



I Brenda Cowan - nee Hutchinson
was born in Cusleton nr Skipton on the
15-1-43, being the youngest of ten. I went to
school in Cusleton then to Brougham Street school
→ finally to Queville, which I left at fifteen.
I then got a job as a weaver at Mark Nutter's
Skipton. I was there until I got married to Tom
in 1966. I then started married life at Halton Gill
and enjoyed every minute ever since.

Brenda Cowan

I Tom Cowan was born at Halton
Gill. 13/10/44. I have seen many changes
in my short life. I went to Halton Gill
school. in clogs but when I went to
Upper Wharfedale school I had to wear
shoes. because of the frosts.

T. Cowan.

Tom Cowan talked about how he finds the changes in farming during his lifetime in the Dale, and in particular of the process of diversifying.

It used to be good to go to market and get a good price for your stock. You'd come home feeling satisfied. Now with depending on subsidies, the gilt's gone off the gingerbread. There's no future for farming now. We're not really wanted. The country's just a playground now. I suppose in the end it will go over to ranching. But if you want to go on living here, and your sons and their families, you've got to diversify.

We first started, I suppose, when we made Brearlands into two holiday cottages. That was in 1979 when we moved from there into the Doll's House. The next thing was making that into the hotel. When we started the hotel and I was waiting at table, the first time I went to auction mart, someone called out, 'Hello, here comes Manuel!'

The really worrying time was when we made the cottages and had to borrow a lot of money. We borrowed £300,000, and then we needed more to finish the job. It wasn't so bad getting the first lot because the bank manager said, 'Well, you've proved you can deal with the public.' Then we needed some more, and that came too, although it was worrying. We'd nearly got there and almost ready for letting, but we still owed about £100,000 for work done, and the bank refused any more. The manager came up, and told me he could remove the furniture. I really lost my temper and told him to stop talking such bloody nonsense and to get off my property before more damage was done. How many other people have been let down like that right at the last minute?

Anyway we got some money somehow and most of the tradesmen understood when I said I just needed a bit more time. That was a bad time though, and it must have shown because a year later a shooting friend said to me, 'Thought we were going to loss thee. Thou was bloody low.' Altogether we had to borrow £435,000. Brenda always said, 'Well, if we lose it all, we can both get a job

somewhere', so you just go on and you get through. Now it's quite good to think it will all be paid off in seven years.

If you can live here, you're better off than a lot of other workers. We're lucky compared with the steelworkers and the miners. When they're laid off they've got nothing. I've never been interested in making a lot of money. I just want to make sure everyone's all right and settled. If anyone came and offered me £5 million for this lot, I'd just say 'Piss off!'

[The Cowans won a Country Landowners Association award in 1995 (Farm Building Award Scheme, northern area commendation) 'for the conversion of farm buildings to holiday cottages at Stonelands Farmyard.'

Recently the family unwittingly revived a 19th Century tradition of walling far afield, just as over a hundred years ago a local walling family, the Pettys of Arncliffe, had walled at Sutton Brow on the Hambleton Hills. The Cowans became involved in a wall restoration project run by the National Trust at Fountains Abbey. (The main difference is that the Pettys had to walk to their work, a distance of 60 miles.)

The present opportunity came during construction of the stepping stones across the Skirfare (referred to on page ?) which involved the demolition of a Stonelands wall. The contractor asked Tom if he and Roger and Mark would rebuild it themselves. He must have been impressed with the result, and probably with the long roadside wall outside the cottages which they had recently done, because he asked them to consider walling at Fountains Abbey for which he was responsible. It turned out to be on the Seven Bridges Walk along the river Skell in the Studley Royal water gardens where the banks needed 'wearing' (reconstructing), having been worn away since the original work, designed by William Aislabie the son of John Aislabie who had started the work in the 18th Century.

Serious flooding over the years has caused erosion of the banks and Tom, Roger

and Mark have rebuilt 106 metres of the 200 needed, but are dependent on the weather as the river has to be very low for working, and in this phenomenally wet autumn, that has been a problem. This is one part of a £50,000 restoration scheme.

Brenda Cowan spoke about her life in the Dale from the beginning in a conversation with Ruth and Janet Taylor:

I thought the Dale was a long way out. The first time Tom brought me up here I thought, 'Where the hell's he takking me?' We courted three years and then married. I couldn't drive before that and he said I'd better learn as otherwise I'd have to wait till he or others were going. I passed the test at the third go and I think being able to drive made me like it more up here.

I was still working in Skipton at Mark and Walters, weaving (pl. ft. work), and went on for 6 months. I didn't mind the driving, but I did run out of petrol in Arncliffe

one morning at 5.15., and as I didn't know anyone in Arncliffe by then, had to walk back to Halton Gill, and then David ran me back with some petrol.

I enjoyed it up here. Everyone was very friendly and the Cowans were very good.

Tom saw that changes were coming in farming, so we had to change too. There was no financial help; you just had to get on with it, otherwise Mark and Roger would have had to work elsewhere. Tom's been in farming all his life but you can't look back. Everything has worked out well. If difficulties arise, we all get together and talk it through. We've always managed to sort things out. You can't allow it to build up inside. (At this point, Ruth said it was sometimes difficult for the one who had the problem, because of not wanting to upset anyone, but they all understood that, and it was the best way of tackling the situation. Tom and Brenda had borne the brunt of the long hours in the hotel, 7am to midnight and after, seven days a week, so that had to change, and everyone is happier with the new arrangement.)

It was a big change when we started the hotel and quite hard for Tom when he went to auction. But as times got bad for the farmers, they stopped making the 'Manuel' jokes. We're lucky because we can do everything in the family and don't need to employ anyone. We all work together well.

I, Ruth Cowan, was born at Stobhill Hospital, Glasgow at 1.20pm on the 6th May 1973. I weighed a healthy 7lb $\frac{3}{4}$ oz and lived in that area right up until moving to Dundee University aged 17 yrs.

I Mark Cowan was born at Keighley on the 17th Nov 1971, and I have lived here in the dale all my life.

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as yet 14

The Cowan family's association with Littondale began in 1868, when Thomas and Nancy (née Ellershaw) moved to Halton Gill from Bentham with their young family, Anne aged 3, James Ellershaw aged 2 and baby John. They farmed at Low House Farm for about 30 years, before taking on the Manor. At that time there were about 8 farms in Halton Gill.

John went on to marry Jane Coates whose family farmed in Halton Gill and they had four children, Nancy in 1900, Thomas in 1904, James in 1905 and John in 1908.

In 1937, James married Amelia(Millie) Towers from the White House in Austwick. They in turn farmed the Manor and took great pride in producing quality stock, together with his brother John (known affectionately as Unc). They had four children, Nellie, John, David and Thomas(Tom). Unc was also the local postman; three mornings a week he rode his horse to Cosh and three mornings to Pen-y-Ghent. Later he used his motorbike. Young John went on to take over the Manor and marry Anthea Val Haslegrave in 1975.

Tom married Brenda Hutchinson in 1966. They moved to Angram, where Brenda served ham and eggs and did Bed and Breakfast. They had two sons, Roger and Mark.

Tom and John took over Stonelands Farm in Litton from Maurice and Norman Pullan in 1970. Brearlands barn was converted into the family home in the late 60s.

Roger as a boy often helped his father and uncle milk the 80 Friesian cows. The two farms became independent of each other in the 80s when Roger left school and went to work with his dad full-time.

As Mark chose a career in catering, the family changed Stonelands Cottage into 'Littondale Country House Hotel' in 1990. It became a flourishing business.

Later, as times changed, the cows were sold in 1993 and the milking parlour and outbuildings converted into the cottages and swimming pool as they are now in 2000. Another change came in 1997 when the hotel was made into three 'suites'. Meals are available and delivered to the cottages.

Roger and I met at school. I grew up in Kettlewell, where my Grandad and Grandma (Robert and Nancy Butterfield) took the Blue Bell in 1939. Both my sister Tracey and I were heavily into horses, being members of the local Pony Club, competing in all horsey events, hunting with Pendle Forest and Craven Hunt.

Roger and I married in 1989 and moved into Brearlands. He continued working on the family farm and I at my parents' hotel and tearoom in Kettlewell. Emily was born in 1992 and Charlotte in 1995. Both girls enjoy swimming, riding their Shetland ponies and riding their bikes, and for Emily there is also the piano and playing golf. Swimming is Charlotte's love at the moment. Both girls enjoy going to Arncliffe School.

Ruth Cowan

When I first came down from Glasgow to work in the area, it was supposed to be a temporary arrangement (for some months only!). I remember thinking that the road was never ending, and that my dad, who was driving, must be lost. However the area was beautiful, and I loved it; there was not a lot to do by means of entertainment. I couldn't drive, and I thought it was great...for a short time! That changed when I went to one of the local dances in Amerdale Hall, and met Mark (now my husband). I knew when we started going out together that it would mean my staying down here and that was fine.

We were both worried initially about where we would live. Mark was living and working at home then, having lived in this dale all his life. He and his family (parents Tom and Brenda, brother Roger) moved down from Halton Gill to Litton in 1975, owning their farmhouse "Brearlands". Tom and his brother John purchased the farm and "Stonelands Cottage" in 1969. They extended the house in '83 and then in '89-'90 converted it into a small family-run hotel. In 1991, as a family, they decided to convert the farm buildings across the road into seven self-catering cottages. It was a big change as the Cowans had farmed for generations, milking cows and keeping sheep.

To begin with, Mark and I lived at the rear of the hotel. When we were engaged, we applied for planning permission to build our own cottage alongside "Stonelands". We were married in 1996 at Dirleton Castle, Scotland, and planning permission was granted soon after for our house. Building was completed within three months and we named our new home after the River "Skirfare".

Our twin daughters were born on 18th September 1996, and we named them Hannah and Katie. It was lovely bringing them home here from the hospital; all the cards and presents we received from family and friends in the dale made the nursery very welcoming and helped make that a very special (and tiring!) time for us. Soon after the girls were born, I realised that I would have to learn to drive, if I

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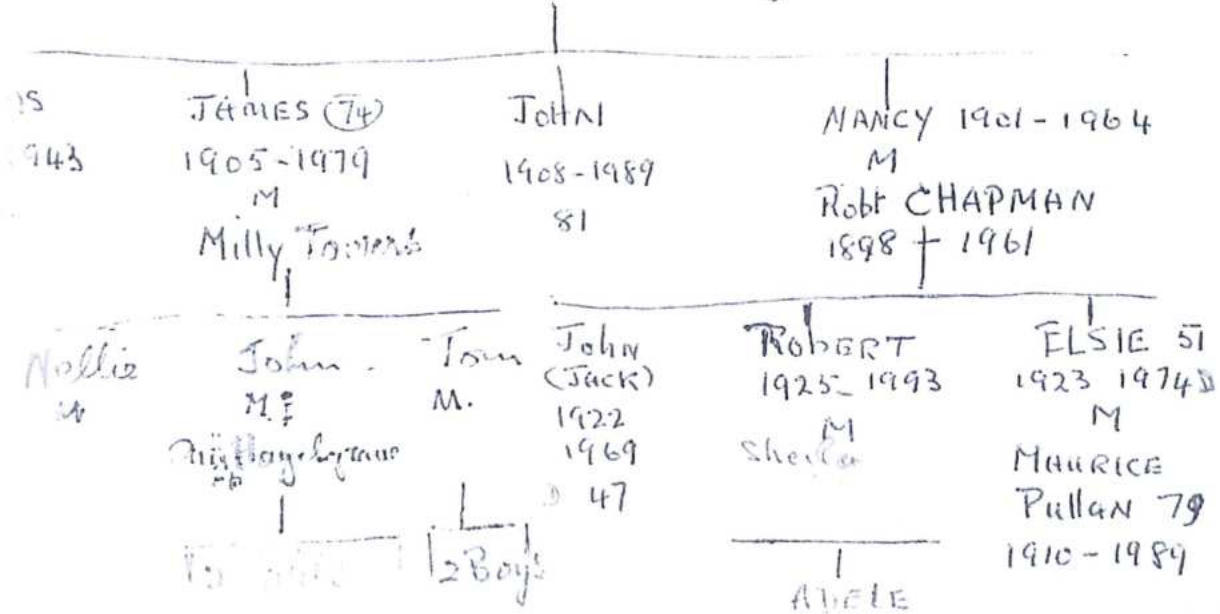
wanted to take them anywhere. Brenda used to take me down to Skipton for my lessons, and helped me practise, and I can't tell you how relieved I was when I passed. It has made a huge difference to my independence and confidence, and really living up here as we do, I think it is very important.

The girls are 4 years old now and having great fun at Grassington Playschool and Hebden Nursery. Next year they will join their cousins Emily and Charlotte at Arncliffe School which happily is just a short distance from home. Meantime they are enjoying playing with dolls and their new bikes - and also taking part in a survey interested in the development and understanding of twins. (T.E.D.S.)

For me the major advantage of belonging to a family firm is that I can work here at home rather than going out. This means that I can spend a good deal of time with the girls as the hours are flexible and we all work in with each other. Now that my own mum and dad have also recently moved into Threshfield, it is lovely having so much family nearby.

Mark and I applied for planning permission to extend our cottage a few months ago. We were thrilled when this was granted, and are now hoping to begin work on that shortly. It means an awful lot to me to know that there is an opportunity here for the girls as they grow up, to work. They are very fortunate in that. Obviously we do not know what ambitions they will have as young ladies, that is up to them, and where they choose to live is also their decision. But I find it reassuring to know, that hopefully if things go well with the business, they could continue to live (and work!) at home. They are very lucky.

John Cowan M Margaret Jane



Tom Cowan - last sentence altered.

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