

The Old Radio story

Jean Foreman: '1955 was the worst winter I can remember at Uswayford; '55. We'd lost a lot of sheep in 1947 of course. I was just a little 'un then, you see. I canna remember nowt aboot that at all. All I can remember aboot that was everything was level. There was nae drains or little burns, they were all just level white, level white. Everything was white, just white.

Sheep was dying, Dad was upset 'cos he couldn't keep them alive; he was running oot o' hay. He tried all ends up to get stuff dropped. Could the NFU not. There was a phone at Barrowburn then. Well, it was at the school. Couldn't get nothing, no. Too many air pockets in the valley for helicopters, they said to him.

Mam was..., she telled us since that, since the storms, that she was quite worried aboot how he was ganna cope. Talked hissel' really sad like. To the point of tears, you know.

In '55 he went away down to Barrowburn to the phone, "I'm away to phone the NFU," he says. "We're ganna have to have some hay. They're ganna have to de something, they're ganna have to get something for I'm ganna lose all these sheep again." 'Cos from '47 he was just getting his ages of his sheep built up again. It was only five year, 'cos you kept usually your ewes on the hill was five year old when you selled the old ones away to bring on your younger stock that you'd kept each year, you knaa.

And he went away, and he come back and he says, "We gotta listen to the wireless." The wireless, I'm showing me age now. "We hadda listen to the wireless at six o'clock news on the home service." he says. And Mam says, "Well what on earth for?" He says, "We're ganna get a message if they're ganna give us hay. They're ganna bring us hay."

So we're all sittin' roond the wireless. "Divvn't anybody speak mind, we divvn't wanna miss owt of this. Shut up the lot of you." So you're sitting there and it come on and it said, 'Would Mr Dawson Telfer, Uswayford Farm, high in the Cheviot Hills, mark where he wants the

hay drop tomorrow with a letter C, nine foot in diameter with something black, where he wants this hay to be dropped. Weather permitting, he'll get a drop tomorrow starting at eleven o' clock'.

"My god," he says, "Where we gonna find owt black?" Everything was feet of snaa, you know. So we dig doon to the muck midden, you knaa, where you mucked the byre oot. So we dug and we dug and we dug, got down to the muck midden. And we're leading it up on sledges and, "Anybody knaa how we're gonna measure nine foot?"

"Aw, just get a muckle bloody C on the hill there." We had this muckle C marked in the field. Sure enough, eleven o' clock up the valley, up the valley towards us this reet muckle plane like, what a size of a plane. He didn't drop nothing the forst time, he went oot around the top, swung around Cheviot, roond Windy Gyle and right aboot and he came right up again. They were Hastings bombers or something from Abingdon in Berkshire.

Two lads were pushing a bale oot each side, oota each side of the plane at a time there was two coming oot. And, of course, we're standing there, I can see Mam yet saying, "Aw, dear me, Dawson, we had nowt te feed the sheep on, now we're no gonna have a hoose. Them's gonna drop on the hoose." But they were floating in the slipstream of the plane to where they knew exactly where they had to push them out, you knaa. And they did that with tons of hay, and they were one hundred weight bales tied up with wire, for when they dropped they didn't burst. Everything was fed and happy. Making tracks to get them nearer home and all the sheep. There was thousands of sheep just within carrying distance for to carry these bits of bales. Opened them up and took bits away for them.

But they lived, the most of them, the majority. But they were the worst days. There was lots of lovely ones.'