

Social gatherings – shows

Wrestling at the shows

The prize money today, some places, is reasonable. But compared to what it was 100 years ago, it's just a fraction of it. At Grasmere, it was £100 for winning there forty-odd years ago. Then it was more than two weeks wages; you didn't get a day's wages for winning now.

There's always been money involved, aye. Alwinton is the best around about here, always the best. Sadly to say, Thropton was always the poorest!

Jimmy Pringle, lives in Thropton, was a wrestler for 30 years and then became a coach

Alwinton Show, 13 Oct 1951

A grand show in every class, 38 dogs for trials won by Willie Anderson, 12 dogs in hound trial and some of the best wrestling ever seen at Alwinton.

From the Diaries of Mr J Wilson of Clennell, who died at Alwinton in 1957

Get your knitting

I've never been any good at reading and writing. In fact, I wasn't encouraged to read very much because it was always 'get your knitting'. We had to do something a bit more practical. I think I would learn at home – me mother would learn us.

Later on I knit my dad a pullover and put it in Alwinton Show and got a prize for it. Just second, like, but there you go.

Sylvia Tully, who was born in 1944 on a farm cottage at Elilaw near Netherton

Divvn't let it wobble!

Mam used to show. She won umpteen prizes for baking, she did. Goodness me, sitting in the horse and cart, trying to keep the shortbreads level. She'd say: Divvn't let it wobble!

She always won for shortbread, nowt simple like a jar of jam that you could just pack into something. No, no, it had to be a shortbread or a lemon meringue pie. Imagine sitting with a lemon meringue pie on your knee for three and a half miles in a horse and cart!

Jean Foreman, whose large family lived at Uswayford, ten miles north of Alwinton

Secret recipes

The Ladies hadn't many classes in 1912 – crochet work, knitting, stobby rugs, and then they put in a class for scones and teacakes. No fancy cakes...

In the 1960s and 70s, entries could be up to 30 in the baking, and once there was 48 gingerbreads. Tremendous interest – and a little bit of rivalry. Of course, you could never get the recipes. Hidden secrets!

Bobbie Dixon, Committee member, Secretary and President of Alwinton Show from 1952 until 2004

Out of shape at Alwinton Show

In the 1960s, one lad put some entries in – sausage rolls. But instead of sausage he'd put in strips of canvas so's they wouldn't lose their shape. When the judges tried cutting them, they couldn't cut through! The ladies were very indignant about that.

Bobbie Dixon, Committee member, Secretary and President of Alwinton Show from 1952 until 2004

Alwinton Show between the wars

They had classes for ewes, and gimmers, and ewe-lambs. They used to have classes for shepherds' stirks and draught horses after the first war, and poultry. There wasn't sheep dog trials in the beginning; they started off in the 1920s. They had dances in the tent or in the granary and the shepherds would really enjoy themselves.

Bobbie Dixon, Committee member, Secretary and President of Alwinton Show from 1952 until 2004

Gimmer: a young ewe (female sheep) Stirk: a young cow or bull

Winning ways

You do get complaints. In the old days there was one man was judging the Cheviots, and this fella came up to him and says, 'What had you against my yow?' 'I had nothing against your yow. I liked your yow, only I liked the other one better,' says the judge. That's the beauty of Showing. If everyone thought the same, then that same one would win every year.

Bobbie Dixon, Committee member, Secretary and President of Alwinton Show from 1952 until 2004

Secret recipes

Harbottle Show was always a great social occasion. There were races and sheep dog trials and marquee where handicrafts, vegetables, scones, cakes, jam and combs of honey were displayed.

I have a sweet tooth and, in those days, one could buy a first prize comb of heather honey for 1/9d [1 shilling and ninepence].

R H Hay, whose great aunt, Susan Herbert, was the postmistress at Harbottle

The best butter and jam

Mam used to win for her butter often, aye. We had a cross-Shorthorn cow at home and, my god, the butter was this yellow! It was gorgeous stuff. And she made all her jam, you know, gooseberries and blackcurrants and all this. She used to buy fruit and bottle it for the winter. It was just a way of having something different in the winter.

Jean Foreman, who lived at Uswayford Farm, ten miles north of Alwinton

Enormous crowds, giant veg

There was an enormous crowd at Alwinton Show for the centenary year, 1963. Extra buses were put on, and there were cars from Alwinton to Harbottle on both sides of the road. I think it was a terrible jam-up.

And we gave extra prizes for the Centenary. Tankards specially inscribed for the sheep dog trials and the sheep and vegetable classes.

Bobbie Dixon, Committee member, Secretary and President of Alwinton Show from 1952 until 2004

With a bit of encouragement

Quoits has been predominantly played by older gentleman. But in the last few years I've been getting quite interested in it and really encouraged it at a lot of the shows, and we've got a great number of youngsters come along now.

Just shows you that you can, with a bit of encouragement, get people interested in these old sports, and the young 'uns really enjoy it.

Richard Mason, whose family has lived near Rothbury for generations

Fun and games at Thropton Show

We used to have great fun – the egg and spoon race, the three-legged race, and the sack race. Everything was, sort of a little bit daft and for a bit of fun.

Welly hoying competitions – see who could hoy a welly the furthest – that was always great fun. Jason Davis always used to win that because he was muckle big and strang, ye knaa.

Richard Mason, who was born and brought up in Rothbury

Did you know?

The first world record Welly Throw was set by Tony Rodgers in Wiltshire in 1978. He threw a size 8 Dunlop Challenger boot 52.73 metres (173 feet). That's half way down a football pitch!

Taking a break

I often went to Harbottle Show and Alwinton Show. Harbottle Show broke my wrist, because you went in for everything. You entered the wrestling and you did everything.

I remember doing the high jump. Well, there was no sand to land into so I went over onto my arm and heard the crack! It was a compound fracture, a nasty one. I remember my mother taking me back to Rothbury in the car, where my father gave me an anaesthetic and a surgeon came out and reset my arm. But, oh, the pain on that journey!

John Smail, whose father was a doctor in Rothbury from 1948

Harbottle Show, 8 September 1945

The first after a lapse of six years, a grand fine day and large attendance. Sports very good. Douglas was home for the weekend and won the 100 yards out of 32 runners. Jim Wood won all weights; his brother Matt was third.

From the Diaries of Mr J Wilson of Clennell, who died at Alwinton in 1957