East Garth

This account is based on conversations between Dennis Lund and Eddie Chapman about their early days in Littondale and about farming at East Garth and other Dales farms.

Dennis Lund: I was born at Penyghent Cottage, also known as Upper Hesleden, in 1925. My family went to live at Malham Tarn in 1929, where my father was gamekeeper, and I first went to school there at Waterhouses on the Malham Tarn estate. I remember being pulled on a sledge over the frozen tarn. We came to live in Arncliffe in 1932 and I was at school there for few years. My mother had a shop and made teas for cyclists; very few motorists came in those days. Later we lived at Buckden, Hellifield and Malham.

My first job was on Langerton Farm near Cracoe, where horses were used to pull the machinery. It was during the war, and the situation of farmers had improved after the very hard times in pre-war years – at Langerton they had once had to sell a cow before they could pay the rent! The winter of 1940-41 was very hard. The farm had no hay reserves and 46 of the 120 sheep died, but before they could be buried the wool had to be clipped from them. The price of a cow rose from £30 to £70 overnight. I learnt walling there and once was with the farmer and watched a sheep run at a wall. It did it again and again until the wall fell down – and I got the blame for not stopping the sheep sooner. One day I found a strange object on Barden moor and carried it back to the farm where it caused great alarm – I had picked up an unexploded incendiary bomb! Another night a three ton land mine was dropped by an enemy bomber at Yarnbury above Grassington. I had cycled to the pictures at Skipton and on the way back through Cracoe was challenged: "who goes there?" I couldn't speak. "Who goes there?" "Me" I managed to answer in a small voice as a bayonet was pushed against my stomach. "You silly young fool, you nearly got yourself killed" - it was a soldier from the camp near Thorpe, which had been put on alert.

Later the war brought tragedy for my family. I was working then at Litton Hall and was chopping wood at Litton Hall barn when a policeman cycled up from Arncliffe and gave me the news that my brother Lionel had died in India. My parents were living at Foss view then. Janet Taylor's book "Littondale Life" describes more about their lives. One memory of my father is of him walking through Litton with two

fox cubs on a chain, trying to sell them; eventually a woman from Clapham bought them.

During the war farmers were forced to plough and grow crops. When I worked at Litton Hall Farm they ploughed Bridge End meadow (by New Bridge) and grew potatoes. At harvesting time, we went first with a bucket and fork, but the ground was too hard and needed a machine to turn it over. Other crops grown in the village were oats, swedes, turnips and kale. A field by the corner of the Outgang (Bancroft) was planted with swedes and we had to get down on our knees and weed them by hand. The narrow field next to it (Little Parker) was planted with oats. When the first crop ripened, nobody knew what to do with it, but they got the landlord of the pub to show them how to stook it. It was threshed at Litton Hall, when the gamekeeper from Kilnsey came up with a threshing machine, and the sacks of oats were stored in the sitting room – but the rats found them! Land girls came up to work at the ploughing and sowing. East Garth never had to plough because they only had 13 acres of meadow and the lane was too narrow for the machinery. My father and brother did rebuild the wall to widen it though, when Geoffrey had a broken leg and had to sit down to do the walling my father passed the stones to him.

Irish labourers came to work on some of the farms for haytime and were paid £40 a month (at the time I was only getting £15 a month). They were hired in Skipton High Street. They could mow 2-3 acres a day with a scythe and when the weather was bad they whitewashed the shippons or cut thistles. I asked one of them where he went afterwards and was told he went to Lincolnshire for the potato harvest and then back to Ireland, but there was no work there. A few were still coming in the early 1960s. Italian and German prisoners of war also worked on some farms, coming up by bus from Overdale camp at Skipton. The Italians put in a water pipe at Hawkswick.

Sheep were wintered at Denholme near Oxenhope, from 1st December to 1st March. They walked to Grassington station, then thousands went by train to Thornton, then walked to Denholme. When they came back they were black from the sooty atmosphere.

Nearly everyone kept pigs then and during the war farmers were only allowed to slaughter one a year. There was a close police check on anyone suspected of killing more. My brother Dick's father-in-law kept a pub, the Hare and Hounds at Lothersdale and his son, who had a small farm at Carleton, had killed a pig and taken it to the pub. The police came and found pig hairs and blood in the car, and found

that Dick Lund had driven off to East Garth. Two car loads of police came up Littondale to look for the pig but Dick saw the two cars coming and raced off round the Outgang to East Garth while the police were asking for directions. He managed to get the half pig into the loft in time, but then the police wanted to search the loft so Dick confessed and brought it down. He was eventually fined for this, but had kept the police from looking in the loft, where they would have found a whole pig of his own which he had just slaughtered. The police didn't think of looking in the pram where baby Garnett was lying on top of a large ham! Mrs Coates at Elbeck made the best sausages and Tom Cowan's mother the best pies and jugged hare. Much earlier there were 50 or 60 pigs kept in the wood near Stonelands and they dug up the trees and the soil which was washed down the slope so it came to the top of the wall. That wood is now a dense thicket of blackthorn.

Heavy snow was normal in the winters at that time, but 1947 is the winter everyone remembers. I had just got a motorbike and on my first journey to Skipton met the snowplough and had to dive aside and jump off. When the plough had passed I couldn't find the bike! I was working for Mr Coates at Elbeck then and we were sometimes employed by the council, digging out the snow on the roads before the horse-drawn snow plough could get along. Their rates were two shillings and sixpence an hour but I remember Mr Lee at Stonelands asking me to dig out his drive for only one shilling an hour, and I wouldn't work for that (he paid only ten shillings a day for beating on the grouse moor when the usual rate was a pound). Maurice Bramley at West Farm owned the two horses for the wooden snow plough provided by the council. There were 300 sheep in Lands and I only had one bale of hay for them. I dare not take it because they would have mobbed me. Frank Coates lost 186 sheep that winter. At Hesleden they had to dig a tunnel through the snow to the barn. After the snow melted and the grass grew up again it was too rich for the half starved sheep and a lot more died on Belder.

Just after the war I lodged with my brother Dick at East Garth and worked as a rabbitter. I caught 6000 rabbits in a year. I had a motorbike and sidecar and had a serious accident on the Hawkswick road. I skidded and hit a wall and the vehicle turned over. I was trapped underneath it, 120 rabbits were scattered over the road, blood was pouring out of my boot from a broken leg, and the motorbike horn was jammed on. I was saved by a couple staying at the Falcon, who were walking nearby

and applied a tourniquet to the leg. I reached the hospital just in time to avoid an amputation.

East Garth Farm

I bought East Garth Farm from Captain Walker in 1952 after it had been empty for eighteen months, and at first my parents lived with me. The previous tenant, Benny Hewitt, was only there for eighteen months. He weighed 18 stone and always wore clogs and no socks. The Hewitts came because their son wanted to be a farmer and they had a pig and a white horse as well as sheep and cows, but no tractor. The first night they moved in, the men were out milking and Mrs Hewitt was alone in the kitchen when it was invaded by mice. She stood on the table and screamed. Dick Lund came and coated a large board with a sticky substance called Dak and caught 50 mice on it in an hour. Dick had farmed East Garth from 1941-47. He milked by hand and wheeled the milk kits over to the milk stand in the village on a trolley. He moved to Foxup, where his son Garnett still farms. Before Dick, Jacky Richardson, the Potts Moor gamekeeper lived at East Garth for 17 years and the land was farmed in conjunction with Litton Hall Farm. Jacky went to Carleton for three years but then came back to Litton to live at Foss View. Before 1924, East Garth was farmed by the Leyland family.

When I bought the farm I had very little money to stock it, and started with one cow, Buttercup, bought at Otley auction mart where I almost bought the wrong lot by mistake, not realising that taking my pipe out of my mouth meant I was making a bid. The cow had come off good land and did not really thrive on the poor Foss land. I also had 54 sheep and hired a horse for the first year, paying for it by doing some walling. I only had 13 acres of meadow and about 223 acres of pasture. The farm was the second poorest in the dale, after Sawyers Garth, which had even less land. I had no milk licence. The farmhouse had a range with a side oven and boiler in the kitchen and we used a zinc bath in front of the fire. There was an earth closet outside. We had paraffin lamps and then Aladdin pressure lamps with mantles came in the 1940s. Electricity was the best thing that ever came to Littondale.

In the first few years I had to earn some money by working for Jimmy Landless, an ex-army major who farmed at Hawkswick Cote. I earned two shillings and sixpence an hour. When I dug out the floor of the shippon next to his barn I found

the remains of 30 sheep buried there. In those early years I had no social life as I could not afford to buy a round at the pub.

I turned Home Barn into a milking shed, mixing two tons 11cwt of cement myself by hand. I made some mistakes, like turning the horse and cart too fast, and breaking the shaft. After the first year I bought a 1924 Morris Oxford which Chris Ingleby converted for mowing with cast iron back wheels, but it had no doors, no roof and no brakes. To stop it I had to either run it into a pike or else a long way on the flat. I had trouble with the cows pulling out the wires and I eventually sold it as scrap for three pounds ten shillings (£3.50). But the dealer came back with another seven shillings and sixpence (38p), saying that when he stripped it he found that under all the grime there was all copper-bronze alloy. Later I bought a Fordson Flyer from Chris for £30, which lasted for two years. I was in the hayfield when I heard a loud bang and the piston came through the top of the engine. Next I got the grey tractor (formerly used for towing RAF aeroplanes) which I still have with its original 1940 tyres.

In the early 1950s we didn't wash the sheep or salve them except when they had scab. Then we had to dip them twice in ten days and keep the sheep under for a minute, which was too long. The police came to check, but when they had gone we let them out faster. It had to be done in the morning so they had time to dry out. The dipping tank was near the present garage at Elbeck Cottage. The dip came as a thick paste which had to be dissolved in boiling water.

In 1954 I married Eileen and she came to live at East Garth. In 1956 I got my first milk licence. Milk was very important for farmers' income in those days; five farms brought milk to the stand in the village (Armistead, Litton Hall, Elbeck, West Farm and East Garth). Sawyers Garth had its own stand near Crystal Beck. I drove the milk kits, holding 10 or 12 gallons each, across to the stand on a door fixed to the back of the tractor. The milk lorry driver would also take rabbits for sale. The milk went to West Marton creamery. When it was first collected in 1938-39 it was taken to the Rowntrees chocolate factory in Leyburn, and later to Leeds. In the snow of 1947, when the lorry couldn't get up the dale, some people made butter and cheese but a lot was poured down the drain.

About this time Jimmy Metcalfe, who died at Stainforth a couple of years ago, came to Litton. He was nicknamed Nimrod and had worked at North Cote and then came to Elbeck. There was a shippon for six cows in what is now Elbeck Barn and he

described how, when he was milking the cows, rats would come and take the feed as soon as a cow lifted its head from the bucket. I had mentioned to him the story about gold being hidden in the old school at East Garth so we started tapping at the walls to find the hiding place. When we heard a hollow sound near the fireplace we set to work with hammers and chisels and broke through into an old beehive oven, but never found the gold. There were pegs above the oven to hang oat cakes. I later dug up the floor at Spittle Croft to look for gold and a few years later I found my son Stewart doing the same.

Machines became more important in farming. Mr Roberts of Kilnsey had the first baler, which he hired out, but later I bought one jointly with Mr Thorman of Litton Hall. West Farm had a rowing-up machine called a centipede. I bought my first Land Rover in 1958-9, when an insurance policy matured, then about 1986 I bought my first quad bike. I use one every day now for getting about the farm.

The first silage was made in 1954 or 1955, after a wet summer when the hay was too wet. Tom Metcalfe of Sawyers Garth made good silage in a pit dug into the slope of Top Croft. There was always a danger of fire if hay was stored damp – I remember finding ash under hay in one barn where it had started to burn, but luckily there hadn't been any wind or the whole barn would have gone up in flames. Some of the farms hauled the hay up with a rope or on to a trestle or used sweat poles in the hay to dry it out.

I moved to West Farm when Maurice Bramley left after being been there for 46 years. East Garth was rented first to John Valentine and then to Edwin Page the music teacher, then to Judith and Peter Davey who used it as a holiday home with their four sons who liked canoeing. I moved back to East Garth about 1978 and Stephen stayed on at West Farm.

My hobby has long been hunting foxes, by myself. Since the conifer plantations were established above Beckermonds, the number of foxes has increased greatly.

Farming has changed completely in my lifetime. In the last ten to fifteen years we have had to put up with more and more regulations and I now employ an agent to fill in all the forms. The first I knew about the Scoska Site of Special Scientific Interest was when I found people in the wood doing surveys. Spittle Croft meadows and Long Meadow have a great variety of wild flowers and are now part of an Environmentally Sensitive Areas agreement – I have to use only manure to fertilise

them and to cut them late, but since I have always done this, getting a grant is a bonus. Now all the cattle have to have passports which record every time they move to another farm, and sheep have to be tagged with farm numbers. In the last few years I have had to hire someone to clip the sheep. Now the cost of having a sheep slaughtered is higher than the price I can get for it at the market. I have not kept cattle since 1986. But in spite of all the problems with present-day farming, I have no plans to give it up and retire.

I was born at Penyghent Cottage also known as Upper Hesleden, in 1925. My family went to live at Malham Tarn in 1929, where my father was gamekeeper. and I first went to school there at Waterhouses - on the Malham Tarn Estate. I remember being pulled on a sledge over the frozen tarn. We came to live in Arncliffe in 1932, and I was at school there for a few years. Mother had a shop next to the Falcon Inn - she made teas for cyclists - very few motorists came in those days later we lived at Buckden - Hellifield. Malham

The Old School at EAST TARRING