

NORMAN GUY, STALWART OF MUKER, REMEMBERS THE VILLAGE SCHOOL



I went to Muker School. I was born in 1939, so in those days I would've started in January 1945 when I was 5 wouldn't I, yeah.

There was no kitchen at Muker, we came home for our lunch. I lived in the house just behind the church in the village here. I had cousins that lived at Hill Top Farm, which is a farm you can see as you come over from Askrigg. It's a couple of mile at least, and sometimes they would come down with horse and cart, to ride down on their own. We had a stable next door to the house and the horse would stop in our stable, and then they'd ride back home.

It didn't seem anything out of the ordinary to come in a horse and cart, they'd prefer that to walking. In those days if you didn't pass your eleven-plus you stayed at the village school till you were fourteen. My cousin Annie didn't pass, and her brothers Dick and George were older than her. So there was always an oldish one on the cart as well, they weren't just what you'd think of as primary school kids now.

They wouldn't worry too much about staying on at the village school, they were farming stock and they worked on the farm before they even left school. They all had their farming jobs to do, milking on a night and morning, and haytime, y'know...their life was at home.

It was a good school actually was Muker. She was a good teacher. Miss Dickson. I have no idea what her first name was. And we used to do nature walks. Not that I learnt much, we were all just allowed to be out of school for a few hours y'know. We'd look at flowers and trees and animals and birds.

There was only one of her but there was such a broad range of kids, up to twenty children with an age range of five to fourteen. So the older ones used to help with the younger ones.

Some of the older ones might've failed their eleven-plus, but actually they were doing something important, which was helping the young ones. And it worked the other way as well. There was one lad who was six years older than me but he couldn't read, and the teacher used to have me like listening to him reading. And I must have only been about seven year old then, so I must've been a pretty good reader by the sounds of things.

When I first started school the seating was tiered, like raised wooden seats, and they'd be four or five (children) in a row. Then that went out, and we had tables for two. Girls and boys were all in together, all in the same classroom. We had to learn to write using a pen and ink. It could be messy.

You couldn't see out the windows, because they're so high and so when you sat down you could see the hills but you couldn't see what was going past, there were no distractions. But in those days there wasn't a lot going on. There was very few cars, maybe only about three people had cars in the village. You could recognise cars from long distances in those days cause they were all so different. Which they aren't now. No matter what make they are, they all look very much alike don't they.

If you were naughty it used to be a ruler across your knuckles or a strap. It didn't happen a lot to be quite honest.

At Christmas time I always remember you used to make things for Christmas presents. Miss Dickson would get rolls of old wallpaper and we'd make things out of nothing – pencil cases and pompoms. It was all about using hands y'know, we didn't have woodwork or metal work or things like that. It was all about doing and making things.

There was no playthings. At lunchtime we were allowed to go home for lunch, but at playtime - breacktime as you'd call it now - we were only allowed in the school yard out the back. We went to school to learn, y'know. To me that was the purpose of being in school, to learn not to play. We played when school finished.

I liked learning. When I passed my eleven-plus and went on to Richmond Grammar, the school was great. I was a boarder there from age eleven because there was no school bus in those days, so from up here in Muker we had to be boarders. First electric I came across was at boarding school.

How did I feel going off to sleep somewhere new? Well it was part of the system so I had to get used to it. It was strange having to leave home. I'd never been away from home till then.

We'd stay at Richmond seven days of the week, and we'd go home maybe every six weeks. Half-term holidays were only a long weekend from Friday to Monday. But I used to see me dad on a Saturday. He used to come into Richmond on work and we'd get to see him then, yeah.

I wasn't really aware that I lived in a beautiful place, because this was where we'd always been. I had no idea what it was like living in a town till I went to boarding school, and then I learnt what it was like living with a few thousand people instead of only one hundred.

But I would never want to live in a town or a city now. Look what I've got out there. 58 years now I've lived with that view. And we know our neighbours. We knew our neighbours in all the villages in those days, everybody in Swaledale and Arkengarthdale. Because they were all local families that had been there for hundreds of years.

Most people used to stay in the Dale when they grew up, but that actually altered when secondary education altered. When Richmond Secondary Modern was built up on Darlington Road, that's when everybody at eleven went away to school for secondary education. And I think that altered people's expectations, as everybody got to see what it was like and what opportunities there was.

But still a lot of the farming people - with fathers who were farming – most of them still came back home to work on the farm. But there was opportunities for those that maybe didn't want to do that.

Muker School closed in 1979 with five children. It needed to happen, but I was a bit sad actually. Because you couldn't hear the kids, you know? Now we only have one child in the village. And he's at Richmond School so we never see much of him. But you know at playtime you couldn't hear the kids running round, and it seemed to be the beginning of the end to me for a village. Keld would feel the same, when they didn't have the kids running round. It just seems as if part of life's been taken out of the village. But you can't expect them to keep it on with only five children.

When we were little, every village was its own pod. Is that the right word? It had its own shops, its own pub, its own schools and its own church. We had a church and a chapel and everything - every village was like that. And they were an entity in their own right. And now we struggle to keep a shop. And I mean, it's nothing to do with the shop. It's just the way life's gone. We're very fortunate we still have a pub in the village.

There's nothing to be done - only bring work, you have to go to where the work is. They're on about housing for the young people but young people don't need housing, because there's nothing for them to stay, there needs to be work for them to stay here. Commuting's alright but it isn't the be all and end all is commuting. Expensive for starters.

I came home because there was a job for me at home. If there hadn't been, I wouldn't be here now.

We used to have a family business, a haulage business, and I came home to do that straight after Richmond School. I did that for 25 years. We sold up in '81, and then I drove the school buses. So I was lucky enough to get another job. If I hadn't got the school bus run I would have probably had to move away.

The school bus was County-owned, it wasn't contract, and the chap that drove it lived just behind us here, and when he retired, he came to see if I fancied the job. County wanted somebody that lived up here to do the job to stop a lot of travelling. I lived up here, so I started up here and finished up here at night.

Most of the children were our relations (laughs). Not just the Guy family but me wife's family, and nieces and nephews. They were very good, they knew they had to behave themselves, because I had the support of the parents.

I enjoyed being the bus driver, well I did it 23 years, half me working life. I had half me working life driving wagons, and half me working life driving buses. I preferred the buses I think. Cause with the wagons you had to get animals onto em, or carrying stuff onto em, whereas with the bus they walk on by themselves (laughs).

I think what you can experience living in the country is the freedom, for one thing. I mean in towns they can't let kids go out on their own, can they? You see these people coming on holiday with families, into the cottages, and you can see the look on the faces as the kids come out the door and go running round the village, it's unbelievable, that they have so much freedom. And I think it's great. You give them confidence for one thing, and they realise that there isn't something around every corner that they have to be wary of.

We learnt to swim down in the river there. And summer we'd be down there every night, after school. I taught meself to swim just by jumping in the water and surviving (laughs). And playing games, I mean, we had no street lights in the village. So in wintertime it was pitch black. Yer had no problems cause yer knew where every stone was, every step was, and we used to play games on the nights round the village. Like hide and seek, this sorta thing. In the dark. But it was no problem. That was part of life.

I've played in Muker Band for the last 68 years. I play the cornet. And I teach youngsters, if any want to learn. I've never been taught music you see. I've never had a teacher. I've always been what you call self-taught I suppose. And I don't find it easy. I prefer them to learn at school, where they get people that know how to teach. But I do me best, I do, you know. We used to have a lot of youngsters at one stage. I had like a junior band. And then they moved into the bigger band. There was no music at grammar school whatsoever. We had one lesson a week of music appreciation it was called. But there was no practical playing or anything like that. Me music actually has been since I left school, quite honestly. And as I say it's self-taught as much as anything. Just listening. And practicing. Music adds a lot to your life. Being part of an orchestra or a band or a group. It's a great thing. As long as there's a group of us, we'll play and enjoy it and make noises.

Second picture below: *It was a wet day so the band was playing inside. That's me on the left and my brothers Maurice on the top and Ron on the right.*

