

## **Life in the Valley**

### **Beans for sheep**

I always wanted to be a shepherdess, I think. Mam used to give us butter beans – you know, the ones you need to steep – for to be sheep, and I moved them along the floor with a knitting needle. I built pens with the dominoes, and put them in. The flagstones on the floor were my different hills.

I had a big marble, it was my dog. And little white beans, or maybe a handful of dried peas, they were my little lambs when it come April!

Jean Foreman, whose father was farm manager at remote Uswayford Farm in the 1940s

### **The weight of water**

We had to carry the water from the spring in buckets. The spring was on the other side of the hill. You came from the house and you walked across the field to a narrow track and over the footbridge. It just trickled down, but it was lovely spring water.

We had a washroom, sure enough, but it was only the water that you'd fetched in for drinking. And if it started to snow, you had to go and get the water before it got too bad.

Catherine Evans, who grew up at Hazeltonrig Farm in Alnham

### **Bringing things up to date**

The first thing I tried as a councillor was to get running water attached to every house. Practically everyone had to carry their water the length of the village from the well at the roadside. It was very heavy for the women. There was opposition ('we've survived so long, we can survive without all this fuss') but it brought things more up to date. Then, when we got the water, they hadn't chosen very wisely and half the village was left without it whenever the stream ran dry!

E M Benfield, who moved to Harbottle in 1942 and became a district councillor soon after

### **Getting done before dark**

In the winter time, you had to get everything done before dark because there was no going into a building and putting a light on. If you wanted light in a building you had to take a hurricane lamp. The same thing applied in the morning. There was little point in going out until you could see daylight breaking, because there wasn't anything you could do.

Robert Bertram (1947-2020) who was a shepherd in the Upper Coquet

### **Living by lamplight**

When it came to evening times, as there was no electric light in the house, we had paraffin lamps with a flame and a glass funnel. In the kitchen, where everything happened, you cooked, you bathed the kids, you ate at the table, you did whatever you did in the evenings. We played Snakes and Ladders and all these board games, and made what we used to call proggy mats.

Don Clegg, who grew up in nearby Redesdale in the 1930s

### **The tramp clippers**

In the early 1960s, sheep at Rowhope and Trows were hand-clipped [sheared] by a gang of hired clippers. This was no easy job for the wife at a farm, as there were 12 to 14 men to feed. Four meals a day. It was a long tiring day for everyone, but there was always time for a crack and banter round the table at meal times.

Hannah Hutton, who fed the hungry clippers at Rowhope

### **The end of an era**

When the diesel generators were installed in 1964, the sheep were sheared by our own men with electric machines, and the 'clipping days' were no more. Much less work for the wives, but those early days of friendship and banter were a miss for us. Another way of life was swallowed up by progress.

Hannah Hutton, who lived with her shepherd husband Joe at Rowhope

### **Peats**

We did afternoon jobs of collecting peat from the stacks and potatoes from the pit. Evenings were busy too. We'd sometimes listen to the gramophone. Later Granny darned and Mrs Murray worked at the mat, while we children cut the cloots.

Joyce Reay, who spent her childhood at Windyhaugh

### **An unforgettable smell**

We never had electricity in the 22 years my family lived there. Bread was put on the fender to rise before being cooked in the oven at the side of the old black-leaded fireplace. For fuel we mostly used peats, which were cut in the spring and spread out to dry before being made into rickles. They were led in by a horse and cart and neatly stacked in front of the house... The smell of a peat-burning fire is something you never forget.

Mona Baxter, who grew up at remote Uswayford in Upper Coquetdale

### **Winter warmer**

Most farms had a peat stack, which lasted a whole year; others had two to three tons stored and 20 gallons of paraffin. The hay stack was built where the sheep were to be wintered; a horse-drawn sledge was used to reach them. The sledges were made by the local joiner, George Robinson of Sharperton, and the runners were made and fitted by the local blacksmith, Bob Cummings at Harbottle Peels.

Lizzie Robinson, local postwoman from the 1930s to the 1960s

### **Cold and snowy nights**

There was no central heating. You just went up to bed with your hot water bottle and your mam leading the way with a candle. I've seen us lift the mat off the bedroom floor and hoy it on top of the bed, just for a bit of extra warmth when the drift was coming in. And the door always opens inwards on a hill farm, so you could cast [dig] your way out in the morning!

Jean Foreman, whose father was farm manager at remote Uswayford Farm in the 1940s

### **Clippy mat cloots**

A homemade mat was the only comfort most country folk could afford – a stone kitchen floor was a very cold floor. To have a nice mat you had to be careful with the cutting of the rags. A proggy or

stobby, you cut the strips the length and width of the side of a matchbox, that way the pile was even. For the hooky, you cut long strips and wound them into balls so they didn't get wrinkled up. If you were talking about a gossiping woman, you'd say she has a tongue like clippy mat clouts!

Jane Snaith, who made mats in the winter and stitched quilts in the summer

### **Idle hands**

We all used to knit. Dad used to knit all his own stockings. It was very much part and parcel of winter time, was knitting. Even with the men; a lot of men knitted and quite accomplished knitters at that. You know, boredom's a hell of a thing if there's not a lot to do.

Robert Bertram, who was a shepherd at Blindburn in Upper Coquetdale

### **Kidlandlee School Logbook, 29th Jan 1923**

All the 12 scholars are present today.

All the boys have now learned to knit with two knitting needles.

### **Evening classes**

I used to go to a class at the Barrowburn school to do sewing. I used to drive one or two ladies up.

A Mrs Thunberg from Rothbury started us off sewing. She taught us a lot.

It was 1980 when I made my first quilt, and it's still on my bed. I've made many quilts for the family and I've enjoyed doing it.

Marjorie Common, who ran the post office in Rothbury for thirty years

### **Flitting**

The word takes me back to the 1930s and '40s when many farm workers and shepherds moved to another place of employment at the May Term on 12th or 13th May. Wagons piled high with every home item were seen on the roads all over the area.

When I see that word, I remember the first flitting my family did when I was a small girl in the 1930s. Father was a shepherd at Scrainwood and had taken a shepherding at Wandylaw, just south of Belford. To us children, it was so far from all we knew. All our furniture, everything, was loaded onto a cattle wagon. The weather was wet and foggy for days after we moved, and I cried so much to go back to Scrainwood where I knew everyone. I hate to think how Mother felt – a flitting, wet days and 'a greetin bairn'.

Hannah Hutton, who lived at Scrainwood, north of Netherton, until her family flitted

### **My favourite flag run**

My favourite flag run is up the Coquet. It's beautiful on a lovely sunny morning, and you see all kinds of animals. I start at five o'clock in the morning at Tango Barrier, I go down into Holystone, up Harbottle, Alwinton and right up onto the top of the Coquet and out by Cottonshope, and it's just beautiful.

Kathy Scott, who worked at Otterburn Camp for 24 years and then started doing early morning 'flag runs', hoisting the warning flags around the edge of the military ranges.

### **Bird's eye views**

There are a lot of birds up on the Ranges. The MoD are really good on conservation and reintroduced patches of native trees, and there's heather and bogland. That's where I saw the last golden plover. I saw a shore lark one winter, which I've never seen inland, and snow buntings, twite and northern golden plovers. And a red kite right up at the top of the Coquet!

John Richardson, who has special permission to monitor bird species on the Ranges, including nesting swallows

### **Shepherd's letter – A bit of sheep blether**

The Heigh

Sept 12th 1945

Mrs Barnett

Dear Madam

Your letter today There was certainly trouble about the 1st lot of BF lambs at Bellingham on Aug 23rd. The Auctioneer came to me and asked me to collect the lambs in one of their fields on Sept 5 and take the chasers out amongst the wedder ones. So the Auctioneer Sold them again. There was 3 amissing.

43 wethers made 21/-

The 14 chasers made 20/-

22 mules made 23/- There was 4 chasers amongst them. John told the Auctioneer about them.

28 BF tup and wedders made 7/6.

10 Cheviot Ewe lambs made 7/-

and 6 BF Ewe lambs made 5/-

I filled in 2 forms the same as you have sent. Mr Robson spoke about getting someone to keep the Tups during close time as it is impossible to keep them from the Ewes at the Heigh.

Trusting you can come up as long as the weather is good. Please let me know

I am

Yours Truly

Wm Potts

**BF lambs** Blackface lambs. Blackface are hardy sheep with horns and black faces and legs

**Chaser** Breeding male put in with a herd of ewes, often as backup for the Tup

**Wedder** Castrated male sheep (sometimes 'wether')

**Mule** A mixture of sheep breeds, not a pedigree animal

**Tup** Uncastrated adult male sheep

**Ewe**

Adult female sheep