

## No. 2 Armistead Barns

My late husband Keith White, myself and our son Craig, who was then 23 years old, came to live at Armistead barns in May 1994.

The barns were newly converted and we were the first occupants in this first floor flat, which faces up the dale in a westerly direction with views up the River Skirfare to New Bridge. Keith was still working at Darnbrook Farm after 19 years and travelled there daily from Litton.

We had lived in Littondale in Arncliffe for five years in our early married life. Keith had lived and worked there for many years before that, farming and walling, and he was also gamekeeper on Arncliffe Moor from 1970 to 1975. He had a long association with the dale, his great grandparents had farmed Sawyers Garth, Litton where they brought up eleven children and later did bed and breakfast, but great grandma died in her fifties. Keith spent many school holidays at his aunt and uncles' farm (Mary and Chris Ingleby) at Halton Gill. He used to travel up by bus in those days from Earby, which he said seemed an endlessly long journey. He also had an aunt and uncle (Harry and Jenny Emmott) who farmed at Foxup. I think Keith knew he wanted to live up here; he enjoyed the outdoor life, he loved the hills and moors and liked working with sheep.

My mother-in-law Doris White (née Emmott) has told me she used to spend many happy hours at Armistead Farm when she was a girl with her aunt and uncle Gertie and Frank Pullan. She remembers there was a plun tree growing up the east wall of the house. Also how she used to sit at the top of the stone steps of the barn, which she called the granary, eating sweets she'd bought from Battersby's at the Post Office.

Elsie, who was Gertie and Frank Pullan's daughter, was born at Armistead Farm in 1934. She told me what the different parts of the Barns were used for. My downstairs hall was used to house six stirks and the downstairs flat was the shippon for twelve cows. At the back of the big barn was the place used for washing the milking units. At the front was the stable where the horses were kept, and was later used for housing the calves in loose boxes. Up the outside stone steps was the bedding chamber where the straw and bracken were kept, this was used for bedding the calves. The bracken was cut by scythe and brought home on horse-drawn sledges. The little separate barn was the cart house and was also used for the sheep shearing.

Since marrying Keith in 1970, I have seen many changes. Keith used to tell us how he had to carry a back can to bring the milk home from the cows in the out barns. Back cans will only be seen in museums now. When I first knew Keith he worked in Arncliffe for Eddie Greenwood. He drove a grey Fergy (Ferguson) tractor. No tractor cabs in those days! In my early married life the women still used to help in the hayfields raking all the edges of the fields and any missed hay into the rows for baling. These days they turn the cows or sheep into the fields after they've finished hay or silage, and they eat the edges and missed bits.

The major changes are in the weather. The seasons are changing and we haven't seen a really cold or snowy winter for quite a few years. Neither have we had any consistent hot spells in summer. Sadly the number of farms has declined over the years with two more sales in the Dale this autumn of 2000. Cows are no longer being walked up and down the village for milking and the milk tanker doesn't come up this dale any more. With more people owning cars, we've seen an increase in visitors and walkers.

The introduction of the quad motor bike to get the farmer everywhere, even onto the hill tops, has made a big difference. It is so much easier and quicker than walking everywhere in lambing time and when gathering sheep off the hills and fells. It used to take three shepherds and their dogs three hours to gather Darnbrook Fell when I first lived there. With a fence dividing the fell and a quad it is a quick job now by comparison.

I don't remember any silage being made in my early married life. It is a good thing they can make silage in this more unsettled climate, and silage and hay can be made into large round bales and wrapped. I wonder how long before the end of the baler and the traditional square bales being sent up the elevator and stacked in the old barns.

There has been a decline in some birds like the skylark. Keith used to say that when you walked through a meadow it lifted with skylarks, and now you don't see them. There are fewer house sparrows than there were, but goldfinches, which I used to think were a rare sighting, are quite common now.

I still like living up here. I love the hills and scenery in its different lights and seasons - it is a joy to travel locally and look at it in its changing moods. I also like living where you know everyone, and say hello or wave when meeting on the road and if I go to a local function I know almost everyone there.

Since Keith was ill I have worked part time locally. Our son Craig was born when we lived at Arncliffe, then we moved to Darnbrook for nineteen years, and he has lived here at Litton on and off. It is his work as a specialist car builder that has taken him away from the dale, but it was actually working for Steve Greenwood at Halton Gill in Littondale in his youth that led him down this path.