

Chris Calvert of Pry House Farm, Keld - formerly of Hoggarths, Keld.

‘My first story takes me back to when I was a teenager, quite a few years ago. It goes back to one of the buildings, known as Briggs Hoghouse. This hoghouse was built to house the hogs; a hog being a female lamb kept for breeding, and they were wintered at home the first winter, nowadays they’re all sent away to lowland dairy farms. And so each night in winter time, hogs were gathered up, out of the pasture and put into the hoghouse. And the system used to be that when you let them out of a morning, you always filled the hayracks full of hay, in daylight, that morning. But unfortunately this day, when I came to put my hogs in that night, they hadn’t been fothered up in the hayracks. And so it was quite dusk, you know, the light had gone and I remember vividly, going into the hay mew for a couple of bales of hay to put in the racks up on the top loft and just reaching down for these bales of hay, a voice suddenly said, *“It’s OK, I don’t smoke, I won’t light a fire”*. Well, it frightened the living daylight out of me as you can imagine, and t’this day I can’t remember whether the hogs got with hay or not that night ...maybe, maybe not. It really put the wind up me and I remember leaving in one hell of a hurry. And next morning we saw the tramp leaving and there was no damage, no fire. He was just on his way and nothing wrong, but at the time it put the fear of god into me that voice in the pitch darkness. I never saw a face, I never saw a face at all but it took me rather unawares.’

‘There’s another building, which is on the way to Ravenseat. The house (Harker’s) is in the middle and either side of the house is two cow’usses and two hay mews which is quite unique all under the one long roof. And there is a very big hay mew, but in this smaller hay mew which is on the western side of the house, about half way up the wall there is a blue line on all four walls of the building. And I do remember dad saying years ago, because we would be putting hay in there in summer time, “Dad, what’s this blue line across the wall? Who’s been doing this, what’s all that about?” And it was apparently for if the farm was let for rent; some farms are let in spring and some are let on the autumn and once upon a time, Harker’s must have been an autumn let and so for the incoming tenant to winter the stock of sheep which goes with the land he would need hay t’feed them to get them through the winter and so the

previous tenant who'd made the hay during summer to hand over in October or November had to leave a stack of hay up t'that level which was quantified enough to get the stock of sheep through the winter. It's something you don't see very much of, but that building has it still very distinct today...just about a yard long on each of the four walls. And that would just be loose hay, not baled hay, which is a smaller tonnage.'

Q: Is there still traditional stalling at Harker's? 'Yes, particularly in the bottom one, there was tying for six cows and a little bull stall. And this bull stall rather tickles people because it's raised up, I mean they're all raised up for the cows, but this little bull stall was even higher . It mustn't have been a very big bull because it wasn't a particularly big stall. We never put a cow in it but that's what it was designed for.'

'...I do remember when we used to winter cows up there, it was always my cow'uss to do was Harker's and you'd let them out, either to the well in the field or the little stream at the back of the house on the fell and each autumn, when we put the cows in, we had one old cow, she was an old favourite. She was an Aberdeen Angus and she was a very quiet cow, she was almost human and each year we used to laugh because after the cows had been out all summer, they go in and they'd mix up, don't know which stalls they're going into, but after a couple of weeks they only go into their own stalls. But this Aberdeen Angus cow, every year, we used to stand back and just watch and she came in and her stall was first in, turn right and face out to the window and she'd stand there, eating her hay "I'm back in me stall again". All the other cows were "woa I don't want this one, I want that one" but every year, and we're just like "I wonder if she does it this year?" and every year she never failed.'

Q: Ronnie Metcalfe was saying they used to tie two cows up in each stall in the Muker cow'usses? 'Ah yes, where the stone boskin is, there often used to be just like a wooden post up so that the cows couldn't turn round , so that they couldn't put her backside up into the other one's food, without a division but with this central pole, that kept them separate. Each one was designed differently...cattle weren't as big as perhaps they are today. They were certainly a lot quieter than the Limousines that we have now.'

‘These off buildings, these cow’usses are very labour intensive. It was twice a day, every day but it was the only way to do it until people got modern buildings at home and the cattle wintered in those. And you had to bring the food to them at home as well. But now, I remember it very well, these cow’usses and wintertime with the cattle...that’s what they were designed for yes. Now, they’re all just in modern sheds in the yard, loose housing, bedded up with straw and like, silage in big round bale feeders. A lot of our cow’usses now just get used for storage. For example, storing fencing stakes, all sorts of bits and bobs that just need to be undercover and kept dry. We do put some stock in them on a spring when we get sheep coming into lamb, we get a bit tight for space so for about a month we sometimes have to put some back in these old traditional boxes, and the cattle take rather badly to it, but it just gets us out of a tight hole when space is at a premium if it’s not very good weather at lambing time.’

Q: How many of the cow’usses on Pry House and Hoggarths Farms still have hay kept in them? ...‘About four ...we still like to make traditional bales of hay. It’s still bad to beat. You can’t buy hay like it the traditional hay meadows, these are a special type of grass, and it’s sweet and natural, not forced. You get the lowland grass which is farmed more intensely, it’s more coarse and rougher and we always say if we got our hay half decent the sheep would prefer that to some lowland hay...yes, they don’t like it.’

‘Another one of my stories goes back to 1979, renowned as one of the worst winters, certainly that people of my age can remember. We always used to winter the sheep on the fells as we still do to a certain extent, and hay would be taken up during the autumn so that there was always a supply of hay up there in these corrugated iron sheds, railway huts or whatever there was. And back in ‘79 the roads was completely blocked with snow and it was blocked for quite a while, and all the local farmers had to walk to the moors to feed t’stock, which wasn’t a problem until I think it was this one Thursday, it was unbelievable . Allus used to one person go and do the moor but in bad weather times people always went in twos. I remember going with m’dad. We set off and walked from Hoggarths, up past Pry House, past the phone box, and you couldn’t see very much. The wall tops were in sight but the drifts were very big. And we got to Firs hoghouse, which is just on the Ravenseat road end and

a neighbouring farmer and the man he had hired were sheltering in the hoghouse and we got in there as well. I do remember there was cattle in there as well. We sheltered there, oh for several hours. And as I mentioned before, we had cattle up at Harker's and we had those to feed ...we had to go on the Ravenseat road as well as going on the Kirkby Stephen road to do the sheep. Anyway, we waited there for a good two to three hours and we could see plainly the day wasn't improving, it was getting worse and my dad always had a very wise head on his shoulders and he said *"I think we want to forget about the sheep , and forget about the cattle and think about getting ourselves safely back down home"* and at this point we looked out of the doorway and just opposite the road there's a telegraph pole and it's not far from the doorway and sometimes you could see it, and sometimes you couldn't. ..and dad said it's absolute madness even setting off onto Ravenseat road you won't get there. It took a bit to frighten my dad in snow and bad weather. He always prided himself *'I can get there, I can get m'self back'*, but he knew his limits and I guess he was thinking my limits weren't maybe as good as his and so to get back from the hoghouse, back down to Hoggarths, he says, *"well, we can't see where we're going down the road cos the walls were making the drifting that bad"* and so we headed down Firs fields, down to the Swale, down to Firs where Clark and Stewart were. The wind wasn't quite as strong down there and we followed the Swale back down to Hoggarths but that's the only day that dad didn't dare come back down the road and I don't think he'd done it before and I don't think he did it since. It's no distance and it's a journey he'd done umpteen times and he could do it with his eyes shutbut that Thursday in the hoghouse was a proper whiteout.'

(Adapted from the 29th June 2016 interview transcriptions from the Every Barn Tells a Story project by the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority)