

Steven Calvert (57) of Greenses Farm, Keld

‘When you come to take the roof off a barn, it doesn’t matter if it rains, you can carry on, whereas if you are on with a house roof, everything’s got to be watertight before you leave it on a night, so it was a lot easier doing the barn roofs. But if they were in a bad way, if they were going to fall in, and the stone slates are worth an awful lot of money...so if a roof fell in you could have four thousand pounds worth of stone slates on and there’d probably be four or five whole ones after it’s fallen in...it wipes out a lot of slates.’

Q: Where did the slates come from? ‘They’d have come from the nearest place that they could quarry out due to a horse and cart having to drag them...a lot of them would come out of Hill Top Quarry...they used to dig down by hand and if they came to a layer of stone an inch, inch and a half thick to half an inch thick then they were taken out for stone slates for roofing. Thicker than that, two inch, up to two and a half inch, they were used for stone flags for houses and then anything thicker than that was for stone walling. In those days they didn’t have stone saws or diamond discs, they just had to go by what they could get out of a layer, so there was a lot of stone wasted; whereas in recent times, now, they just used to take out a three ton stone and take it back home to a shed with a 24 inch diamond disc and they could cut that stone down to whatever thickness of stone that you wanted and so there wasn’t the waste.’

‘Once upon a time, if there was a barn that was going to fall in, you used to buy the barn and take the slates off to use on other barns, but the National Parks have stopped that, so you couldn’t do that. So Hill Top Quarry came back into use again...probably nearest one after that was over in Middleton-in-Teesdale which was quite a long way to travel. There was slates coming from India...they called them ‘Indian slates’, which were stone, slightly different colour, but now they call them ‘natural stone slates’...there’s quite a few roofs’ll get slated by that. The slates are all right, stone’s very hard, harder than a local slate...they’re a lot easier to walk on.’

‘I’ve found quite a few old coins and given some away [this one is a penny and this one is George III?...]it’s either George III or George V, one of the two...on a lot of roofs, they used to put a coin under the first row of slates as a good luck

thing...it must be somebody that has plenty of money, because, such as a half a crown or whatever in those days, 1821, it would be a bit of money then...[heavy too?] yes, you'd know if you'd lost them.'

Q: You found a newspaper clipping dated to 1971 in a barn, where was that?

'It was one of our barns at Angram that I was restoring...it got left in there. We used to put hay in there, it was in the wall'

Q: It tells of your dad getting £1020 for a tup shearling. What was so special about it?

'Well, it had very good legs, and carcass-wise it was very good and it had tremendous head as well, colour and hair. At that time there was just one sale, whereas now they have two sales, so m'dad used to go home. You'd be at the sale at about 7 o'clock in a morning and then you used to have to go home to milk the milk cows and then come back again...if you were late in you know, 10 o'clock on a night they'd be still selling and so they decided then it was going to have to be a two day sale, like it is now.

Q: So it was a good price? Yes, it was the first one in Swaledale to make over a thousand. Mr Duke Iveson and Mr David Amsden bought it that day...it was commended in the show that morning. It didn't have very much wool, which in those days was a bit of a fault, whereas now people don't want wool and the shorter the wool the better. If it were sold today it would've made a lot of money...m'dad bought a new van and he bought a second hand tractor and he bought a second hand baler which we never had before with that money...you'd be looking at today's prices about £30,000 now.'

'I found some World War II bullets for a bolt-action rifle (when working on a barn wall), a whole ten cartridges in a belt...brought back I would think from the Second World War, maybe even the First World War, I don't know. I quickly put them back where I found them...you don't know how they'd react to sunlight. So they went back in. And then there's the usual the old bottles as well, which I used to collect. But my wife doesn't exactly like them...and old scythes, rake heads and old chisels...just stuck up out of the way in the rafters. And sometimes when you are taking a wall out you'll come across old clay pipe that's been broken and shoved into the wall when they been filling back up.'

‘And of course, moles as well, under the slates. You wonder how a mole’s got up onto the roof. I would say an owl or a stoat or something like that, that’s brought them up...plenty of rats’ skeletons as well.’

‘In the cowhouse (at Greenses), we used to play football up on the baux above the cows, in summer when the hay’s all been taken out and finished for winter feeding. There used to be a cross beam from a foot beam and we used to kick the ball, try and keep the ball up and over the foot beam, that sort of stuff, but generally it was just work in the barns...you just had to work on the farm, there wasn’t PlayStations or anything like that.’

‘At Greenses the house was in the middle, one side was the stable where the young calves were reared and where the dogs slept, and above that was where the young female sheep would be for winter...on the top. At the other side was a cow byre for four cows and alongside that was a barn for hay and straw...all under the same roofline as the house...all made into one house now.’

‘There’s just one building (on the farm holding now), it’s just 55 acres so it’s not big enough to make a living off, it’s just basically hobby farming really. It just has one building which is where I found the paper clipping. That’s been restored...it was just a hay barn...now it just has some building stuff inside.

Q: Not used for hay anymore? ‘No, not anymore, now it’s generally round baled and wrapped which is a sign of the times...people wouldn’t get finished hay now if they had to haytime everything...I can’t remember too many times when you were haytiming in September years ago whereas now you certainly would be in September if you were trying for hay all the time.’

‘A lot of the barns that have been restored probably aren’t used at all, but you get an awful lot of visitors now to the Dales and they’re always asking, ‘What’s these little stone buildings? What are they? Are they for houses?’ They don’t realise that people used to have their cattle in them in winter...more or less the whole dale was involved in going round these buildings, letting the beasts out for water, ‘cos they didn’t have water inside the building...so you had little wells outside in the land, and these beasts used to come out and then you’d used to have to muck the manure out into a heap. And then when the land was dry enough to get on ... you used to have a little tractor and a little trailer and

you used to make little heaps of cow manure everywhere and then go and spread them with a fork.'

Q: So, it's the roofs that tend to go on these buildings is it? 'It's the nails that's holding the slate laths on the roof. In some cases you hold the slate on the roof by an oak peg. Somebody making these little pegs with a knife. I've tried it 'cos the English Heritage, you had to have oak pegs again. And I've tried paring them and you get blisters on your hands. Paring these pegs down. And then they changed their mind then and said you could use aluminium pegs which was a lot easier...the stone slate sometimes has a wide hole for the peg and sometimes it has small hole and if you are having to pare a piece of wood down to fit these holes...so sometimes, the oak pegs disintegrate and so the slates then slide down...lets water in it does. The roof timbers go first and if the ridging gives way at the top, water gets in and then they start to bend after a few years of rain...but if the pegs are going, then you can knock the slate up and wire it to the laths. It's when the nails have rusted through on the laths and the whole lath rolls down underneath the slates and then your whole roof starts sliding down and you can't do anything with that.'

'M'father farmed another farm at Thwaite which belonged to m'uncle and he had two or three barns and there was one with slates which were down a bit, so m'dad got me up on the roof, when suddenly they all started sliding with me on them down the roof. Luckily we came to a standstill before the bottom and I shakily got on the ladder and I told him I wasn't going up again. Not in those sort of words [laughter], there was a few swear words in among that...this only happened twice to me has that...it's like with the laths, with the nails rusted through, ... they're like being on rollers, so it's the whole section of slates are rolling underneath, the laths roll down the roof and the slate comes with it. But only twice has that happened to me.'

'I served m'apprenticeship with a firm called P Calvert and Son, there was three partners: Dick Guy, Matt Spensley and Ken Barningham at that time. And Dick Guy was on the roof of a barn in Angram, roofing the slates and the local doctor, who took photos and that, came along. He had his cam recorder at that time. He used to do slide shows and that for the village halls, and he said '*Dick, can I video you working on the roof?*' '*Oh yes, yes*'. He said, '*Dick, how d'you know where the slates go?*' And Dick says, '*Memory*', he says, '*I memorise*

every slate. I know exactly where they go', and he said, 'you don't number them at all?' 'No, no, it's off memory'. And Dick's son was working there, and suddenly chirped up, 'd'you want number three Dick?' [laughter]. 'On purpose of course. We didn't number them.'

(Adapted from the 3rd October 2016 interview transcriptions from the Every Barn Tells a Story project by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority)