School in the 1940s

All the news we need

One blazing Bank Holiday my wife and I stopped at Battlesfield for refreshment. Mrs Rutherford gave us a superb tea, everything was home-made for there were no delivery vans. This was before the spread of radio and I asked Mr Rutherford was they did for news as they never saw papers. 'We have all the news we need,' he replied, pointing to the large family Bible, from which they read daily.

Gordon Evans, who fell in love with Coquetdale in the late 1920s

Manual calling

Not many had phones back then, but people always knew who had a telephone. Most of the phone numbers were just three digits. In Rothbury, the exchange was behind the Post Office and Bessie Kirkup was on the switchboard. It was all done manually, the call would come in and they would say who they wanted and she'd plug it in. She could tell you everything that was going on!

Peter Gale, who moved to Rothbury with his mum in 1950 when he was five years old

All the way to Windyhaugh

My great-aunt Miss Susan Herbert was postmistress for fifty years. The Royal Mail van used to arrive about 9.30am. The letters and parcels would be sorted and given to the postmen to deliver... Their names were Scott, Tate, Nichol and Oliver. They had heavy-framed bicycles with a metal basket on the front for the postbags. It must have taken a great deal of strength to ride out to Windyhaugh and beyond in all weathers.

R H Hay recalls Harbottle Post Office in the 1920s

Post office uniform

Elsie had to walk everywhere on her round – for forty years! The post office paid for her uniform. She had a lighter one in the summer but the normal winter one was dark blue, with the little red piping round the jacket. But it was the same material as the British army uniforms. It wasn't waterproof, and when it got wet it weighed a hundred weight!

Peter Dawson remembers his granny's friend Elsie, who was born in about 1898

The last farm in England

One of the last farms in England. It is three miles from the nearest road (it was eight miles before the road was extended up the Coquet), four miles from the nearest school, 10 miles from the nearest inn and the nearest shop (though groceries are actually brought from Wooler, 25 miles away, to Barrowburn, at the foot of the Usway, and carted up thence by the farmer himself), 12 miles from the nearest telegraph-office (there is a small post office at Barrowburn), 20 miles from the nearest regular bus service, and 35 miles from the nearest railway station.

F R Banks, Scottish Border Country (published in 1951)

The travelling vans

These travellers came up the valley. If they knew when these people were coming, the people at Uswayford and Fairhaugh would come down on their horse and cart or their tractor and meet them. Failing that, they would just leave an order at Barrowburn. These travelling vans had an idea of what people wanted and would just put a box up and leave it there, to be picked up at their leisure. Nothing was too much trouble then.

Robert Bertram, who was a shepherd at Blindburn

No need to leave home

We had the grocer come twice a week, we had the baker, we had the draper, fish man, we had hardware stores. We had all of these different people had vans and they all came to the door. There was absolutely no need to leave home.

Robert Bertram, who was born at Blindburn in the middle of a snowstorm in 1947

Shepherd's Letter

The Heigh

Feb 9th 1947

Mrs D Barnett

Dear Madam

Just a few lines to say your Ewes are still at Whitefield. We are having a bad Blizzard ragging across the Cheviots. Been snow every day for a week and no signs of any improvement. Snowing and Drifting tonight of course John is at Whitefield with your Ewes and I don't think it will be as bad there Altho the last bus stuck last Monday about Dueshill. There has been no mail for a week So we are isolated. It is hopeless to think of getting your Ewes back until the weather gets a bit better. The Coupons have never come and supplies are getting short and I expect the roads will all be blocked.

Trusting

you are all well. I am

Yours Faithfully

W Potts