

## **Robert William Clarkson, formerly of Scarr House (Angram), & Black How**

‘First barn (called Banty) as you come over from the other side (Wensleydale) was a very popular place for tramps, that would’ve had a hard trek over from Buttertubs and it was their favourite stopping off spot. As we had cattle in in winter, they were to do twice a day, and we usually got there at night, it would be dark quite often, it was one of last jobs we did. It was a vehicle job from home, 2 mile away from Angram and quite often you’d grab a leg and jump when you went in the dark, cos no electric and even flashlights weren’t that great in them days, and you’d mebbe go in for an armful of hay to put through t’holes for t’cows and you’d end up grabbing a tramp’s leg or something, you ran out. They did you no harm tramps, most of them. We were frightened to death of them as kids when we were going to school if there was a tramp on road, when we walked to Keld school, we’d go miles round to avoid if there was a tramp on road but basically once you grew up you knew they weren’t going to do you any harm.’

**Q: Your Dad’s farm at Scarr House had how many barns?** ‘I left Scarr House when I was seven, but I was brought up at Scarr House until I was seven and me father would have [counts]...eight, and two of them would be hog houses, aye, and five or six barns with cattle in, and mebbe two for sheep at Scarr House. And then we went to Angram, and we had a hog house up there, [counts]...about five barns at Angram, it wasn’t as big a farm. But one of them big barns on Kisdon Side there, it had a mew in the middle with a hog house at one end and cattle tyings at t’other. A lot of them had a little hog house at the end didn’t they?’

‘The hog houses, they were nothing like what you have up t’dale; best hog houses I would say were round Hoggarths and Stonehouse and Pry House and onto Black How. I farmed Black How for three years and wintered 80 hogs there in them barns, they had two good hog houses...you’d put about prob’ly 50 in top one, that’s building at roadside just past Black How house, it had downstairs fer mebbe 50 you’d get round it and a mew a’top and then down bottom at Home Field there’s another building with a hog house on the end,

that ran 30 down there. They came down off moor, waited, and you mebbe let 50 into top house, then you opened gate and t'others ran to bottom at Home Field at Black Howe and went in bottom one which was a low profile building, it hadn't a one above.' **Q: It didn't have a second storey?** 'No.'

**Q: So where was the hay for these sheep kept?** 'I think there might be a little barn on t'end of that, just plenty to put hay in, but hog house itself was a low profile building on t'end of it. **Q: They're all so different?** 'They are, the bigger hoghouse had a hay store above, now whether it had always had that or whether it'd hadn't, it's possible that some time in its early life the second layer might have been for hogs as well, cos there's steps up at back, and they usually have steps. You'll know at Hoggarths, they have steps up to second layer don't they? That was unique thing about hog houses (two floors of sheep). Very seldom you got two layers of stock here do you, you know what I mean? ...and they were well built cause they were stone floor upstairs as well as down stairs.'

'Going back to the Banty cow'uss, there's something that's just come in me mind about it...must have been very early 50s. It'll just be when tourist job was taking off, and there was hikers and campers coming around, they set fire to it did two lads with a primus stove...yes, it burnt down. That's why it has an asbestos roof on...yeah. Two lads on bikes from West Yorkshire or somewhere, lit a primus stove in it...I don't think there mebbe was a lot of hay in it. I remember it was still charred when I was a kid, inside, where t'fire had been. That would've been a disaster in them days.'

'Well, me early memories of them were they were great places to play in...yes, when hay'd gone out, spring time of year, we'd make dens in them. Great places to play in, we had some great times, there was about seven of us round Angram believe it or not, kids...we all played of a night and through day and made what we called pot houses... little houses, like dens and lasses would do 'em all out, get an old cup and saucer and that...like what they called pot houses when I was a kid. Aye, we played in them all day, you seemed to play a lot more in them days didn't you, you know what I mean?'

‘Then when you left school, you soon got in the way of going round all buildings of a morning, they were all to go to, you usually had three or four cows in, at Angram we had in the Skeugh cowhouse it had four tied in it, you went down there, let them out to t’well. They all had a well, had cow’usses, and cows went out to drink. You mucked them out wi’ shovel out at back of them. They came back in, you put their hay in front of them o’course, and they came back in t’look for their hay, and you tied them up again by neck.’

‘At Angram I did Skeugh cow’uss, then you went across gill to what we called t’Smithy Green cow’uss, probably been an old smithy had that in its time, for t’mining lot. Because a lot of them have changed over years from one thing to another...and it had five little beasts that, it was a tying area for small calves, just mebbe six month old, six to eight month old calves, and you had them at one end and then you had your hay mew in the middle and at the other end, was a place for mebbe ten sheep that ran in, a hog house, another hog house but just for ten or so, mebbe your tup hogs. And it took...life just wasn’t as hectic in them days, if you were back round from all your buildings by half past ten, eleven o’clock, it was ample. Cause we were only talking about, my father when he was at Angram, he never had more than about 210 sheep, mebbe 15 cattle. It’s nothing today, nothing. You wonder how they ever got a living.’

‘I’ll tell you a little story about Chris’s uncle. Hay wasn’t always good in them days you know, because it was afore plastic bags and silage, and you had to make hay whatever and so some of it ended up bad, and I’ll always remember Chris’s uncle, Bill, talking about; they were having an argument in Muker pub, Farmer’s Arms. It was when balers came in, and whether you should shake these [tightly packed] canches of hay that came off a bale, whether you should shake it up and loose it up in front of them, or just leave it in the canches you know. And Bill says ‘Well, if I shook mine up, they’d never find their way back into t’cow’uss’ he says, ‘there’s that much dust coming off them’. [Laughing] Which there’s only Bill would say that.’

**Q: In your farming career, when did you stop using cow’usses?** ‘Well...I left Black Howe in ’72 and came to Low Whita, and in ’73 put our first modern building up, that was part of coming to, you know, when we took tenancy on,

that was just when barns were going out. We had a 60 b' 45 [foot] building put up and it was thought to be a tremendous size, it was, and of course they've just gone on from there, and as you got more of these barns, tying the beasts up started going out of fashion and you started using them [cow'usses] for storage more and we have, what have we now down here? We have about four that we've put double doors in so as we can use them to store implements and store hay, store straw too and get in with tractors you see. But them's bigger buildings down here (at Low Whita, east of Muker), what they call laithes. To me, these bigger ones down here, they're not like little field barns, where you had just a small field up dale...they aren't as big enough to get in. Them what I call proper cow'usses with just four cows in; whereas these down here below, well, below Muker really, you start getting bigger ones, for some reason down here th'called 'em laithes.' **Q: Are they still used for the same purpose?** 'Oh yes, but bigger hay mews in t'middle, we had two down here and they had chimneys in t'middle...the hay mews were so big, and so much hay going into 'em, they had a double ladder like, that went down t'middle as a vent... to get air into t'middle'. **Q: To stop them firing?** 'Yes. So you didn't need them up dale in little ones, but down here you did, great big mews that took a lot of hay. Aye, they had air vents in.'

**Q: Have you ever known loose hay to fire?** 'We've never had anything touch wood, there's never been a lot that I knew of. When I went to Black Howe in '69, there's Howe Edge building there, joining Harker's. I took a mew over off 'Kitty', Chris Alderson, and that had been very close. It was gone purple, and brown, it was like tobacco it had been so close to firing...it had just gone to like tea and brown, it had been very, very close to firing...we eventually got rid of it one way or another, mebbe used it for bedding or something...'

'I never heard of a lot of loose hay catching fire. They got very, very warm, cos as I say it had to go in as hay, there was no silage made in them days it had to go in as something. But that's why we had these pikes, made pikes in fields. If your hay wasn't quite ready and good enough and it was going to rain, you 'piked' it. You put it into pikes and they stood out for a week to sweat out and then you put it into mews and it came out better stuff.'

'It was worst job there was, was mewing t'hay, but you usually went in t'hay mew as a kid with your mother or someone, and father of course was forking the hay. You'd bring a sweepful, this was going back to tractors and sweeps, when it was out in rows, this was loose hay...tractor swept it to forking hole in hay mew, and then he would fork it in. Me mother would be receiving it, and we would have to go round edges, she'd be throwing it back to us and we'd be trampling it down. She would be using a pitchfork inside, and throwing it back and then we would be going round tramping it and similar idea to, as I said before when you made pikes when it wasn't just good, if you had some that wasn't as good, as cured as much, hay, it went on above beasts on bauxs, because it had air under it...and that's why they would call it baux hay...it's spelt 'baulk' isn't it - this area above cows...we call it 'baux'. You'd put it 'that's only baux hay, that', meant it wasn't that good a quality'

**Q: Fed just to cows?** 'Yes, mebbe wouldn't be good sheep hay that.'

"Twas a big event of a back end – cutting a mew down – you went in, mebbe end of October, this was done with a hay spade remember, on loose hay. Because your hay mew was full of hay, you couldn't get it out where you usually, front of cows, for cows to eat, you had to cut a square down from top...agin the doorway. You cut that down, and forked it back on top of hay mew, so as when you got your cows in a week or two later, you could get at hay, and you put it down that hole you see. And you worked your way along front of cows as you went on through winter. And a lot of folk would go right round wall sides, cut round, and leave middle in case you wanted some good for sheep...round edges, cause these walls...they weren't sealed with lime or cement or anything and it was a little bit winded round at side that hay... your best hay was in t'middle, if it had been cured right.'

**Q: How many of you would be treading hay in the mew?** 'Mebbe two, two in a small mew, two kids or something like that...there'd be one in the hay mew and one on the baux...but, by it got hot in there, and midges usually...yes, it was hard work, and it was usually women in hay mews.'

**Q: How many hours did you spend treading hay before you got a break?** 'Well it'd depend on how much hay you had to get in, depends how big your field

was. Usually, I would have thought, if you went for three or four acres in a day, loose hay like that...for a family, I'm going with a mother and a father and a couple of kids which was the ideal situation a lot of the time. Cos you spent day rowing it up and you mebbe wouldn't start putting it in til four or five o'clock at night, b'time you got it dry right, when you were happy to row it up. And me dad had rowed it up with horse rake in them days, then your mother was tidying rows up, and you were with rakes til it was ready. And then you started and it'd be eight or nine o'clock mebbe ten o'clock afor you finished of a night usually. And then we got more and more modernised. After t'hoss rakes, there was acrobats, what we called an acrobat rower, they were faster things behind a tractor, twas still sweeps (taking loose hay up to the barn), we got our first bailer in 1967.'

(Adapted from the 21st June 2016 interview transcriptions from the Every Barn Tells a Story project by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority)