

Out and About in Craven

# BITTEN BY LITTON

ALTHOUGH the emphasis in Litton has shifted over the years from farming to commuting, it is a growing, cosmopolitan community.

In the village which has seen small farms, and families, absorbed by bigger units, there lives a woman striving for self-sufficiency on a smallholding, a man who looks after 19 miles of inhospitable road, a farmer who once won a sheep in a game of dominoes, two sculptors and an assistant editor of a national newspaper.

Ian Plant met them and their neighbours, wound up holding the rear end of a cow and where dogs seem to outnumber humans, was quite bitten by the place—literally.

LITTON seems to be going to the dogs. Every home seems to have one, and at one house there are 14.

There is one called Patch, and as I searched for the door at the back of Foss View I discovered why. There was the rattle of a chain, a flash of white then the sensation of teeth in trouser cloth and flesh. Before I came to my senses Patch struck again, higher up, and Peggy Chapman appeared to see what the commotion was about.

She apologised profusely. "I didn't hear you coming. He only attacks people when he's tied up."

I secretly implored her not to put the theory to the test. Patch looked hungrily at my other leg as I hurried back past his kennel, but Peggy restrained him. She is the wife of Eddie Chapman, one of Littondale's most familiar figures, who patrols 19 miles of road from Rainscar on Penyghent, to Foxup, Darnbrook, Slets Gill and Hawkswick, latterly on a bright yellow county council dumper truck.

In his spare time he looks after sheep for the Greenwoods of West Marton, who have land in Littondale and for whom Eddie was farm man for many years.

they did get inside they would be disappointed—it is blocked solidly by a roof fall less than 100 ft. from the entrance.

The Foss discharges water all the year round, but Potts Beck and Crystal Beck which deeply incise the dale's eastern flanks to the north and south of the village, have intermittent flows. Water is also drawn from them and there is a borehole. Joints in the limestone engulf water at varying points depending on the volume, and the topography of the area points to cave systems of considerable potential.

Some of the finest stalactites in the Northern Pennines were found a mile down the valley at Boreham Cave by cave diver Geoff Yeadon. Geoff's parents, former Skipton Rural Council engineer-surveyor Mr. Tom Yeadon, and his wife Gladys, retired to Ammerdale Garth, formerly Hill Top, in 1974, since when they have modernised it extensively.

Geoff Yeadon also had a hand in the exploration of another impressive cave, whose entrance in the bed of the River Skiffare is now blocked. Over 4,500 ft. of impressive streamway was discovered by the Burnley Caving Club. It led to a 550 ft. long sump, a completely waterlogged tunnel, dived by Geoff into a 70 ft. high cavern bestowed with the inglorious name of Fat Old Toad Hall. It continues unexplored.

The cave was named after nearby Spittle Croft, the ruins of an old house built on the site of a monks' hospice.

It is on this west side of the dale that Litton has its roots. The abbots of Fountains Abbey received a corn mill here as a gift in 1279, but there were frequent disputes with the monks of Sawley Abbey, who owned land opposite. For damage and violence on one occasion, the monks of Sawley were fined £10.

There was a school in Old Litton, built in 1695, and it must have been a busy little community when the old drove road over Penyghent and Fountains Fell via Nether Hesleden founded the river here. There was an inn at the other side on Outgang Lane, a broad road through the fields along which cattle were driven to common pastures beyond, but it closed in 1842 when a bridge was built higher up the river.

EAST Garth is now the only property occupied on the west side of the valley. It is the home of Dennis Lund, who I found among his Border cross Lakeland terriers back across the river at West Farm, a tenancy he took over in 1964. One of a family of 10, he was born at Upper Hesleden, a farm which clings to the steep sides of Penyghent Gill.

Seven of the young Lunds walked the 2½ miles of exposed road to Halton Gill school but Dennis was luckier. His father moved to Malham Tarn, where he was under-keeper for 9,000 acres of shooting rights. There was a school at the tarn and Dennis became one of its 28 pupils. The teacher was a woman who rode in every day from across Malham Moor on a donkey or pony.

But Dennis was on the move again in 1930, to Arncliffe where his father, William Edward Lund, set up as a molecatcher. The family still have a stuffed white mole in a glass case. "My father would catch about three white moles a year, and some piebald ones," said Dennis. "For my eldest brother's wedding, the second in the family, he made a pair of white, moleskin gloves for the bride. I've caught thousands of moles, but never a white one."

The family uprooted themselves again and moved to Buckden, from where Dennis journeyed to school at Kettlewell. There followed 11 'disastrous' months at Hellifield before he finished his schooldays when the family moved to Trablans, half-a-mile from Malham. He and two younger brothers walked three-quarters-of-a-mile across fields to school at Kirkby Malham in the mornings—and came home for dinner. "Our clogs eventually wore a nine-inch deep rut up the hill to the school," Dennis recalled.

He was working back in the meadows of Upper Hesleden when war broke out, then between spells as a farm man, he caught rabbits professionally.

On V.J. Day at Litton's surviving inn, The Queens, there was much rejoicing and Dennis challenged a farm lad, John Pedder, to a 200-yards race. "There was a lot of betting on the side. He had 20 yards start because I was taller. A few fivers floated about and I lost mine, and the race, by a yard. If it had been 50 yards further I'd have won."

His grandfather had been a better runner. George Lund, a well-known carrier between Settle and Stainforth, won a pint pewter tankard at local sports in a 100-yards sprint—and then he was 50-years-old!

In 1952 Dennis set up at East Garth. He had a cow, a horse and 54 sheep and had to catch rabbits as a sideline to live. "I had no haytime machinery so I joined with a farmer down the dale. By the time it was my turn with it the weather broke so I had a bad do. And when I got back, I found my father had mown half-an-acre of grass with a scythe."

Now Dennis has 1,500 acres, 120 dairy cows and 750 Swaledale sheep. He is helped by his sons, Stuart and Stephen, who look after land and sheep on their own account as well. "I could not do without them," Dennis told me. "Labour is so expensive."

Life, he recalled, was different in his younger days. "Everyone kept a pig and three or four farmers would come and help you kill it. Each would help the other when the time came. We made sausages on our own machines. You can't buy any to touch them now."

There were good nights in The Queens, where Dennis won a Swaledale gimmer lamb in a Boxing Night dominoes championships. "It belonged to the late W. E. Greenwood and had strayed onto my land. I asked him when he was coming to collect it. He said he'd play me for it at dominoes—£5 or the lamb. I bred from it for years and probably still have a strain from it to this day."

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People came from far afield to trip Litton's famous ship's lino to the



THREE of 12 red setter pups running about the house at Potts Beck, home of Kath Bellerby, whose husband Michael, is chairman of the parish meeting.



MARGARET WALKER, of Elbeck. Margaret and her husband Ron are opening a gallery and pottery workshop in the summer, in Grassington.

Peggy met Eddie when she worked at The Falcon, at Arncliffe, so the couple are no strangers to the valley. They are familiar with its changing moods, from the nine weeks the dale was cut off by snow during the winter of 1947, to the summer of 1975 when there was not a drop of rain between the end of May and the end of August. In September, 1961, one thunderstorm lasted from early evening to the following morning, with lightning flashes and thunder all night.

On January 21, 1963, a family at West Farm attempted to thaw out their pipes in a barn, using a blow-lamp, which set fire to hay. Four fire engines turned out and had difficulty getting enough water to put out the blaze. The hay was lost and the barn gutted.

Such accounts are recorded by Peggy in a small exercise book where she has compiled a potted history of the village.

They have lived at the former gamekeeper's cottage since 1958. Foss View takes its name from the water which gushes from the fellside across the river, more so after heavy rain.

A CONSTANT watch is kept on Litton Foss because it supplies over half the village with water. It is surrounded by a fence and the coming and goings of anyone near it can be seen by the entire community. Cavers



JOHN CAMPBELL, of Sawyers



JANET BEARD, striving for self-sufficiency with the help of a Dales-pony.

and fiddler Sammy Stables, a pork butcher from Keighley who later moved to Grassington. Inside and all round the hall, a seven-inch-high platform provided refuge during Lancers, an exhilarating eightsome in which ladies were swung off their feet with increasing fervour.

With the exception of Sundays, it was used each evening as a reading room for cards and bagatelle and later billiards. Lenten services were conducted here by the vicar of Arncliffe, there was a badminton club and a Young People's Guild. There were wedding feasts and birthday parties, and on wet nights during haytime, Irish labourers danced and played the flute at dances arranged spontaneously.

The hall gradually fell into disrepair and after being pronounced unsafe by a Settle Rural Council building inspector, it was dismantled and sold in 1959. It still fetched more than cost price and the lino was sold separately.

Behind the hall was a school built in 1847. Scholars had to pay 1d a week but the very poor were excused payment. For reasons unknown it was closed between 1865 and 1875 and from 1895 to 1910, and it closed for

dale from Skipton in 1969.

The Taylors succeeded Henry Battersby, a man whose grandfather a Leeds tailor, brought his wife and young son to Litton in 1875. Mrs. Battersby taught at the school while her husband plied his skills with needle and thread. In 1885 Mrs. Battersby resigned to become the village's first postmistress, and the business passed to their son, Arthur, in 1922. He was also a road foreman, registrar of births and deaths and vicar's warden at St. Oswald's Church, Arncliffe.

Nearly 30 years passed before the third generation took over and Henry, or Harry as he was better known, a former joiner and builder, retired to Riddlesden last summer.

It was to escape the pressures of business, as a marketing manager living latterly at Carleton, near Skipton, that Stephan Appleton took The Queen's Arms four years ago.

The history of the pub is vague, but it was in existence in 1851 when, it is recorded, a licence was refused. Older datesfolk still refer to it as The Mucky Duck, so-called from the time it was in the hands of a landlord who also kept The Black Swan at Bradford.

"I didn't buy the pub to make money," Stephan told me. "I bought it as a way of life. I wanted my independence and to be my own master."

But he still finds restrictions, imposed on him ironically by the licensing laws. "They should be framed in tourist areas to suit the trade," he complained. "For the first three hours in winter it is rare that anyone comes in but I am bound to open at 5.30 p.m."

But it was the season he preferred, because, he said, it was back to the locals. And they constitute the darts team which, when not on home ground, travel by bus over the tops to venues in the Settle and District League.

Captain is John Henry Campbell, who moved with his wife Cathy to Sawyers Garth Farm, near the Crystal Beck road bridge, in December last year. Born at Foxup, John has lived on farms at Arncliffe, Deepdale, Barden, Bolton Abbey, and was even at Sawyers Garth before—fourteen years up to 1940. "I've told him we've gone far enough now," said Cathy. "Next thing we know, we'll be back at Foxup."

The Campbells lament the loss of the small farms and local families. "There were five farms here—now there are only two," John explained.

Some of them form part of the larger concern farmed with land higher up the valley by John and Tom

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**A** CONSTANT watch is kept on Litton Foss because it supplies over half the village with water. It is surrounded by a fence and the comings and goings of anyone near it can be seen by the entire community. Covers are naturally attracted by the distant sight of this large resurgence but if

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**O**N the site of the old school now stands Dilston, the home of Michael and Kathryn Bellerby, son Richard (13), a boarder at Ermysted's Grammar School, Skipton, and daughters Sarah (10) and Robyn (8). The girls attend school at Arncliffe, where their mum spends two hours a day as a non-teaching assistant and meals supervisor.

"Watch out when you go up there," Peggy Chapman had warned me. "They've got a dog that's worse than ours." What she omitted to tell me was that it was also called Patch and had come from the Chapmans in the first place!

Patch II was denied a mid-afternoon snack of reporter's limbs by his mistress, who bundled him into another room. But I was developing something of a phobia about dogs, particularly when another door opened and in bounced Brandy, a handsome red setter, and her 12 pups, which the family are trying to sell.

Michael Bellerby is chairman of Litton Parish Meeting, which meets annually in April and when other matters, like poor television reception, demand. He presides at the annual letting of the parish lands, which belong solely to the village. One of them, Margaret's Field, or Bull Lea, is a benefaction from one Elizabeth Wade. In addition to the tenant's rent, the equivalent of nine shillings is paid, and probably has been paid since the abolition of church rates, to the Littondale Charities.

Dilston was built by Michael nine years ago. A playing member of Wharfedale R.U.F.C., he is a quantity surveyor and travels daily to Bradford and surrounding sites. For Litton has become very much a commuter village, a fact evidenced by people like Michael, and Colin Groves who works for ICI at Huddersfield. His home is Litton Hall where his wife Eileen, resident in the village for 25 years apart from a short absence, runs a guesthouse.

**F**IVE years of commuting have proved too much for Ron Walker and his wife Margaret. The Skirfare rushes past their home at Elbeck, a farmhouse until 1961. The Walkers are opening a pottery workshop and gallery in Grassington in the summer, enabling Ron to forsake his job as an art teacher in Manchester.

They are sculptors and attended Leeds College of Art. Ron specialises in commemorative plates, thrown ware, portrait heads and commissions such as statues for churches. Margaret concentrates on decorative flowers and coiled, hand-built work.

"We always wanted to live in this area," Margaret told me as Arthur, an Old English sheepdog, thumped the dining room floor with his paws. "It was a case of getting jobs. In the end we decided to come, job or no job, and have spent five years working towards the gallery."

The Walkers' love of the limestone scenery is shared by Janet and Geoffrey Taylor, who took over the post office last August. Geoffrey is Litton's longest-distance commuter, spending three days a week in London where he is an assistant editor of The Guardian.

His wife, a New Zealander, looks after the shop which sells "the sort of things that people run out of." It is all there in the village, but according to Baines's Yorkshire, published in 1822, there were, among a population of 102, a grocer, blacksmith, cabinet maker and shoemaker, as well as

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Some of them form part of a larger concern farmed with higher up the valley by John and Tom Cowan. Tom lives with his Brenda at Brearlands, in Litton, his brother lives at Halton. Their family's link with the valley goes back 110 years.

Ironically perhaps, Tom thinks the increased price of labour will mean farming swing back to smaller units. "The day has come when the only people to survive will be the ones who can do it all by themselves," he says. "It is becoming a bigger struggle, we have found we may have done things too quickly."

Chores like repairing gaps in walls are some of the least productive most time consuming and necessary aspects of farming, particularly when you have mile upon mile of the wall. "If you could make a machine that would wall a gap you'd be a millionaire," said Tom.



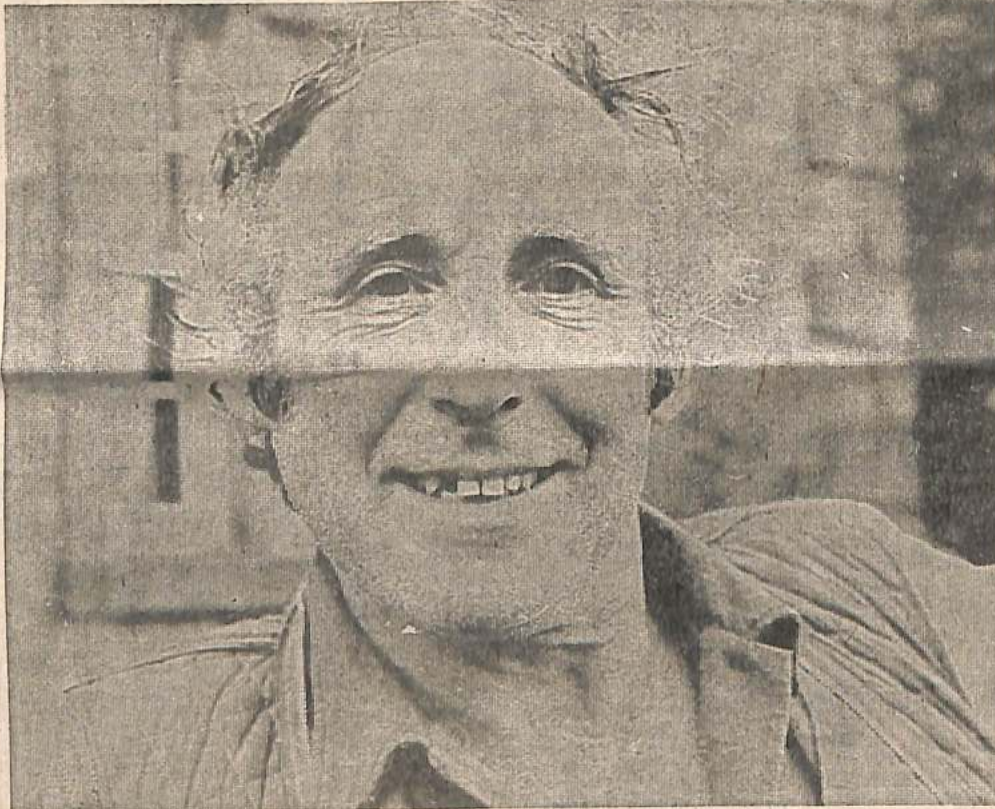
**STEPHAN APPLETON**, landlord of the Queen's Arms, the pub so known to many dalesfolk as The Mucky Duck.

**I**N a village where farms have been split up and houses sold separately it was heartening to encounter Janet Beard. For one thing, her dogs were friendly.

Janet has a 13½-acre smallholding on which she is trying to eke a living for herself, her eight-year-old daughter Katy, and young friend Alison. It is an exercise in self-sufficiency, a sort of rural Good Life, yet a step back into an era to which Tom Cowan believes we might eventually return.

The Beards have been at Arncliffe Farm for 3½ years. Janet has no real knowledge of farming other than familiarity developed from visits to an uncle. "It is partly sentiment but I am trying to produce enough food to live on and I take in visits to help it pay," she told me.

Our conversation was interrupted by Dennis Lund, who had come to help Janet inject Daisy, one of her two Jersey cows that had gone herself on dairy nuts. I volunteered help and wound up at Daisy's attractive end, which I held firm with Janet while Dennis administered the jab. Daisy I learned, was much improved the following day.



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TWO of the dale's most familiar figures, roadman Eddie Chapman and his wife, Peggy.

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Today's tradesmen travel from Grassington and Kettlewell. There are no buses—the last one ran up the



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Latest addition to the Armitstead farmstead is Helen, a Dales pony with whom Janet and Alison, who is training her, intend working the

steep smallholding. They have also bought a cart and harness.

There's Gwenny, a pedigree Welsh sow, some duck, hens, geese and a few Jacob sheep. Janet has much faith in comfrey, a fodder crop cheaper than oats and cake. It is a tall perennial with huge leaves, and it will feed anything. "I can cut it myself with an old sickle," she added, and also plans to grow kail, turnips and potatoes.

Janet was under no illusions about the struggle that would be involved when she started. "It takes a lot longer than you think to get established. It is difficult trying to adapt a little corner of what was a bigger farm used for rough grazing, and to make it a unit by itself.

"We don't have water in all the fields so rotation is difficult. This summer we'll be able to carry it to troughs by horse and cart.

"The farm is not completely self-sufficient and I don't think it ever will be. The guests pay for it, and I have to do some supply teaching during the winter.

"The idea is to have variety, for my daughter to live among animals and to watch them grow up. I feel that Europe, particularly Britain, is going downhill. I want Katy to relate to the Third World. That's where the future lies."