

Marina Whitehead (nee Alderson) of Muker – formerly Hill Top, Keld

Anne Guy (nee Thornborrow) of Muker – formerly Frith, Keld

Margaret Fawcett (nee Alderson) of Brough – formerly Skeugh Head, Angram

Annas Metcalfe (nee Whitehead) of Muker – formerly Ravenseat, Keld

‘If I had a pound for every person who asked me what these little buildings were.’

Anne: ‘Cow’uss! . . . Yes, you see they’re not barns, they’re cow’usses.’

Margaret: ‘Cowhouses in the field, or a cow’uss, not barns in Swaledale. That’s been my bone of contention ever since we started to speak. You never said you were off to t’barn, it was off to t’cow’uss! And hay mew.’

‘The hay mew was attached to the cow’uss. Yes. One building. Cows went in (in the winter). The manure from them cows went onto the field which grew the grass to cut again for haytime, to put in the other half and that fed the cows again...’

Anne: ‘...I remember at Frith once the cows were out it became a pig sty, we kept pig in it. Pig went in cow’uss. Killed it then cows would go back in.’

Margaret: ‘We went up steps at Skeugh Head, above pig ‘ole. Where calves were. Hog house and two rooms. That was me pot house!!’

Margaret: ‘I had a swing in’t loft. Over beams. In among old meal and everything.’

Q: Was milking done in cow’uss? ‘You just had a bucket and a stool...three-legged stool. Kicked the bucket and bucket of milk went over ...we would only have mebbe 3 cows? Fed it back to calves, and in summer we made cheese out of surplus, and butter, cream...separator going in dairy.’ ‘But they were nearly all joined on to your houses (the buildings where milk cows were kept).’

‘See, when they went to milk in these cow’usses it was always candlelight ...I don’t know about your cow’usses but ours always had a little hole in the wall for the candle to go in...wasn’t likely to set hay on fire you see...and then little

lamps came that you used to carry...and then what you called a tilly lamp, paraffin, had to prime it. That was a big step up.'

Anne: 'Ah but tilly lamps never came to High Frith... we had candles all the time.'

'You'd get heat off it as well...you did, off a tilly lamp.' 'Used to have a flashlight that you could hold in his mouth...when he had two calf buckets he held the flashlight in his mouth...not like a head torch now, they're grand!' 'They'd milk in the dark in't winter.'

'And we had a well in the back yard. Just opposite the cow'uss. And I remember, in '63, we had so much snow ...I remember that all four of us...brother, mum and dad. And we had to dig a tunnel for the cows to walk through to the well...and that was just behind the house so that was pretty sheltered really'

Q: When did the first sheds come? 'Did we build our first one in 1981? And that meant that we didn't use as many of these little buildings'.

'Tied up then....you went around 'em every morning and night let them out to drink. No water laid on. Muck 'em out, feed 'em. You didn't have water bowls then. Haytime, hay would be forked in loose. Cows wandered out, had a drink, then came back in themselves for their hay, they didn't gallop off.'

'They knew which 'bousen', which is what we called the, you know, they were in sections, usually a stone slab that way on' **Q: stone stalls?** 'Yes..bousen, don't know how you spell that! And the cows knew which one to go into.... They weren't galloping around, but when it got to, say April, just before you were turning them out maybe into May, and the grass was coming; when you'd let them out to drink and they'd think, oh they didn't want to go back in they'd never go...you had a job get to get them back in.'

Margaret: 'Muck out, you'd have your little muck midden outside didn't you? Trundled with hoss and cart, led into heaps ..aye some had a hole to muck in ...had a hole in the wall and muck went out of there...that was hard work through there if you missed!'

Margaret: 'At home we had to muck it out through coal 'ouse and over t'flags and over t'wall in't field ..yes we did, muck midden [that was a long way?] ..yes, especially if it was a bit slothery!!'

Annas: 'There wasn't straw...the bed in the big sheds, they put all straw out, but they didn't buy straw then, no, so muck they did was in this group they used to call it, without straw, so that was just muck to be quite honest ..the cows went up onto a step and muck went into the group,'

'Rushes...we used to cut them for bedding...well there wasn't such a thing as proper bedding.'

'When we had these little cow'usses they did get out to drink twice a day but the rest of the day they were tied up with a chain in the bouses. Calves, they were all kept together, they were loose, you might have 4 or 5 in a calf box. Same building, they were bedded out ...you used to milk the cows, to feed it back to the calves, they didn't seem to think to let the calves suckle!' 'No, they were too wild. The calf didn't like it out of the bucket so you put your hand in and in its mouth to get it to drink. You tried to lead them if you wanted to show them at Muker Show. You put a halter on them. They weren't wild like today. You took a dog to round them up...you don't go with a dog today in among any cows. Then you used your dog. We used to have a dog that used to swing on cow's tails!'

Q: In the winter the bull would be tied up in with the cows? 'Tied up? ..they'd just let him out, or they'd take buckets of water to a bull...but when you tied them up, you know they had horns. They all had horns before you started dehorning them. You put your arm over there, got t'chain, pulled it up like, around the neck. And you always watched that they didn't throw their head back ...you didn't put it [the chain] tight, and you tied it up here at back of their head. But when you bent down, over, you reached over their neck, and your head was nearly touching theirs, but you have to allus watch that they didn't jerk up with their horns and bang you know.'

‘I remember once tying one up and it did, it jerked and hit me, and d’you know I went out of cow’uss and across yard into house without realising’ **Q:stunned?** ‘I must have been. I’ll never forget that.’

‘Going back to roadsters...I remember we used to walk to the hog house up there to catch the bus to school (from Ravenseat)...wait for the school car coming and these two people did come out of the hog house up there. Well, it was one of their stopping spots was the hog house.’ **Q: Tramps?** ‘Yes, tramps.’ ‘And as children we were frightened of them.’ ‘There’d be some at Crook Seat would there?’ ‘They came out these two people. **Q: Were you wary of strangers?** ‘Well yes, you see you didn’t have tourism at all when I was a girl.’

‘One thing I can remember we’d used to do, after we’d sheared the sheep, you’d put all the fleeces in a big bag don’t you, and stitch them up and when we’d stack them up on the loft, and they were our racehorses. Yes and we sat astride and raced horses for many hours ..there’d be a few alongside, wool, they’d be like that shape, lovely slack back, probably a bit rope round for reins.’ ‘Because you hung ‘em up, the bags didn’t you? To fill them, each corner.’ ‘Then as a child, I had to go in and stamp that down,’ ‘That was horrible, all greasy wool!’

Q: Did you go into barns to play? ‘You went in to work!’

Margaret: ‘When I used to go to see, you went to water the cows, that was when you went around the barns. And when I used to go first thing in the morning, there was two barns (Skeugh and Lowside), way down the fields, and I used to climb up outside, I never went in the barn door, used to climb up the wall, and there was a big hole, and that was called your forking hole, where you put the hay. I used to climb up there, look in to see if there was no tramp laid in the hay before I went in; because it’s pitch black dark, you had no lighting in your mew, and I allus used to go in there to see if there were any old tramps laid up on top.’ **Q: How old were you then?** ‘Oh well, 16, 15, 16, 17 maybe yes, still wary of a tramp.’

Q: So once you knew the coast was clear you went in? ‘Yes, then I’d go in and let the cows out, you know and then I could go in because when you went in,

sometimes you climbed up and pulled hay off top you see. When the hay mew at home you used to have a hay spade and you used to cut it down and make...what were they called?' 'Dess!' 'Yes, a dess, a square of hay...and you tied it up and you could take it on't horse-back up pastures for your sheep.'

Q: In creels? 'In creels, yes. See, when you put it in at haytime, when it was dry, somebody forked it in, and you had to be in that hay mew. And that was usually the daughter's job, to be in the hay mew, and you had to tread round ..stamp it down, and there was all these cobwebs and beams. You banged your head...it was the hardest job. You'd tread it down so you could get more in, dry hay was very fluffy so...in your shoes or your bare socks. But the (heart-shaped) hay spade cut it, it was all lovely when the hay spade cuts down the mew...you cut it down at home and it really crunched, as me dad used to cut it you see. Oh I'll just get a hole above cows and you'd climb up and pull hay off top of hay mew. It was quicker that way because it was maybe only at home you cut down like that where cows were, them that were milked, whereas t'other, you just pulled it down and you fed 'em. There'd be snow on it if it'd been snowing, blown in.' "Mould, all wet, mould if it'd have been put in damp, condensation.'

Margaret: 'And you played on the beams across, when the hay got built up, climbed on those. When the hay got up you see, you could climb up and you were climbing over those to get in to tread the hay down.'

'And then above the cow'uss part where the cows were, there was always a section there and we called that the baux (baulks) Yes, baux! Up on baux.'

Anne: 'And that's where the green hay went, especially if you'd had pikes. Pikes were a big mound of grass really, grass hay that wasn't quite dry enough to go into the mew. So they'd put them into a big pike and cover it and then if it came wet they were covered, and if it came fine you had to shake it out, you had to shake these pikes out and if it never got dry, it went into the baux to dry out. So it went separate, didn't go into the hay mew.' 'It maybe got given to cows and kept better stuff for sheep?' 'If you put a lot of hay in a mew and it wasn't very dry it could fire...and you had to mind how much you put in at any one time...and that's mebbe when it was a bit wet. If it wasn't so dry you put it on the baux to keep it separate.' 'We used to have one big mew, and we had a

bag of straw hanging in the middle. Big bag, like that. And you put the hay all in, and then at night, they'd pull the bag out to let condensation out...like a hole, like a pipe . . . because it can fire . . . gets too hot...and you're frightened of a fire in a cow'uss, next to a house as well.'

Margaret: 'Sheep were never inside, never housed. Hogs were, the young ones, hogs, let 'em out through the day, put 'em back in at night. Or you just let them roam, door open, in the hog house.' 'Well I had to let them out as I went to school , let the hogs out, let them run back into pasture . . . now I always think it's a lovely smell in a hog house. I don't know why!'

(Adapted from the 31st May & 1st June 2016 interview transcriptions from the Every Barn Tells a Story project by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority)