

## Telephone tracks

**Peter Dawson:** 'Being the postwoman, it was a lot harder than what it is now, but Elsie, she used to walk. Her, she never had a pushbike. She never had a cycle. She never had a van. She walked and she walked from here, east, her post round was east. So when she went out the village, she'd do the Thrum Mill, Burnfoot, all the Cragside lodges, Cragend Farm, and the farthest she went was Healey's and she always had to go to Healey Farm because they got The Journal delivered. It was delivered by post to the farm so she always had to go to Healey. Now, you imagine doing that for nearly 40 years. She must have walked twice round the world, she really must.'

Now, you know, you carry a post bag that distance. And, not only she delivered the letters but she, from areas down that way, she brought the letters back as well, because if you're living at Healey, you hadn't a post box. So, you'd give the letters to the postwoman and she'd come back here.

And when she retired, they got a postman – a postman, not a post woman – they got a postman and they give him a moped for to do the same round that she walked.'

**Alan Wilson:** 'The communication with people nowadays is not what it used to be. Whether that is mobile phones, texting, different things, Ah don't know. But people we see on a regular basis, yet what we've been in communication with all our life, are just the same basically but everything's a faster pace now.'

People are much better off nowadays I think, financially, but Ah don't think they're as happy as they were. I wouldn't say it was easier but it was simpler and everybody seemed to be happier, more content with what they had and their way of life. But country people, there's not as many country people left nowadays, that's probably the times we live in. It's not so easy to live off the land nowadays. Times are definitely different.'

**Anne Webb:** 'The things that were commodities that were landed on the quayside were picked up by a big cart and taken up the hill to

Town Moor by dray horses. Then people like Eddie Clark would pick the stuff up and come up the valley. Delivering things but also picking things up. His stories were really very, very interesting. They talked about the very heavy snow and how the guy at Hepple, I think he was called Will Hall, was put on the back of the wagon to take him to Otterburn, but somehow fell off at Holystone Grange and wasn't found again, and they didn't bother but eventually I think he found somewhere to shelter.

It was really interesting because he was sort of saying that he was bringing things like cloth and pans and pots and selling things and sewing machines and needles. But he was also collecting dairy things like butter and meat. So he was doing sort of exchange up the valley.'

**Anne Dunn:** 'Actually, there was a firm in Rothbury delivered in those days called Askews, and they delivered once a fortnight. The van came round but you had to send your order in. So, she used to ring her order in, well, to begin with she used to write. Used to write and post her order in, then they would bring it out. Everything, all the dried stuff and all the tins. Anything tins and jars, anything like that that you wanted. Even some of the food they used for dogs, flaked maize and things like that, they brought that out as well. So, it was all brought out and delivered to the farm once a fortnight. It was very good.

I mean, people think now it's a wonderful thing getting things delivered. I said, "No, we've been delivered. All my married life we could get stuff delivered!"'

**Robert Bertram:** 'We used to go away on holiday, you know, weekends here and there because, you know, to friends and relations. And then we always had a school trip to Whitley Bay or Spittal or wherever.

That was the highlight of the year, and the other highlight was, weather permitting, was the pantomime in Newcastle. We always went to a pantomime. But these were school events, that the school

teacher would hire a bus and practically everybody in the valley would go on these two events. We used to pray to God that there was no snow.

There was odd occasions that we didn't get, and there was odd occasions when it did snow but we did get back. Those were really the only events we went to. We had Alwinton Show which we got to. On odd occasions Mum and Dad would take us down to Rothbury, the Jubilee Hall, there was a cinema there which was very popular. But when you didn't get away very often it was always very exciting when these little events did crop up, you know.'

**John Clark:** 'I don't know exactly how it worked but the shepherd's contract was different to the farm workers. The farm workers, the tractor men etc., couldn't keep chickens or cows. But they could keep a pig. The shepherds, because they were more isolated, they didn't usually live in a house as close to the farm, they could keep a part of their wage, was what they called "pack cattle" and "pack sheep", which was probably a milking cow with two calves and, shall we say, ten sheep, and that was part of his wage. Because they were isolated and they could also keep hens, because they were isolated. It was just a different arrangement, you see.

Part of the idea of giving a hill shepherd so many sheep as part of his wage, they'd be on the hill with the other ones. That was one way of getting the shepherd to go and look at the sheep because he wanted to see if his own were OK.'

**Bob Hardy:** 'I remember the people that lived there, ye know. Where they disappeared to from there, ye know, like us, we just all over the world. Ah know people that live there now, their offsprings are away Canada and places like that.

Some of the Bertram family, not a shepherd any more. Ah know he lives away down in Birmingham, ye know. But, every year, they always seem to be hefted back to the valley and ye can always guarantee ye'll meet them Alwinton Show day, of all days.

Alwinton Show day, everybody just flocks back and that's just like a meeting of family. Wa, kind of like, hefted to the valley. Ye know, the saying is with shepherds: Ah'll heft some sheep onto this part of the land, ye knaa. And no matter where ye take the sheep, tha'll always gan back to that part of the land. Ah, di'knaa, that's what tha seem to do. Tha still like to go back, when they think of it. Yes, that's basically what it is: going back. Hefted.'

**John Murray:** 'In the arable areas up on the borders, they were into a rotation with their crops. It's called the Norfolk Four Course Rotation, and one of the years in that for fertility was roots, turnips. But they needed something not only to break the crop cycle, but they obviously had to do something with the turnips. And they were all arable guys, so they were keen to get the guys in these areas to take their sheep up there for the winter to eat their turnips. The guys on the arable farm looked after things.

My grandfather and his brother, and the two neighbours in between, combined the four flocks of sheep and they went to the Corn Exchange in Berwick, did a deal with somebody up in Kirknewton for to winter these sheep on at a price. I mean, they wouldn't pay that much 'cos it was as big an advantage to the arable guy to have the sheep on for fertility but it was an advantage to us as well, 'cos they were off the farm for the winter and we didn't have to make any winter fodder for them.

So they would book a train from Whittingham, date the train would come in, dump off so many carriages in the siding at Whittingham Station. And the four farms here would drive their sheep down from Bankhead to Lorbottle, pick up everybody's and walk them down to Whittingham.

They had a relation's farm just beside the station that they rented a field overnight, and parked them there to get rested. And then it was a marathon job the next morning to load all these sheep into carriages. You know, there would be eight or nine hundred sheep and I think they got about thirty or forty in a carriage, so it would be a

heck of a long train. Then the train set off for Kirknewton. Then at Kirknewton Station the arable guys they took them off the train and they put them on the turnips.

So they stayed for three weeks before lambing, and then the reverse thing happened. But of course the ewes were pregnant by then, heavily pregnant, it was a long way from Whittingham for them to walk back here. So again they rented this field and the farms down here took down a horse and cart full of turnips spread out in the field. So the sheep came off the train, got their fill, ate their turnips and lied down and rested, and the next morning they went and drove them home. And on the way back, when they got towards Callaly, there's a finger post to a place called Toddling Moor which you'd never find, that was the back road to Lorbottle Steads.

The majority of Lorbottle Steads' own sheep would turn right down there. Then the Lorbottle ones would carry on down the road. You would see an odd one would go further down and realise it was on the wrong way there and turn back. You had to give them plenty time. And then at Lorbottle, the Lorbottle ones went right and the Bankhead ones went left. And the next day anything that was mixed up, they just used to bring them by horse and cart back to their fields.

My father reckons it was just mebbes half a dozen each farm got it wrong, so they knew exactly where they were going. Of course they came back home onto nice green pastures.'

**Margaret Beech:** 'One of my aunts, one of my mother's sisters, when they all lived in Starmyres, she became ill one night. And they didn't have any electricity, so everything would just be oil lamps, paraffin lamps or whatever, and she had this terrific pain apparently. And it was appendicitis. So the doctor came, and he had to operate on the kitchen table because there wasn't time to get her to a hospital. And she lived right into her late 70s. And she was operated on the kitchen table by a local doctor to take her appendix out. By probably someone holding up a hurricane lamp so that he could see what he was doing. Yes, a different world.

And a lot of infant mortality as well. Certainly two of my mum's brothers and sisters did die quite young. And three of them emigrated, because again we tend to think of geographical mobility being very modern but they had to do it in those times because they had big families, there wasn't the work for them, so quite often... On my father's side, father's family and my mother's family, several of their siblings emigrated to Canada or New Zealand for work. And you would never see those siblings again. My father never saw his sister who emigrated to Canada, and she went when she was about 25.'

**Jennifer Collis:** 'That was one of the hardest bits about moving regularly was you didn't build strong friendships, because you would no sooner get to know somebody and develop a strong friendship with them and then you would move. I remember being very, very upset when we moved from Scraisborough because we'd lost our friends.

So yes, we flitted from Scraisborough to the Coquet Valley. I was twelve then and I remember flitting day very, very clearly. I don't remember much about the other flitting days, but flitting day from Scraisy as we used to call it, from Scraisborough across to Coatwalls, it's still imprinted in my head. So, Flitting Day came and we were all packed up, all the things in the chest. The pet lamb was allowed to come but he had to be kept separate from Mr Stodge Sheep in case he transferred something, like ORF for example. Wa cow came, Buttercup, wa hens, the collies, the sheep. Oh, and the cat; the cat Mickey.

The furniture wagon came first. Blakeys had sprayed it all out to put all the furniture in and they said, the other wagon'll be coming along but it's about two hours yet or more, because he's on a job. So Dad turns around to me and he says, "Jennifer, you wait for the second wagon," and he says, "You load that up". Ah was twelve!

So I remember just sitting and having a war, and I waited and waited and waited. Then, eventually it came, the second wagon, with Spike

as he was known, Spike Blakey, and er, so, there we were. We got the hen houses loaded, the hens, the cow Buttercup, the sheep, my pet lamb Toots, the collies. One collie was so old and that was my collie, Nellie, so she didn't come with us, and that upset us as well cos Ah had trained Nellie and that was the first collie Ah had trained, but she was so old. That's the way things are. So she didn't come. And of course Mickey, the cat.

Now, Ah got everything loaded up fine. The dogs, fine. And the cat, Mickey, couldn't go in the wagon cos he woulda got out. So Mickey got put in a sack! Sounds awful but that was the way things were. It was 1962 when we moved to the Coquet Valley. So, Mickey was tied in a sack to the back of Blakey's wagon, and there we were heading over the Carter Bar to the Coquet Valley. What a journey that was.'