A Northumberland Childhood

Reminiscences
by Jim Barber
1908-1999

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The photographs are taken from Jim's own albums, with additional photographs from Robert Sinton, Hetha Bruce, Dinah Iredale and James Calder.

Foreword

My uncle, Jim Barber, after leaving school, went to Cambridge then into the army. Following that, he ran a school in the south of England, and then joined the British Council, spending a lot of time based in Italy.

He never forgot his childhood being brought up on the family farms of Weetwood and Lowick, and he decided when in his eighties to write a small book recording his many happy memories.

He took enormous pleasure in completing this and always wanted others to share his formative years.

He would have been delighted that the proceeds from any publication should go to the funds for the village hall.

R.H.T.B.
17th April 2007

Reminiscences 1908-1916

I am 83 this week. Therefore, both physically and mentally, there are many things I can no longer do. Time can lie heavily on your hands when you are old and I thought that in the early months of this year I would occupy myself in the self-indulgent task of writing about my childhood as I now remember it. I have always found that dredging up memories that lie deep in the mind is a congenial task. I might say that figures I give - dates, acreages etc - are probably not entirely accurate.

I was born on January 1st 1908 and have chosen the years to think about from then until I went to my Prep School in 1916. My life has been interesting and varied and I could have chosen another period, but I suppose the earliest was the happiest and least complicated. It seems to have the rosy glow that most other autobiographies echo. Another reason for this choice of dates is that, except for holidays, I was not on the farms from the time of going to my prep school in 1916 till coming back to run Lowick in 1952. The days of which I am going to speak, therefore, seem isolated and complete in themselves.

I considered myself fortunate in having lived long enough in pre-Great War days to remember them. This war surely marked the change, at any rate in the country, between the way life had been for generations and life only four years later. Since then I have seen the incredible difference in living standards, in speed and method of transport, in the health of all classes of society, in the spread of availability of utilities - water, electricity, gas, telephone. The list seems endless. I could have lived for eighty years in the 18th or 19th centuries without noticing very much change. I hope that what I write about will bring home to anyone who may read it how great this change was.

I will give some family details which will help with the sketches I am about to write.

Lowick
January 1991

My father's family

My parental family, the Barbers, have been farmers in Northumberland at least since the mid-18th century.

It should be understood that, until the First World War, most farms in Northumberland were tenanted. The landlords were either the old aristocracy (Percies, Tankervilles, Haggerstons) or smaller 'county' families (Sitwells of Barmoor, Collingwoods of Lilburn or Cornhill, Baker-Cresswells of Harehope). To a large extent the landlords depended on their rents and were affected as much as those who actually farmed the land by the ups and downs of the agricultural cycle. Tenant farmers moved more frequently than one would expect. I have never understood for quite what reason. The landlords changed less frequently - the Joiceys for the Waterfords, the Leylands for the Haggerstons.

From their gravestones it would appear that the Barbers were at Boulmer in 1746 and some parts of the family must have stayed in that neighbourhood as a Miss Barber, apparently a great character, was farming Rock Moor House in 1886. She is probably the same person mentioned later. Some moved North to farm Belford Moor, Duddo, Bowsden, Ilderton and finally North Doddington which they farmed till 1916.

My father, the eldest, was born at Doddington in 1863. He had two brothers. My grandmother died young which was sad for the children as she would have been a softening influence in a pretty spartan life. She came from a family of timber merchants in St Andrews who traded with the Baltic. She painted well and seems to have been a cultivated mid-Victorian lady. At sometime about the 1880's, I imagine, my grandfather took West Weetwood and my father went to live there, looked after by an aunt. My grandfather died in 1894 having married again, late in life, a Miss Crisp of Prendwick. One uncle remained with his father at Doddington and continued to farm there till 1916 when he moved to Newham. The other uncle, Jim, after whom I am called, was in some ways unsatisfactory (I never heard in what ways). My father, however, prospered and about 1902 bought Wrangham from Lord Tankerville. This, in those days, was a bold thing to do - a 1000 acre farm bought by a tenant farmer. Jim in the meanwhile was farming Kilham. However Lowick, a much better farm, came up to let but Sir John Haggerston would not agree to the unreliable Jim being the tenant, so my father's name was put on the lease.

My father married my mother, Violet Atkinson, in 1905. Jim died by taking a cold bath when he had measles in 1907 so Ronald found himself with three farms - Weetwood, Wrangham and Lowick.

I was born the next year.

My mother's family

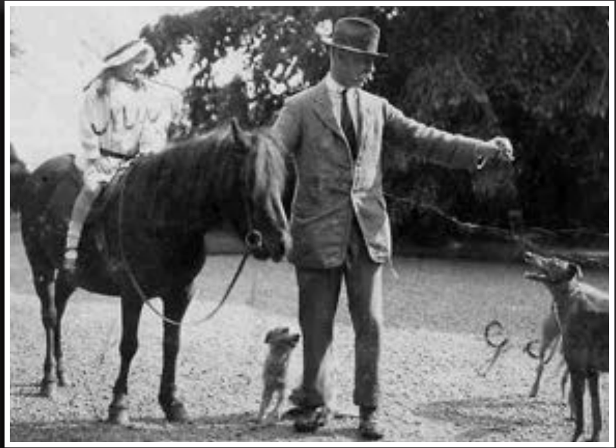
My maternal family was called Atkinson and came from North Yorkshire. My grandfather John had married Sarah May of Thirsk. They lived at Yafforth Lodge near Northallerton and had three children - Violet, my mother, and a sister and brother. Yafforth Lodge was a small farm on the Harwood estate. The charming Georgian house is still there. My grandfather was delicate (I realise now he had an ulcer, as did my mother and as did I until science made it possible to operate). The family decided to move to London about 1890. There must have been more money than just the rented farm. Perhaps it was my grandmother's. Anyway, they bought a house at Chiswick, then almost a village between Hammersmith and Ealing, and invested in four shops, two near Victoria and two in Oxford Street. Grandfather Atkinson died before the Great War and Sarah, looked after by two wonderful old maids, Emma and Edith, died soon after.

Between the wars the London property was sadly mismanaged. When I began to look after my mother's financial affairs I found only one shop left, in Oxford Street, on a corner site between Selfridges and John Lewis, but it had been let on a pre-war lease till the end of the century.

My mother, therefore, although she had lived for some 15 years in London, had been to school in Switzerland, played the piano and violin and sang in the Bach choir, had spent her formative years on a farm in the North. This is not the only reason she made such an excellent farmer's wife. She was most capable, and anything in the house, the nursery or the garden which she didn't already know, she quickly learnt. My father was quite willing to leave all domestic decisions to her but she never interfered in farming matters. They were complementary each to the other. I always felt it was a truly happy marriage.

My father was a good man in every sense of the word. Totally honest and straight-forward, somewhat blunt, he was liked and respected by people from all walks of life. He was also an excellent farmer though my mother always said he farmed by instinct.

The Barber & Atkinson Families



Mavis, Daddy and "Smut"

Jim 5 Mavis 2 Tony 3 Ian 6

Mavis & Jim

Clinton House, Chiswick
Archie Atkinson
Violet Atkinson
Sarah Atkinson
May Atkinson

The Farms

The three farms were West Weetwood, a mile from Wooler, where we lived until 1920, Wrangham which had no house and Lowick which was used for holidays, usually when Weetwood was being spring-cleaned or at Christmas.

Weetwood was the perfect house for children: with the farm cottages it made a cosy, self-contained community, yet near a small town and branch railway. There was a delightful and productive garden (my mother was a keen and knowledgeable gardener) a tennis court and a croquet lawn. It was always immaculately kept. We children, on foot, ponies or bicycles could choose the moor with heather and bracken and the gull-ponds or the Till which ran at the bottom of the farm for fishing and occasionally bathing. We hated to leave it, especially when we came back from boarding school and holidays seemed all too short. My mother had the strange idea that farm-bred children enjoy seaside holidays. Luckily she changed her mind when my sister, aged about 4, said, when being put to bed on the first night at the Victoria Hotel, Bamburgh 'Thank God, that's one day gone'. She realised then that no Barber likes to go far from his farm and that they certainly did not want to be in, on, or near the sea.

The house at Weetwood of course would seem small nowadays. There were permanently two parents, four children, nanny and nurserymaid (later a governess) and two maids. A double 'spare room' was sacrosanct though seldom occupied. Being a tenanted farm it could not be enlarged, or if it were, the tenant would have had to pay. But I can't remember ever feeling cramped or that one indoor lavatory and one bathroom was insufficient. A room of one's own was not thought of.

From the farming point of view, Weetwood was not very good. About half of it was moor and the rest sandy soil which gave light crops before the days of fertilizers. It also flooded often and was perfect ground for rabbits. Its good point was that it was easily cultivated by horses.

The three farms, while not marching, were not far apart. This was important when my father was farming 800 acres (Weetwood), 1000 Wrangham, 1000 Doddington North Moor and 1200 Lowick. From Weetwood one either went to Wrangham by Weetwood Hill or by Way-to-Wooler and crossed a ford coming out at Turvilaws and on to Doddington Bank.

Wrangham at that time was of course purely a stock farm. I think my father loved it the most, partly because he had bought it and partly because he was

more interested in stock than arable. Doddington North Moor was all heather and was rented from the Lambtons who had always been friends. The farm was run by the shepherds (Jim Rutherford at Wrangham and Josh Graham at the North Moor). There was also a spademan-fencer called Green who put the first fences across the moor on the Berwick-Wooler road.

This might be the right time to say a word about shepherds in those days since they are a dying breed. Butchering was part of their job; sheep for the house and pigs for everyone. In this part of the country they were the most important men on the farm. There were families of shepherds. They didn't come under the steward and often the two were at loggerheads. I suppose they consulted the farmer about the laying-out of the stock and the feeding, time of lambing etc, but it was they who were the experts. There was no telephone and they had to make decisions for themselves. It was not easy to send for the vet and animal medicines were elementary. They walked endlessly: from Lowick to Belford Mart across the Hettons and Hazelrigg School wheeling their bicycle to come back on. Or taking 500 store lambs (my father believed in large numbers going through the ring at the same time) from Wrangham to Wooler Mart. They looked their stock twice a day. Mostly they lived in rather remote places and had to be prepared to be cut off in winter. They were allowed to keep one or two cows, two pigs and usually part of their wage was paid by permission to keep a small number of livestock. (Needless to say that the shepherd's ewes always had twins). Sometimes they moved up the ladder to start as farmers themselves by renting a small farm and taking their stock with them. In this case my father would probably lend them some money.

The cattle at Wrangham were Galloway cows put to a White Shorthorn bull to produce the then very sought-after blue-grey heifers. Steers came to Lowick to be fattened.

The Shorthorn bulls were bought from the Duke of Northumberland and I remember driving to the Home Farm at Alnwick in the dog-cart with my father to choose one. While there I very much admired the Jersey cows kept for the Castle dairy. Jerseys in those days were considered too delicate for Northumberland and wore rugs when put out in Winter. The farm manager gave me a young heifer calf which was put in a sack and into the back of the dog-cart. It became a great pet with us children and from then on almost every house cow we had was descended from her.

There were two herds of Galloway cows which lived out with their bulls all

the year round, calves being taken out at an appropriate age. They were very wild but in those days shepherds' dogs could deal with cattle as well as sheep.

The sheep were either pure blackface - I can well remember the difficulty in keeping blackface tups in their paddock as tupping time approached - or blackface-Border Leicester tups which gave the valuable mule ewe lambs.

In retrospect Wrangham before the first World War was pretty bleak - the cottages had no sanitation at all. They used the whin bushes. But it was lovely for us children. The North Moor had enough grouse to drive and was lined with butts (for the Lambtons). We had 'The Bog' where you found almost anything - blackcock, grouse, woodcock, snipe and on the farm golden plover, pheasants, partridge, hares and rabbits. On the pond at Lowick there were mallard and teal in plenty. Shooting for the pot was presided over by Andrew Lee, the rabbit catcher who lived in a cottage (now destroyed) on the Hetton boundary. He and his wife were our great friends and mentors, true country people the like of whom it would be difficult to find nowadays. I will never forget teas in their cottage, the warmth and kindness as well as the scones and home-baked bread and dripping which must have been provided out of the pittance they earned. I'm glad to say my brother took the family with him when he left Wrangham for Duddo.

Rabbits were a great pest in those days, especially on light land. I think I am right in saying that Andrew Lee and his son Billy caught 20,000 couple the first year they went to Duddo, a farm which had been very neglected. They provided some farmers with a considerable part of their income - but at what a cost.

From the North-East corner of Wrangham to the South West corner of Lowick is only half a mile. The two farms are very different but when they were run together complemented one another perfectly. Lowick was predominantly a cattle-fattening farm - as were all the farms on the coastal strip from Berwick to Alnmouth. With proper management they grew some of the best grass in England but in the days of horses, the land was heavy to plough. Wild white clover and slag had improved the grass enormously. The cattle were Irish which were available in large numbers but often in wretched conditions having been collected by dealers from all parts of Ireland, driven to a port and shipped to Liverpool where they came by train to Wooler and Alnwick. Certain farms, I don't know why, specialised in heifers. Lowick was one of these. They were mostly bought in the early part of the year, put out on the 'moors' which were in fact excellent permanent grass with enough whin to make shelter. Here they

were fed oat straw and perhaps some hay.

In the spring they started moving towards the village around which all the best fattening grass lay. In the summer they had to come into the steading once a week to be drawn. It was difficult driving even in those days with little traffic and when people kept their gates shut. Now it would not be possible.

My father rightly maintained that of the three farms it was Lowick which made the money. But it was not easy to run. The steading and farmhouse were in the village but the nearest land was half a mile distant (the land near at hand was attached to a house or an inn) which meant that the horses in Summer and the house-cows had to be taken this distance twice a day. The farm ran North-South for 2 ½ miles but was only three fields across.

In the years I am writing about we children saw little of Lowick. The house was run by Miss Blossom who was succeeded by her sister. They were delightful Yorkshire women whose address I remember to this day: Miss Blossom, Lily Grove, Hawthorne Avenue, Hull. There were usually one or two 'mud' students living in the house. These were well-off young men who were supposed to be learning farming from successful farmers like my father. In fact they seemed to hunt and shoot and be a boon to the ladies of the district. Miss Blossom and a living-in groom looked after them. They were a useful source of additional income and some remained family friends. We often came to Lowick for Christmas. I remember Miss Blossom always dressed the grandfather clock in the hall with ivy from where a little cotton-wool owl peered out.

When we moved, the procession which started from Weetwood would seem strange today. First my mother in her dog-cart, perhaps one or two of us children on ponies, then Nanny in the pony-cart, the governess on her bicycle, a farm-cart with the luggage and finally a house cow. My mother was ahead of her time in knowing that infected milk could cause tuberculosis. This migration took place every Spring while Weetwood was being spring-cleaned - a very necessary and complicated affair in these days of coal fires and oil lamps and when moths got into everything unless great care was taken. I will explain why we came to live at Lowick even though it is outside the time I am writing about.

After the First World War landlords fell on hard times. The Claverings wanted my father to buy Weetwood and the Haggerstons wanted to sell Lowick. As I have said Lowick was much more profitable so, with great misgivings on the part of my mother - Lowick it was. From the sheltered Weetwood and the garden she had worked at for 15 years she had to move to a

house which had only been partly occupied, where there was an uncultivated garden, a very poor water supply and a much more inhospitable climate. The year before we moved she laid waste the garden with sodium chlorate, keeping only the trees. The wonderful consequence for me being that although I am talking of something which happened seventy years ago, I never had to deal with perennial weeds in the garden which were a nightmare in the days before selective weedkillers.

We had a very successful sale of stock when we left Weetwood in 1920. We were lucky, for in 1921 there began one of the deepest agricultural depressions. It was a brave and far-sighted decision of my parents. Lowick cost £19000 and there was only a small mortgage, but no new building had been done since the 19th century. There were 10 cottages, but to get water which was in short supply anyhow, the women had to come out to a tap on the street. In the great drought of 1921 we had two men carting water every day for six months.

But from then on, for better or for worse, Lowick was to be our home. The house was enlarged, an engine installed to supply electric light, two tennis courts laid down, and we bought our first car - a T model Ford.

Farm Business

Like much else, the business side of farming was very much simpler before the Great War. The farms produced much less and the produce fetched much less. Money was tight. I have known the Wrangham store lambs sold at Wooler for seven shillings and six pence each. Cattle, sheep and some corn brought in the money and paid the rent. As I have said, rabbits provided some extra. There were always a few sows and a boar and people would come and take away a piglet in a sack and wheelbarrow. One of my father's axioms was that good farmers did not sell hay.

So it was that any bookkeeping was of the simplest. My father paid everything possible by cheque in order that there should be a record and never used that bane of farmers in difficult times - buying by contra. The only papers I remember on his desk were bills and invoices pushed down on a metal spike, receipts carefully folded with the name and amount written on the outside fold and all put in elastic bands. There were also a few ledgers.

The steward made out the wages book in beautiful copper-plate handwrit-

ing. My father drew the money from the bank and gave it to him and the steward paid the workers. The farms each had an account at different banks - Weetwood and Wrangham at the British Linen in Wooler and Lowick at the Commercial Bank of Scotland in Berwick. This enabled him to see how each was doing. He was not 'cost conscious' but just liked to see the balance he had at the bank at the end of each month. My mother had her own account at Martin's in Wooler.

Nowadays you dare not embark on any out-of-the-ordinary expenditure without first consulting your accountant. As far as I know accountants did not exist then. You dealt with your bank manager and your solicitor. They were men of fine character, friends of the family and usually the firm descended from father to son. Mr Middlemas of Alnwick was our solicitor, Mr Deas (grandfather of David Lockie) the bank manager in Wooler and Mr Bolam, the Agent to the bank in Berwick. The offices of those professional people were so different too. Everything written in longhand; not a female clerk to be seen. They gave, with their old papers and a coal fire and gas-lighting, the impression that they had been there forever.

Perhaps the most important person whom my father used for business was called Harry Bolam. I don't think he was a relation of the Bolams of Berwick and Rothbury, but came from Newcastle and I suppose was a sort of land agent. He used to come to stay the night quite often and "go through the books". He sang well so there would be a musical evening and possibly he would be mounted for a day's hunting. I have a feeling that he was too nice to be very good at his job, but my parents liked him.

Land agents played a large part in the life of tenant farmers. They were on the whole disliked, but I understand now how difficult their job must have been, especially in times when prices were slipping but the rent remained constant. They were the buffer between the landlords, who wanted all they could get but ploughed little back into their estates, and the farmers who needed new buildings, draining or an improved water supply.

Another class who were unpopular was the corn merchant, and particularly the maltster. My father very much disliked having to take a sample of his corn in a little blue cotton bag and hawk it round the Berwick Corn Exchange. For cattle and sheep he had taken care to be a founder member of Wooler Mart in order to have some control of how his stock was sold.

Many farmers who themselves did not work physically on their farms spent

a lot of time at various markets in those days. When communications were poor and there was no farming press or advisers, markets were a place to pick up information. (Hunting across other people's land was another!) My father's rule was simple. He always went to see his store stock sold, but seldom his fat stock.

The Farm House

The first thing that would strike you now if you were transported back to a cottage or small house before the First World War would be the number of people it held. Families were large, maids more plentiful and people were at home much more. The fact that the Victorian furniture was much more crowded and larger would have contributed to the clutter .

Weetwood was not a large farmhouse and it was run on the same lines as other middle-class houses of the period which appears now to be very lavish. There was a cook and a house-parlour maid and a nanny helped by a nursery-maid. The nurserymaid left when we were old enough to need a governess.

Economy was a way of life. The least possible was bought and most possibly home-made. Naturally there was much less choice of things to eat; groceries were bought - sugar, currants, rice, yeast etc. The only tinned foods we ever had were sardines which came in large tins and were turned out into a special china dish the same size as the tins: peach slices in syrup and tongue in a glass dish for use in emergencies. Anything else tinned was considered unsafe. Flour came by the sack from the miller, mutton and lamb and bacon, poultry of various sorts came from the farm, as did eggs, milk, butter and cream. There were plenty of rabbits and hares and in winter, game of all sorts. Beef was bought from the butcher's cart probably for Sunday lunch and perhaps some mince or liver as well. There was a phrase in use then - 'butcher's meat' which meant something special and slightly extravagant. Vegetables and fruit were grown in a highly-organised kitchen garden with some of it being stored in frost-proof sheds and fruit being bottled or made into jam. Eggs would be put in large earthenware jars and preserved in isinglass. Barnyard hens did not lay all the year round.

Apples and pears had their own shelves in an outhouse and various types were grown which ripened through the winter. The only fruit I remember being able to buy in Wooler in Winter was red thick-skinned apples, rather wizened grapes which came packed in a barrel with cork chippings and not very good

oranges and lemons. In a small country town there would not be a greengrocer.

Clothes would not usually be made in the house, but by a local seamstress with the pattern taken from a book. But women could sew and there was no house without a sewing-machine. The thing perhaps I remember most clearly was the darning. Unlike modern fabrics, wool and cotton wore out and there was always a darning basket by my mother's chair. Every village had a cobbler and boots and shoes were a major expense. Younger children seldom had new clothes. They had to be content with those handed down. For sewing and knitting and altering and mending there was a problem of light in the winter months. Only three or four lamps would be strong enough to see by and they were hung in the middle of the room with a table underneath them where all work or reading would take place. At Weetwood it was the nursery: in London at my grandmother's it was the dining-room. Smaller lamps might be in the hall or on the landing, but for moving about or in the bedrooms, only candles. One of the things I vividly remember was trying to pack my school trunk by the light of one guttering candle. A great advantage of the lamps and candles, together with fires in the sitting room and nursery and the range in the kitchen and the body-heat of so many people, was that Weetwood was always warm. When we came to Lowick which was bigger, more spread out and had home-made electric light, but not of course central heating, we found it very chilly indeed.

Another great difference was the long hours everyone worked. Perhaps we were troubled by the Victorian ethic that 'Satan makes mischief for idle hands to do'. Let us start with the cook in her kitchen. She would be older than the housemaid - 'an experienced cook'. They shared a room above the kitchen and had one half-day off per week. There was no kitchen-maid or scullery-maid so she got up at 6.30 to light the kitchen range. She was in sole control of her kitchen and neither my mother or any of us dare go there when she was busy.

And busy she was. Before any of us went to boarding school there were two parents, four children, nanny and nurserymaid and two maids - ten people to provide with four meals a day. There were few 'appliances' and no deep freeze or tins. Breakfast was of course cooked. Porridge, bacon and eggs, toast and marmalade. Then after breakfast, my mother and cook would go and inspect the meat safe which was like a large box with perforated zinc on the sides and with legs to keep out predators. Needless to say it was locked and stood in a shady place in the garden. It was here that meat of any kind was hung until it was wanted in the house. They decided what to have for lunch and dinner and brought it back to the kitchen. The day's menus were then written by my

mother on a slate. (Slates were much used in those days, especially by children. Paper cost money but slates could be wiped clean and used again and again.) Every cook could, of course, pluck, skin and gut game or poultry.

Lunch was a simple meal of meat or fish and a pudding: all those lovely boiled or steamed puddings are never seen now: suet pudding and treacle, marmalade pudding, Spotted Dick with currants. There was always a milk pudding of some sort, often rice pudding, but also sago, tapioca, barley kernels, all with plenty of cream.

In the morning the cook had probably been baking. A cake and scones for tea, a tart for dinner. Bread was made once a week - I seem to remember Wednesdays - and stored together with the flour in the bread chest. On that day the house was filled with the wonderful smell of baking bread.

In the afternoon the cook had a rest! The housemaid made the tea, buttered the scones, cut the sandwiches, put out the cakes before carrying it through to the sitting room. In her moments in between she might clean some silver or do some sewing!

I am sorry that the custom of afternoon-tea has almost died out. Tea could be simple or elaborate. The tea-pot could be silver or china, but there was always plenty to eat. It was the meal to which visitors came. We never had lunch parties and seldom people to dinner. On summer afternoons there would be tennis and croquet. Almost every house of any size had a grass tennis court. It was an ideal way to entertain. The young could play and the old could watch and there was always a good tea. In the depth of winter I think that even tea-parties came to a halt. To drive after dark with the light of only two carriage lamps was not lightly undertaken.

Dinner was quite formal. We children did not come down until we were at boarding school. We had to change into a suit and were never allowed to dine in the clothes we had worn all day. It is a habit I have always kept. The house-parlour maid who had changed into a black dress with white apron and cap during the afternoon, waited at table. Dinner was always three courses: soup, game almost always in the Winter and perhaps a pie or casserole or a made-up dish and finally stewed fruit, a custard, a tart - a lighter type pudding than those at lunch.

The house work had its strict routine - Mondays washing, Tuesday ironing, Wednesday special cleaning, stairs etc, Thursday brass, Friday silver. The washing and some of the ironing was done by an outsider - possibly the same

woman who milked the cows. All farmhouses had a large back kitchen. It had its own open range where the old flat irons were heated and also a 'copper' under which there was a fire and where the cotton washing was boiled. Clothes were also washed in a tub in which they were beaten up and down by a 'poss-stick'. The noise of the 'poss-stick' on a Monday morning (no one would dare do a washing on Sunday) when every cottage woman did her washing was a familiar one on all farms. There was a drying green for fine days, but if it was wet, clothes-horses were ranged in front of the roaring back kitchen fire. A sunny breezy Monday was a blessing for the whole household.

While my mother did not interfere with the cook at her work, she was herself a capable cook. You have only to look at her own recipe books to see that the mistress of the house in those days only concerned herself with 'still-room' food - sweets, jellies, cakes, biscuits, trifles and so on. My mother also made the butter once a week. Home-made butter from Jersey cream was quite frankly the best butter I have ever tasted. To keep a large household in milk, cream and butter, three or four cows were needed which were milked twice a day. Every farmhouse had a dairy - a cool, dim room with slate shelves and the unforget-table sweet-sour smell of buttermilk and the ripening cream.

Vegetables were a problem, especially in winter. There were the usual root vegetables - carrots and onions, swedes and artichokes and, most important of all, potatoes. We ate them twice a day and perhaps fried with bacon for breakfast. Green vegetables in winter would be confined to leeks, sprouts, savoy cabbage and perhaps celery. One can understand why important houses had huge kitchen gardens with their accompanying ranges of greenhouses and frames.

We had a small heated greenhouse, but it was only used for growing seeds, taking cuttings and over-wintering tender plants.

There was an almost frenzied activity in July, August and September. Peas and broad beans could be dried, runner beans were preserved in large jars filled with salt, mushrooms, plentiful in the fields in those days, were threaded with needle and string and hung in the airing cupboard until they were dry enough to be crumbled down and put in air-tight jars.

Fruit was continuously picked and made into jam, jelly, or bottled. Strawber-ries, raspberries, cherries, red and black currants, gooseberries and later plums, and apples from the garden and brambles from the road-side hedges. It sad-dens me that country people can no longer enjoy finding mushrooms while the

dew is still on the grass, or the elderly going for a walk using a stick to pull the brambles towards them, filling their baskets and later to turn the contents into a tart or jelly.

The making of marmalade was something quite special. It could only be done when Seville oranges came on the market in January or February. Each housewife had her own recipe and naturally thought her marmalade was the best. For a few days the kitchen was filled with the delicious smell of marmalade-making. The final result, when the jars were ranged on the store-cupboard shelves with their labelled and dated white covers, was an imposing sight. It had to be, when everyone ate marmalade for breakfast every day of the year.

Pig killing was of great importance to all those who lived in the country. Every cottage had a pig-sty which would contain one pig for killing that Winter and one to grow on. A pig ready for killing was of enormous size and very fat. The products of the pig and the potatoes were the foundation diet of any rural worker.

For the house we would probably kill three pigs each winter. They had to be spaced out as for each pig a lot of time and hard work was needed before the final results were achieved.

It was the shepherds who did the actual killing. They were experts. First the pig was stunned, then its throat cut to catch the important blood used to make black-puddings. It was then immersed in a large vat of boiling water and after a time taken out and put on the trestle kept specially for pig killings and sheep skinning. Now the bristles were scraped off with sharp knives. The innards were removed and the carcass strung upside down on a cross beam in a cool place till the next day for the flesh to firm.

Work in the back-kitchen started at once. The blood was stirred continually until it was cold. The guts for sausages were scraped until only the outer membrane was left. Bowls had already been filled with breadcrumbs and pearl barley, herbs such as mint and marjoram had been dried, the mincer and the sausage filler fixed to the table, block salt and saltpetre ready to cure the hams and bacon.

The next day the shepherds cut up the pig. Every part was used, but very little as pork as we know it now. Only the spare-ribs from which the bacon had been cut. The list of edible products is long. The pigs' trotters were excellent served with onion sauce. We did not cook the whole head but only the pig's cheek, lightly cured and perhaps the sweetest tasting of all. Black puddings

were soft and highly spiced; they still make them like this in France and are called 'boudin'. White puddings were apt to be rather rich made with the odd bits of fatty meat. Home-made sausages were quite special; it cannot only be "that distance lends enchantment to the view" when I say that no sausage I have ever eaten since can compare with them. The brawn was made from simmering odd bones and pieces of meat and pouring it with the green of parsley into jelly moulds. The pork-pies had their special baking tins and a special type of pastry for the crust. They were my mother's pride and joy. Finally from these fat pigs came the lard, enough to fill several earthenware jars for use during the coming months.

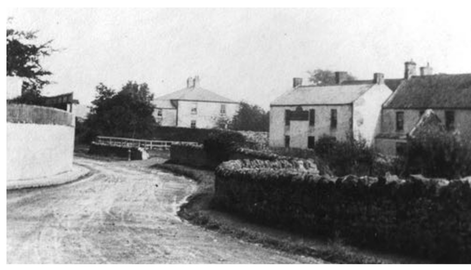
The shepherds. were in charge of the hams and bacon. They were placed in big tubs in the dairy; the bacon flat at first, and after ten days, rolled and strung and hung up on special hooks in the kitchen or pantry. The hams stayed in the brine longer. There was an old cup in each tub and anyone who went to the dairy had to baste the hams and bacon. When the hams were considered enough cured they, too, were hung up in an 'airy' place and would keep almost indefinitely.

The reason I have written so much about the farmhouse at Weetwood is that it was to me an enclosed world; the only world I knew until I went to school: I knew it intimately.

Lowick Hall

The three farms

Lowick
Wrangham
West Weetwood


Lowick Hall
& The Black Bull

Wrangham today
Looking towards
Wooler

West Weetwood today

The Barber Children

Jim On "Kitty"

Ian On "Bucket"

"Poppy" - Jim,, Tony, Ian Nanny Reid

Jim & Tony

Harry Bolam, Mavis

The Nursery and Schoolroom

In my youth parents saw much less of their children. They considered this to be good for the children and it certainly made life easier for the parents. Houses were arranged so that there should be a day and a night nursery and there was Nanny who presided over them. She was the most important person in your life; the one you turned to in time of trouble. Mother you knew was the ultimate authority, but she lived downstairs and was rather remote.

Perhaps we were lucky in Nanny Reid. She stayed with us all our childhood and even when we had gone to school she used to come back (though by then she was looking after Dudley and Boo Buckle at South Berrington) to help with sewing on of labels and packing of school trunks. She was the daughter of a head-gardener in Cumberland and had gone into service at 12 years old. Then she had been nurserymaid in a large establishment. I imagine that in those days very few nannies had any formal training; nursery knowledge was just passed on.

Nanny was good; you felt that she was good; to her, things were black or white, right or wrong, not the shades of grey that other grown-ups seemed to believe in. She used memorable Nanny 'sayings' some of which stay with you all your life:

'How old are you Nanny?' 'As old as my tongue and a little older than my teeth.'

'Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today.'

If we didn't want to go for our daily walk in the rain: 'You aren't sugar. You won't melt.'

'If you ask no questions, you will be told no lies.'

Those were the days when children should be seen but not heard; very different from the bombardment of questions now received by adults from children.

Thinking back now, the nursery was all that nurseries should be. The focal point was a coal fire with a high guard in front of it; then a comfortable chair for Nanny where she could take you on her lap, a table covered with a red cloth under a lamp, a somewhat tattered rocking-horse, a toy-cupboard which was only opened at certain times and we had always (and what a good training for

later-life) to put our toys away before going to bed.

The night-nursery was as cosy as the day-nursery. Two of us slept there with Nanny; three single beds with worn eiderdowns; semi-religious pictures on the walls, kneeling at night by our beds while our mother heard our prayers. What a different world it all seems. The night-nursery came into its own when we were ill; measles and chickenpox, whooping-cough and German measles. I think we had them all except the dreaded scarlet fever. Colds, coughs, sore-throats and chilblains were part and parcel of life in winter in the days when preventative medicine was little understood and modern drugs unavailable. Earache or tonsillitis could lead to a child being seriously ill. Remedies then were simple: drops of warm olive oil in the ear, gargling with salt and water, camphor oil rubbed on your chest, Ellerman's embrocation for sore backs. There was a row of bottles and jars, the contents of which we had to take before or after meals and which were supposed to build up your strength or to prevent anaemia. They were what were known as 'patent medicines'.

We seemed to spend a lot of time making things; crayons, watercolours, knitting, crochet. It was always someone's birthday. They would get a kettle-holder, or the drawing of the shepherd and his dog.

From an early age we had pets: dogs, cats, rabbits, bantams and of course ponies. It was Nanny who drove the pony cart and in it we went to Wooler or to Doddington to see our cousins or take tea for a picnic. Although there was no motor traffic, driving was not without danger. If you came on a road roller at work, one of the men came forward and led your horse or pony past the frightening machine. Horses easily took fright at the unexpected and tended to gallop or even bolt. Pulling on the bit in a high dog cart was much more perilous than jamming on the brakes in a car. Mr Marshall of Chatton Park had a motorcycle and sidecar which Nanny particularly disliked. You could hear it starting in Wooler and we were called off the road and she guarded us like a little hen partridge till the beastly thing had passed.

The highlight of the day came after tea when we were allowed downstairs and my father read to us. I think he must have been a very good reader for children, almost taking the part of the characters and laughing so much himself that he had to put the book down. The books had mostly to do with country life, hunting, animals. As usual with young children the more the favourite books were re-read, the better we were pleased. I remember Jorrocks, Experiences of an Irish RM, the Jungle Books, Black Beauty. Perhaps it was these evenings that

launched me on a lifetime of voracious reading. I remember the first time I ever read anything by myself; it was an advertisement in the waiting-room on Wooler Station.

Another highlight was a game called 'Growly Bears'. This was allowed very seldom as it made us so excited that we could not go to sleep. It took place on the landing outside the bedrooms and all it consisted of was Nanny on all fours covered in a fur carriage rug, crawling from one room to another growling. The only light came from the nursery door through which we darted to safety.

My parents encouraged us to play games and so enabled us to have a great deal of fun and enjoyment in later life. There was a good tennis court and croquet lawn, we learnt the elements of cricket and football, rounders and later hockey. More important still, perhaps, we got the feel of cards; snap, rummy, Old Maid, racing demon; there were plenty of children's card games which made the introduction of whist, auction bridge, contract bridge so much easier when we were of an age to play them.

These carefree days could not last forever. The nursemaid left and a governess arrived. She was a good-looking young woman who came from Hawes in North Yorkshire. She was called Miss Fawcett and she also stayed at Weetwood till we all, one by one, went on to boarding-school. She fitted into the household very well, was a great help to my mother, got on with Nanny and made friends locally. In fact she was to marry Charlie Henderson, the son of a shopkeeper in Wooler, who did well and became a bank manager. We kept in touch with her for years, and my sister was godmother to her eldest child.

Looking back, I think that what Miss Fawcett could not do was teach. She had a good but limited education; she wrote neatly and grammatically, could do simple arithmetic, played the piano well enough to accompany us for singing and to try to help us to play ourselves (there was a piano in the school-room and before the days of the gramophone almost everyone sang or played something), gave us a little PT every morning and looked after the oldest of us for the rest of the day. Her time with us included the whole of the First World War when, even in the country, things must have been difficult.

My elder brother and I were old enough now to go off on our own - to walk, to ride our ponies or to bicycle. With scarcely any traffic on the road bicycling liberated travel. 'Within bicycling distance' is a very different thing to being within walking distance. For instance a young maid who came from a remote shepherd's cottage could get home on her half-day. A bicycle could be taken on

the train and used at either end of the journey. It opened new horizons.

But in the Autumn of 1916 my trunk was packed, my tuck box filled and I was put on the train at Wooler with my elder brother to go to Corbridge with changes at Alnwick, Alnmouth and Newcastle, a journey I was to make three times a year for the next four years.

Life in the Cottages

There were six farm cottages at Weetwood which were built in the form of a square, often the practice in North Northumberland. Perhaps the square originally had a well in the centre, but when I first remember it there were standpipes. Each woman had to come out and fill her bucket, and if she wanted hot water, heat it on the kitchen range. A water supply piped to a cottage was rare, even in villages.

Sanitation was a problem on isolated farms as there was no mains water and no engines to drive a pump. It had to be gravity fed, a windmill or hand-pumped. In the farmhouse there would be one water-closet and an outside dry lavatory which was used by the men of the family. The cottages had only dry lavatories. They always back onto the ashpit and I think that it was due to the large amount of coal ash that the ashpit remained dry and relatively free from smell. All household refuse was also thrown there. The whole thing was cleared out once or twice a year and spread on the land. Since everything then was biodegradable it ploughed in very easily.

The dry lavatories themselves were rather pleasant to use. They were usually in a corner of the garden and hidden by shrubs or trees. At Weetwood it was under a large yew tree and at the junction of two garden walls with flower-beds in front of them. I can still remember the smell of the wall- flowers in Spring. The door was never shut.

Inside was a long bench of smooth white wood, kept well scrubbed, in which a hole was cut and which gave access to the ashpit behind. Sometimes there was more than one hole as at Lowick where there was a small one for a child and two large ones for grown-ups. An outside dry lavatory was called the netty and inevitably stories grew up round them. Here is one my father told.

In those days the milk, fresh from the cow was stood in large flat bowls. Twenty four hours later the cream was skimmed off and put in a small bowl for use in the house or when it went sour to make butter. A farmer who had been

bred in the hills had obtained the tenancy of a lowland farm. In the corner of the garden was a little building which had a bench with one small hole cut in it and two larger ones. 'What is this for?' enquired his wife. 'The two larger holes are for the milk bowls and the small one for the cream' replied her husband.

Another story concerns myself. One day I was sitting in the garden privy when I felt something cold touch my bare bottom. My first thought was that it might be a snake, so I rushed into the garden with my shorts about my knees. It turned out to be a little fox terrier we had which was scavenging in the ashpit and had touched me with his nose.

We were not isolated as some farms are, but in the days of very limited travel, we formed a community on our own. Manners and language were rough then and it only needed some slight incident to spark off violent quarrels among the women in the cottages. I well remember scenes which would never be possible today. For the farmer it meant that when engaging a new man he had to enquire about the wife as well.

Coal was king. Without it nothing moved except by man-power and horse power and occasionally water-power. It was necessary for heating, cooking, hot water, threshing, the blacksmith, the road roller, and the railways. Being in a coal-producing county meant that it was easily obtained. Usually the coal was stocked at the railway siding, but from Lowick the carts could be sent direct to Scremerston Colliery and at Wrangham there were even small shafts on the farm where coal could be dug. Ford Moss was still a working colliery.

Warmth, however, was not a problem as the families were large and the cottages small. An average family would be five or six children and there was only the kitchen, one bedroom and a cupboard type room. There was always a large bed in the kitchen with curtains round it but often, at least by day, it was occupied by grannie. Some cottages still had earth floors, but at Weetwood the floors were of cement, probably covered with pieces of linoleum with a hand-made tufted rug in front of the fire. Possessions were few and basic.

In those days, seventy years ago, life was hard for manual workers. The line between having enough to eat and being hungry was very fine. I think that this was the reason why everything on the farm was locked up, even the bins where the carthorses' corn was kept, even a ladder was always padlocked to something else. It was not that people were more dishonest then than now; it was because their need was so much greater.

The children on the farm were our friends and we played all sorts of wonder-

ful games together after school. Again, what a pity that the danger from machines makes it no longer possible to allow children onto a farm. In the Winter we made turnip lanterns. This was done by hollowing-out the turnip and then cutting holes for eyes and mouth in the shell. An old bit of wire made the handle and a candle end gave the light. I do not remember there ever being a fire, but given that all work in the early mornings and after dark was carried out with the light of a storm lantern which had a naked flame and held a pint of paraffin, I am surprised there was not. The Weetwood children had to walk over a mile to school and those at Wrangham walked to Doddington which, even taking the short cuts, must be three miles: six miles there and back with inadequate clothing and shoes and only a piece of bread and dripping in your pocket, must have been hard on a six-year-old. No wonder the boys were glad to leave school and begin work and the girls to go into service where at least they got a uniform, good meals and training on how a house should be run.

Until after the Second World War the ordinary worker, not the steward or the shepherd, changed farms much more often. I do not really know why, except that it may have been that they hoped to be better treated or to get a few shillings more a week. Farm cottages were, of course, 'tied' which meant that if you lost your job you lost your home. It meant too that the worker took no interest in his house or garden as he might soon be leaving it. The contract was yearly from 12th May. The farmer who had engaged a new family had to send a farm-cart to transport the humans and their few household goods to their new place of work. On 12th May you could see many such sad little processions.

Saddest of all was the life of those who did not find work. Social Security and health care were elementary, so many took to the road finding shelter and work where they could. Tramps were a common sight. Anything was better than the workhouse. In my lifetime it is the working class, not the middle or upper classes, whose standard of living has improved to a degree undreamt of in previous centuries.

Singling Turnips
[Scremerston]

Lowick Hall's
Horses and Hands

Binder at work
[Kentstone]

Work on the Farm

I am the wrong person to write about this. Almost from the first it seemed that I would not be a farmer, whereas my two brothers would never have thought of anything else. On leaving school, they came straight back to farm, while during my short visits, I took little interest in what was going on till forty years later.

Perhaps the most striking difference between then and now was the number of farm servants. There had to be, to make up for the lack of machinery which, at most, would be a thresher and a grinder worked by water or stationary engine. Everything took an immense amount of time and hard physical work. Take muck, for instance, which was still the most important fertilizer. The short cart had to be backed into the small cattle court, then the men lifted it about 5 feet by the forkful on to the cart. The cart took it to the muck midden where it was tipped, but the midden had to be shaped by the fork of another man. They were very neat affairs. When the time came to spread the muck it was again loaded onto the cart and then forked off again as the horse ambled across the field. This meant that only the fields nearest the steading got muck.

This went on for days and days as did, say, the switching of the road-side hedges, or the singling of the turnips and other routine jobs. But it also meant that on a well-kept farm everything looked immaculate.

The head worker was the steward - a key man indeed. My mother used to say that whenever anything went wrong my father only had one reply - 'Send for the Steward' .

Under him came the ploughman-steward who was responsible for the horses and field cultivations. Then there was the byre-man who looked after the cattle when they were inside and in summer doubled as a gardener. A spademan dealt mostly with draining, but also acted as odd-job man. (Tom Howie was one of my father's favourite workers and came with us to Lowick.)

One of the socially important features in having a large farm staff was that one or two 'simple' men could be absorbed. True, they were confined to work which needed little initiative, but it gave them the pride of being employed.

There were a considerable number of women workers. Some were full-time while others were called out when needed. They wore distinctive clothing. A hat rather like a Salvation Army bonnet with a red and white checked kerchief

beneath to protect their neck from rain and sun. Then a blouse, usually of faded blue, and a long skirt of a tough khaki-coloured material, and finally black woollen stockings and boots.

It is difficult for any younger person to realise what a tremendous difference man-made fibres have meant, especially to those working out-of-doors. Wellington boots are a good example. Now you can keep dry feet all day: then, with leather boots, in Winter you were seldom dry. Coats were not water-proof and the men used to put a sack over their shoulders for extra protection. With only wool and cotton and occasionally linen, personal hygiene was next to impossible. The large families, then the rule, exaggerated the problem.

The Corn

There was never a large acreage of corn: there could not be with horses. We grew mostly oats which were needed for the stock and only Weetwood would grow barley of malting quality. Harvest was an anxious period. The corn was cut less ripe than nowadays. There were all sorts of weeds growing with it, the worst being couch, a plant impossible to eradicate however careful the cultivation. But during the summer the fields were very beautiful with the scarlet poppies, blue cornflowers, yellow mustard, purple vetch. The opening-up of the field was done by men with scythes and the women binding into sheaves. The cutting was by a binder which ejected the sheaves already bound. It was pulled by two horses and could easily go wrong with its primitive machinery. Often the cutting had to be done 'one way' as the corn grew much taller then and was laid by the wind and rain. This was very time-consuming.

The sheaves thrown by the binders were then picked up and stooked. The corn ripened in the stook, possibly for two or three weeks, where it was vulnerable to rain and to bird damage. Finally the long carts arrived and it was taken to the stackyard in the steading. The corn stacks were round, broad at the base and tapering towards the top, each sheaf laid with care, heads facing inwards. There were wooden ventilators towards the bottom of the stack, a favourite place for hens to lay their eggs. Finally the stack was thatched - an art undertaken with pride as the stacks stood there for all to see for most of the Winter.

A harvest like this was, of course, the greatest fun for children. They could carry out the tea for the workers, they could get lifts on the carts going to and

from the fields, they could stand on the stack as it gradually rose higher and higher. It is sad that with modern machinery a farm has of necessity become out-of-bounds for the children of today.

It is easy to see why, when harvest was safely gathered in, it was time for rejoicing. There was the Harvest Festival in church where the decoration was much more splendid in those days when everyone had his own garden and fruit trees and there were plenty of mushrooms in the fields, and brambles, crab apples and sloes in the hedgerows. Alas, quite often, the date of the Harvest Festival was fixed and then it was found that the harvest was still far from finished. It was not unusual for it to continue into November in this part of the world.

When the stacks of corn came finally to be threshed they always contained rats, often in huge numbers. If there was rat poison at all, it was very ineffective. The sheaves were forked from the top and as the stack was gradually dismantled, the rats found their way to the bottom. The fun really started when the last few layers of sheaves were reached. Then every man, woman and child was armed with a stick and every dog recruited and the slaughter was great.

A custom which has died out is the Kern. Not every farmer gave a kern and then only occasionally after a good harvest. It was a party which lasted three days and always took place in an upstairs granary in the autumn when the corn was still in the stack. The first night was the night of preparation: the ballroom decorated, the casks of beer broached, the floor spread with French chalk. The second night was the dance. The music was provided by one or two fiddlers who knew the tunes of the country dances. We used to have a party at the house mostly of neighbouring farmers. We went across to the granary and then the dancing started. My father led off with the steward's wife and my mother followed with the steward. For a few minutes they danced alone (or ~ perhaps processed round the room would be a better expression). I don't remember what the name of this dance was, but it was always the same one. The nearest we got to modern dancing was a waltz and the polka. After an hour or two we went back to the house where the dining room table had all the extra leaves in and on it was a splendid cold supper.

The third night of the party was spent in clearing up and finishing off the beer and any leftover food.

The end of the corn cycle was the day when the travelling thresher arrived. This we looked forward to immensely. Nowadays it would seem an extraordi-

nary contraption - or series of contraptions. Along the dusty untarred road would come first the steam-engine with its coal tender. Then there would be the thresher itself, a huge affair on which several men would stand, and finally a large caravan with its own heating and cooking stove and perhaps a wisp of smoke coming from its chimney. It was in this that the thresher's crew lived.

They set up next to the first stack to be threshed and for the next few days, the throb of the machinery dominated life on the farm. The straw was carried to the straw barn in big roped bundles; the chaff to the chaff house in large sheets, there to be mixed with molasses for the calves to eat. The hardest job of all was to carry the corn sacks up the granary steps. Corn had always to be stored in the highest part of a building so that it would find its way by gravity to the grinder or bruiser below.

The Hay

The hay was perhaps the trickiest crop of all and in the days before silage on a predominantly stock farm, perhaps the most important. A good deal of it was soft old-land grass and more difficult to make. The cutting by reaper was much as it is now, although the grass was not bruised. Then came the turning of the swath - a slow job by a horse-drawn turner - which probably had to be repeated several times. If the weather turned wet it would end as sad, black lines across the fields with the green sward growing through. But if the weather stayed fine and the wind got up, then it was pulled by a hayrake into small piles called kyles. Then it was safer from the weather. A few more days and the kyles were pulled into pikes which probably started 15 feet tall and then sank to 12 feet as the hay matured. The pikes were secured with twisted hay ropes and they could then safely stand for weeks. Often harvest had started and there was still hay in the fields.

The pikes were finally slid onto the hay-bogeys which were low, flat, wooden planks mounted on wheels onto which the pike was pulled by a rope attached to a spare horse.

Hay always heated in the pike and in the stack and so the stacks were not put near buildings or the corn stacks in case of internal combustion, but they were built where they could be easily got to in winter. Hay was often of poor quality whereas the oat straw ripened in the stook and in the stack, and fresh from the thresher was good.

The Turnips

The third important arable crop was turnips. This really meant swedes as white turnips, although larger, did not stand frost. Turnips were important in that they made a break from corn and the sheep being folded over them all winter gave the land the vital fertilizer. But they were a lot of work. Firstly the earth had to be cultivated more than for corn, then it had to be rowed up and the seed planted. Once the plants were a certain size, singling began. It was an expert's job and done mostly by the women. A single plant was left every hoe's breadth. Strangely enough it was a thing the workers most enjoyed. Each took her row and worked just behind the one in front. There was a chance for a gossip and by the nature of the work it was done in fine weather.

After the singling came the scuffling to keep the weeds down between the rows. This probably had to be done more than once. Now there was a pause till late autumn when the turnips were to be used. The hoggs would start at one end of the field and at the other end the turnips would be 'shawed'. This meant that the leaves of the turnip would be grasped in the left hand and the right hand holding a shawing hook would top and tail the turnip leaving them in neat rows. This again was woman's work but owing to the time of year, not nearly as pleasant as the singling.

The rows of turnips were then either sliced and fed in troughs to sheep in the field or forked into a short cart and taken to a pile at an accessible place or led back to the steading to the turnip-house where each day the byreman sliced them into baskets with a special machine. They were then fed to the cattle twice a day.

It strikes me as extraordinary that this basic crop has all but disappeared. It is hard now to find a seed drill, a scuffler, a turnip basket or even a shawing-hook or a hoe. All that remains as a mute reminder are the holes in the walls of old hemels which have their stone worn smooth with countless baskets of sliced turnips being fed to cattle.

The Grass

As with food for humans, so with food for stock, very little was bought. You grew it yourself or did without. There were molasses for the calves and linseed and cotton cake for the sheep and cattle. For minerals all I remember were large lumps of rock salt put in the troughs when the cattle were inside. Both crops

and animals were healthy enough, but then farming was not intensive: things grew more naturally.

Two advances in agriculture took place at this time which were to transform the quantity and quality of grass on which we depended. Firstly there was basic slag used as a fertilizer and secondly wild white clover. They were pioneered by Armstrong College, now Newcastle University, which then, as now, had a famous Department of Agriculture headed by Professor Gilcrest - a great hero of my father. Basic slag was the waste from the huge steel furnaces of those days and was therefore cheap and plentiful. It acted as a slow-release fertilizer and needed to be applied only every few years. The new strains of white clover improved the temporary grass leys enormously, as well as providing nitrogen when they were ploughed up.

The slag and the clover were instrumental in turning the coastal strip from Berwick to Alnmouth into some of the best fattening grassland in Britain. From the train you could see field after field of black Aberdeen Angus cattle and Hereford and Shorthorn too. Luckily for us, about half of Lowick was this sort of land. Mixed stocking was the rule and half-bred ewes with their smart carriage and white faces, complimented the black cattle.

Transport

By Horse

It is difficult to believe how much rural transport has improved in my lifetime. The only comparable change must have been the coming of the rail-ways in the middle of the 19th Century. But for the ordinary country person it is not rail nor air travel which has changed their lives, but the ability to leave his own front door and go, if so desired, to the ends of the earth, without leaving his motor car.

I went to boarding school in 1916 and we did not get our first car until 1919, therefore the whole of the period about which I am writing was, for family transport, dominated by the horse and to a lesser extent, the bicycle.

My father did all his work on horseback, riding either round his own farm or going to marts or sales or just visiting. He was entirely at home on a horse. Even when he was old and could only walk with difficulty, he used to be put on an old pony of my brother's and ride round Lowick taking with him the groom to

open gates. On horseback is of course the perfect way to see a farm and particularly to look at stock.

It strikes me now what long days were spent in the saddle. To leave Weetwood after breakfast, to look in at Wrangham and then sort out any problems at Lowick and return, probably after dark, to Weetwood - all on horseback, and possibly in bad weather, would seem to try all but the strongest.

It was the same hunting. No horsebox, but perhaps an hour's hack to the meet, three or four hours hunting and, if the hounds ran the wrong way, an even longer hack back. A pony's stride is very short compared to that of a horse. They were sore and tired children who arrived home on a December afternoon to be greeted by an anxious mother.

My mother rode side-saddle, but gave it up when she started a family. From then on, she drove, and drove very well, for with a spirited horse driving was not always easy.

As I have said, we had two dog-carts. They had very large wheels between which was a bench-type seat with an upright back support in the middle so that the driver and one passenger faced the horse and two more could sit on the same bench, but facing backwards. All our horses, I think, were broken to ride and drive and with a good trotting horse a dog-cart travelled fast. It had however no protection from the weather except a mackintosh rug which was pulled forward to cover the legs of the front-facing passengers. Everyone wore extremely heavy and long tweed coats. It was a disagreeable experience to face rain or sleet coming home over Wrangham or Chatton Moor, unfenced of course in those days, and made worse at night when the only lights were two flickering carriage lamps.

But the vehicle most used was the pony-cart or tubby. It was much lower and oval-shaped and you sat facing one another - two adults and perhaps three or four children. It was mostly the tubby that we used for shopping, or going to the station, or just going for a drive or a picnic.

Going out in any sort of horse-drawn vehicle was not easy. Without a groom and a stable-boy it would scarcely have been possible. First you probably had to catch the pony in the field; sometimes maddeningly difficult and time-consuming. Having got him in the stable, he perhaps needed grooming; then his harness was to be put on. After this, he could be left in his stall, back to the manger and held by two reins which were fixed to the pillars in the front of the stall. Like this he was ready when the call came for him to be yoked into the trap.

But problems did not end there. A horse or pony could not just be left in the way you can leave a car. If my mother went shopping in Wooler the shop-keeper came out to her and she dictated her shopping list to him. Often there was an old man standing about who would hold the horse for a small tip. If you went to the station, you had to be driven there and met on your return. Luckily trains were punctual to the minute. If you went visiting, the groom of the house you were visiting came to the front door and took the horse round to the stable where he was unyoked, but not unharnessed, and again put in the holding reins in a stall until the guest was leaving. You always came home much more quickly than you went as the animal knew he could look forward to his corn and hay!

The bigger inns all had stables at the back capable of holding a lot of horses. The Black Bull in Wooler is typical and the Tankerville Arms (then called the Cottage Hotel) was used in conjunction with Wooler Mart.

To be a groom was a pleasant and sought-after job, but the hours were long as the groom was constantly on call. For this reason he sometimes had a bed in the back of the house or lived in a lodge near at hand. His kingdom was the harness-room which, with its blazing fire and a huge pan for boiling linseed on the hob was the cosiest place on the farm. It smelt of dubbing and saddle-soap and leather polish. From the wall hung gleaming bridles, saddles and glinting stirrups and bits.

While not responsible for the cart-horses, the groom would be in charge of the mares-in-foal and young stock. The breeding of horses either for home , use or for sale was, of course, a routine farming practice. My father bred some excellent horses, but he always maintained that if they were good enough, a commercial farmer should sell them on and not try himself to produce them for show or to steeplechase. Point-to-points were different; they were open only to horses which had been hunted all Winter and like the shows in Summer were treated as an enjoyable day out.

The groom was also an essential messenger. Before the days of telephone, communication was either by post, telegram or 'by hand' notes. The advantage of these was that they brought an immediate reply. I can well remember my father, during a spell of nasty winter weather, sending the groom with a note to ask neighbours, probably the Shorts of Humbleton, or the Chartres of Akeld, to come and play whist that evening. There was no likelihood that they would be previously engaged!

We used always to have greyhounds at Weetwood and later at Lowick till the roads got too dangerous. They had no traffic sense. I seem to remember that most farmers kept greyhounds or lurchers. They were ideal for accompanying anyone on horseback, but were never treated as pets, or allowed in the house: indeed they were rather savage. Hares and rabbits abounded and to these the tenant farmer could help himself. They were a staple article of food for country people. Coursing was very popular and the Waterloo Cup attracted almost as much publicity and betting as did the Grand National.

My father never shot. The shooting on a tenanted farm was either shot over by the landlord or let separately. Luckily we owned Wrangham and it was from there that our game came. It was also there that we were taught to shoot.

People seemed to have much more time in those days to spend on sport and relaxation. It was another result of not being able to travel far and not being always in a hurry. There was cubbing in the Autumn and hunting in the Winter, visits of various packs of beagles to hunt hares. The otter hounds regularly hunted the Till. We could fish for trout in Summer and grayling in Winter. Many a happy day was spent in ferreting and ratting and setting snares, and for the children, bird nesting. These were country sports and through them you came to know your part of the countryside intimately.

For country people who could not move around themselves, the necessities of life had to come to them. Every butcher, baker, fishmonger, grocer and his cart had his round. Haberdashers too took round cloth, some sewing materials and odds and ends not covered by the specialist carts. They were supplemented by pedlars who somehow scratched a living from what they could carry on their backs.

It is interesting that Holy Island was provisioned from Lowick which then had a lot of small shops. Indeed a butcher, one of the Foremans, was drowned when his cart was caught by the incoming tide.

By Rail

The railway, the London North Eastern Railway, provided our communication with the outside world. The branch line which ran through Wooler had a short life as I think it didn't open till the 1880's and closed to passenger traffic between the wars and to freight after the flood of 1948. It ran from Alnwick to Cornhill. Going south, you went from Alnwick to Alnmouth to join the main

East Coast line or from Cornhill you went to Berwick, also on the main N.E. line or you could go west to Kelso and St Boswells which was then a considerable junction linking you with the whole of the Western network.

Rail, to my mind, is the most pleasant way to travel. Once you have settled in your seat or your sleeper you have no worries till you arrive at your destination which is in the middle of a town. At the end of a journey by car, you arrive tired and strained. By air you have the nightmare problem of a busy airport and arrive at a place, miles from the centre of town. Ships I would place second to rail. Your cabin becomes your shell to leave or retreat to as you wish. Unfortunately ships travel on the sea which at best is unpredictable; at worst very uncomfortable.

Nowadays from Lowick you could go to buy sheep at Rothbury or Kelso by leaving at 10 o'clock and be home for tea. Before the First World War you had to go by train which was then considered a fast and convenient way to travel. For Rothbury you took the train at Wooler, then to Alnwick-Alnmouth-Morpeth and branch line to Rothbury. For Kelso you changed at Cornhill. At both ends of journeys like these there was probably a considerable distance to walk.

On the way home from Kelso we used to get off at Mindrum and visit old friends of my father's at Mindrum Mill, called Borthwick. The family consisted of an elderly brother Alex and his two sisters. It was a real Victorian household which even at the age of six or seven I found fascinatingly different. They still dined at six o'clock at a very large table covered with white damask and in front of the master would be two plump cockerels while at the other end the elder sister presided over several delicious puddings. After a more than ample meal we retired to the drawing-room, so crowded with knick-knacks that it was a small boy's nightmare, where the younger sister was ensconced behind the tea equipage. How we got home I cannot quite remember, but I think that probably we had driven to Mindrum in the morning, left the dog-cart there and gone to Kelso by train.

Using modern means of transport, I think it would be quicker for me to get to my house in the South of Portugal, than it was then to attend Kelso ram sale and return to Weetwood.

The station on a branch line such as ours was delightful. Most of them, like Ilderton and Wooperton were little better than 'halts', but they were clean and well-kept and vied with one another as to which had the best flower beds. There was a comforting fire in the waiting-room. The staff joined the L.N.E.R.

for life and were proud of their line. They knew their passengers and you knew them. The porter helped you into your carriage and took the heavier luggage to the guard's van. The van itself was a fascinating place with not only passengers' luggage, but parcels, dogs on leads, dead rabbits in crates and a brace of pheasants just tied by the necks to a label. Anything indeed that was perishable and needing rapid delivery but was unsuitable to go by post. The fishmonger would probably be there to take delivery of his fish and certainly someone from the post office to collect the mail. The rest of the strange miscellany was taken to the freight shed where it would be picked up by the 'flat cart' and distributed around the neighbourhood.

People didn't travel light in those days. Everything was heavier: leather trunks and suitcases, woollen clothes and coats, rugs to keep your legs warm, umbrellas and sticks, hatboxes not only for the ladies but also for men if they wanted to wear a top hat or bowler. No wonder a porter with a barrow was a necessity.

Another factor which added to the amount of luggage was that you did not go away for a weekend or even a few days: it was more likely to be a fortnight or more. Visitors were almost always relations, grandparents, elderly aunts or unmarried cousins who unpacked their bags and settled in. They didn't interfere with the rhythm of the house, but rather took part in it and helped by doing the flowers, picking fruit, or some sewing or darning.

Everything needed for the farm that could not walk also came by train. Slag, for instance, still came to Beal when I returned to Lowick in 1952. It was then brought up in the short carts. Every Mart had to be next door to a station and I imagine that one of the reasons we used Belford for fat stock was it being on the main line. It was also in the middle of the coastal strip of great fattening farms.

In Northumberland we did not grow enough turnips for the number of sheep we carried so in winter a farmer would rent turnips in Berwickshire where the ewes would be sent either by train or on foot. The owner had to provide the hay. One of the few times I saw my father really angry was when, on a Saturday, he sent the long carts with hay for his ewes and the carts were turned back in Coldstream because the town had been tidied for the weekend and some of the hay might have blown about. The Sabbath over the Border was strictly kept.

By Bicycle

I have already referred to how much we enjoyed bicycling as children. The bicycle may never have been a means of mass travel but as a liberator of freedom of personal movement it was unrivalled. It was cheap to buy, required no fuel, neither hay, nor coal, nor petrol; it could be left unattended; it was available at a moment's notice. No wonder it was used by all classes and both sexes.

Country roads, although not tarmaced, had improved enormously. True, they were dusty in Summer and had large puddles in Winter; there were also sharp stones, so punctures were not uncommon. You were in the open air, you could go fast or slowly, by yourself, with friends or in the large numbers of a cycling club which were common at this time.

The days before the First World War were the golden age of cycling. The machines were reliable and comfortable, the roads uncrowded, there was not the all-pervading smell of petrol and oil from exhausts. You could tell when you were passing a bank of primroses or a wood of wild garlic. Bicycles were also silent and you could hear country sounds which are now inaudible. For children they were, of course, the perfect vehicle, but the difficulty was learning to ride. Nowadays children seem to ride them by second nature; then you had lessons. You wobbled, you fell off. I never saw either of my parents or Nanny on a bicycle but Miss Fawcett, our governess, being a liberated young woman, had a lady's bike which meant it had no bar in the middle so that you could mount decorously. It also had a guard on the back wheel to prevent a skirt from becoming entangled.

The bicycle did not have the social significance of the train, the car or the aeroplane, but for the ordinary man or woman, it opened another world.

The Black Bull

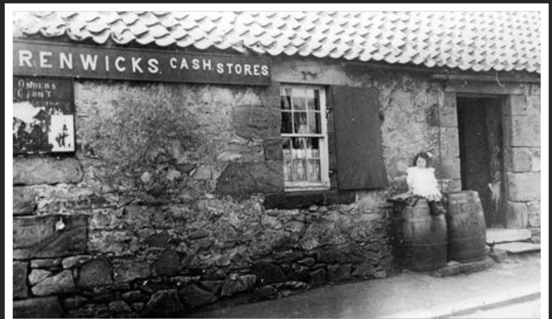
Stephen Mole's Shop

Miss Bernie's shop,
Garden House

Gordon & sons
Butchers

Lowick's shops, stores, Inns and trades

Renwick's Store



Life in the Neighbourhood

I'm afraid our lives as children would seem very dull to the present generation. There were few parties because of travel difficulties and those there were, were kept for the Summer when the evenings were longer; also, I'm afraid, we were not very gregarious, preferring people and surroundings we knew rather than the world beyond. Many families made anniversaries very important, but our birthdays were celebrated by being allowed to choose what we specially liked for lunch and perhaps an iced sponge-cake with our name on it and the right number of candles for tea.

The only parties I remember really enjoying were given by a couple with no children of their own, Mr & Mrs Maling of Twizel. (In fact they must have been given at a later date when we were at Lowick and had a car.) Twizel House was large, old and ramshackle with some magnificent trees in the park and a walled kitchen garden.

There were also rabbits. Not ordinary rabbits but white, pink, grey, spotted rabbits in hundreds which came out of the shrubberies in the evenings. Mr Maling was a man, quite common then, who never did any work in his life. Nor did he have a large estate or public responsibilities. His private income (and his wife's) enabled him to do exactly what he wanted and that was sport. He was a brilliant shot and fisherman, knowledgeable about hunting and hounds, played tennis and golf and in the evenings, cards. He was sociable and liked by all classes and of course was looked after devotedly by his wife and, when she died, a parlour-maid called Margaret who had been with them all her life. It was he who decided the fate of the rabbits. Having put out various coloured ones he let them inter-breed and then picked off with his air-gun any which were ordinary brown. The result was altogether delightful. Mrs Maling had to net round her flower-beds.

Their summer parties consisted of the usual tennis, croquet, clock golf but the highlight came when all the children were taken to the kitchen garden. Then on a blast from Mr Maling's whistle we all poured, like hounds into a covert, into the fruit-cage. There we were allowed to stuff ourselves with as many strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries as we could in a few minutes. Then, at another blast on the whistle we all had to come out. It was the greatest fun and we looked forward to it year by year.

In this same kitchen-garden the summerhouse-cum-potting-shed was a very

old tramcar. How it had got there from Tyneside one can only guess. I suppose on a railway flat-loader to Belford then on to Twizel on a specially made bogey. When Mr & Mrs Maling were both dead it was discovered by industrial archaeologists and is now restored and in the Beamish Museum in Co. Durham.

The winter children's parties at Twizel I remember in particular, for two reasons. The first was hunt-the-thimble in the large Victorian drawing-room lit only by oil lamps and with every exposed surface covered with knick-knacks. One understood the meaning of 'like looking for a needle in a haystack'.

The second was when we were paired - an older child and a younger one - and sent off with only a sixpenny Woolworth torch as light, to search an unused bedroom wing for patience cards (very small playing cards) which had been pinned or stuck to wallpapers, curtains, bedspreads, all of which were in close Victorian patterns. With the tiny light of a sixpenny torch they were next to impossible to see. After, say, twenty minutes, the whistle blew and the couple who had collected the most cards got the prize, although, like all good parties, everyone got a prize for trying.

Easter stands out in my mind as almost as memorable a Church Festival as the Harvest Thanksgiving. Church decoration was more elaborate then, and we children were kept busy picking primroses and gathering moss to arrange together on the window sills of the church. Easter eggs are a Northumbria speciality and all sorts of material was used to colour them. The flowers of gorse were used for yellow, blue came from the laundry where it was used with starch, cochineal for red and so on. You could write a name on the egg with a candle so that it wouldn't take the colour, then wrap the whole thing in a cloth to boil. The result was often beautiful.

On Easter Day the eggs were taken onto the lawn and bowled in a competition to see whose egg would stay uncracked the longest.

In those days, nearly everyone went to Church or Chapel. In the small village of Lowick there were the Church of England, the Roman Catholic, the Presbyterian, both Scots and English, Methodists, Baptists, Plymouth Brethren. There were also six pubs.

For us, church-going was never a penance. I have a feeling that we only went to Matins on fine days as it was a mile's walk to Wooler, and never to Sunday School or Evensong. We used to have a simple service in the school- room so that we got to know the Prayer Book, the Bible and Hymns, but the boring bits like Psalms and the sermon were missed out.

In church everyone had their own pew. In Wooler our family filled two pews and immediately behind us was a neighbouring farmer from Turvilaws called Tom Cabury and his wife. Mr Cabury was a particularly jolly man and he spent the service in trying to make us wriggle. I regret to say he often succeeded, much to my mother's disapproval.

There were two doctors' practices in Wooler. The one we used consisted of Dr Dey who looked after us at Weetwood and Dr Babcock who lived at the Doctor's Lodge near Ford and came to Lowick. He was also a surgeon.

The Deys were family friends as they had children of our age. Dr Dey was the only person I have ever seen who had had smallpox with the result that his face was deeply pock-marked. It was also red as he enjoyed his whisky. When his trap was heard arriving the maid automatically brought in the decanter and siphon. In those days a doctor mixed his own medicines and when he had examined you he invariably replied 'I'll send you a bottle'. It was almost always a purge. The view of laxatives was quite different then. At my prep school we had a nauseous medicine called 'Dr Gregory's Powder' once a week, shaken up by the matron like a cocktail.

Dr Babcock we knew less well until he went to Lowick. He took out my tonsils on the kitchen table at Weetwood by the light of an oil lamp and an ether pad over my face by way of anaesthetic. The ether made you sick when you regained consciousness and I have never forgotten the pain.

Raising enough money to pay a District Nurse, to provide her with a cottage and a bicycle was always a problem at Lowick. There was a never-ending round of fetes, jumble sales, school concerts to this end, and I don't think we ever failed to make sufficient. She was an important part in the life of the village and the surrounding farms. There was of course a much larger rural population then and little knowledge of hygiene or preventative medicine.

Our lives were punctuated by visits from people who had business on the farm. There was the blacksmith for instance. Every farm had a smithy; a place of real enchantment for children: the blacksmith with his leather apron and blackened face, the fire throwing sparks when the bellows were at work, the ring of a horseshoe being shaped on the anvil, the acrid smell when the shoe was affixed to the hoof. It makes me sad to see the smithies shuttered now.

Then there was the travelling stallion and his groom - sometimes a huge Clydesdale for the cart mares and sometimes a thoroughbred to breed riding horses. They would stay with us several times each Spring while they visited

neighbouring farms. These highly-bred and beautifully groomed and caparisoned stallions were a splendid sight on the roads.

We looked forward to the days when the hounds met at Weetwood. We were on the edge of two packs, the North Northumberland and Col. Milvain's; not a very smart country to hunt over but perhaps all the more enjoyable for that. At one meet I remember my father mounted all our men on the carthorses and it was wonderful to see them all careering across the farm on to the moor where they could not do much harm.

Another annual high-spot was the Wooler Show. It was then held on the land between the Mart and the Cottage Hotel (now the Tankerville Arms) and was, of course, much smaller. The site was perfect: near-at-hand, a flat piece of land next to the mart for the arena, a bank where you could sit and watch, then flat again to the hotel which gave space for the tents. My younger brother on his pony called 'Bucket' was often successful in the children's classes. Although small, it was a competitive little Show with cattle as well as sheep and horses. There was a separate dog show, mostly terriers and collies and, as today, flowers and vegetables, cakes and jam, children's writing, needlework, shepherd's crooks and clippy rugs, meant that there was something for everyone. The crowd was local. Glendale was still an entity. It had a magistrates' court, a Rural District Council and controlled all the services which are now in the hands of faceless Civil Servants in Berwick or Morpeth.

Perhaps a few people came by train for the Show. There was for instance, wrestling, (I think it was probably called Cumberland Wrestling) with professional wrestlers and good prizes. The young men of Glendale pitted their strength against others from further afield. My father was always one of the judges.

As sure as the swallows returning in the Spring, Irish labourers arrived at harvest-time. They followed the harvest from the South of England to end in the North of Scotland, often returning to the same farm year after year. They were rough and tough, coming solely to make money to take home. They spent none of their wages except perhaps at the pub on Saturday nights. For bedding they used straw in an out-house and for food they cooked a kind of porridge in the copper usually used for cooking meat for the greyhounds or potatoes for the pigs. Every farm had this sort of boiler in what was called the Pot House.

As I have mentioned before, it is extraordinary how many coal fires there were. The smoking-room, the nursery, the kitchen, the laundry, the harness-

room, the Smithy, the pot house - even the greenhouse had a small stove. It is easy to see why colliery owners were rich and a miners' strike could bring the country to a standstill. The Irishmen were good workers and were sometimes kept on after harvest to do jobs like stone-walling which the regular farm staff did not have time for.

Small county towns like Wooler, Berwick or Alnwick were almost totally self-sufficient. You could buy or have made, everything you needed. My father for his better clothes had a London tailor who came to Berwick several times a year, stayed at the King's Arms where my father chose his cloth and in due time went for a fitting. I got to know this West End tailor well, later on, as when I was in London from Cambridge, he would always cash my cheques!

My mother too, got clothes from London when she went to visit my grand-parents. But for tweed suits, riding-breeches, coats and skirts, we all went to Anderson's in Church Street in Berwick, or to a remarkable man called Mr Colville in Chatton. Not only did he run the village shop, but was also an excellent tailor. Even my mother, who was the least self-conscious of people, felt shy when she appeared behind a screen beyond the buckets and spades, the bags of sugar and rice, in the corner of his shop. The grooms of the neighbour-hood went to him too, as they had a new suit or coat and breeches each year.

Country boots - none wore shoes in the country - were also locally made. Lowick and Ancroft had traditionally been the home for a cottage industry of cobblers. Shepherds particularly had to have good, watertight boots for the amount of walking they did. They were known as tackety-boots as the soles were covered in tacks and they had a steel heel plate. A pair of these boots must have weighed pounds, but they were comfortable when they got worn in and easy to repair by replacing the tacks.

Up to the First World War, which was to prove such a great divide in so many social habits, every village had a number of maiden ladies. (They didn't like being called spinsters.) They had been trained for nothing and as was the lamentable habit in those days, spent their youth looking after their parents. There had been little change from the ladies described in Cranford a hundred years earlier. They were mostly pitifully poor, yet had to try to keep up appear-ances. Some opened a small shop, though I feel it was more for the company they brought and the opportunity to talk, than any profit there may have been. There was a Miss Barber in Alnwick who kept a little shop selling knitting wool whom I was once taken to see as a young child. She must have been left behind

when the other Barbers moved to Glendale from Boulmer and Rock.

Our favourite was Miss Turnbull. She lived in one of the Barmoor cottages (all four were occupied by spinsters at that time) with her brother who was an invalid and who also painted excellent watercolours. My mother was very fond of Dora and she often called when she walked down to do her shopping. In spite of her totally circumscribed life she was always cheerful and full of gossip and little stories of her youth. The only break in their endless routine was a fortnight at Armstrong House in Bamburgh each summer. For them it was magical.

I remember two other shops in Lowick kept by spinster ladies. Miss Bernie was in what is now the Garden House. She sold household necessities, but the shop was so dark that you really could not see exactly what was there, although you could smell the bars of floor soap, the Jeyes disinfectant and the tarred garden twine.

Miss Armstrong on the other hand lived in a little cottage opposite the garage. Since it faced south it was all bright and, to us, delectable. She sold only sweets. There must have been sweets like Mackintosh's toffee or Fry's chocolate bars, but the majority were in glass jars of various shapes and you bought a pennyworth of this and tuppence worth of the other - acid drops, black bullets, liquorice all-sorts and even gob-stoppers.

There was an old lady (or perhaps she seemed old to me) who lived at the White House, at Barmoor. There was talk of improving the lamentable water supply which of course would have meant an extra penny or two on the rates.

Miss Fennel when having a conversation with my mother said - 'You know, Mrs Barber, people nowadays are so extravagant with water'. My mother replied,

'How do you mean, Miss Fennel?'

'Well,' she replied, 'they only use it once. I myself wash in it first, then I use it for the dishes and only then do I water the garden with it.'

These ladies have gone. Gone for good; but I am grateful to have known them.

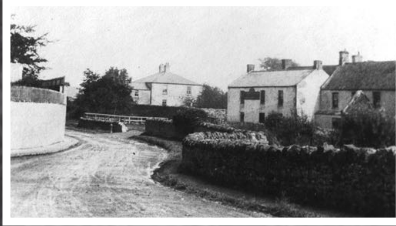
Conclusion

It is now almost the end of March and I have done what I set out to do - occupied some of my time each day dredging my memories of the first eight years of my life. I have enjoyed doing it. I'm afraid I have been unable to compose elegant sentences. I have tried, but I found I was unable to hold a long sentence in my mind from start to finish. It reads rather like an extended telegram.

I am not sure what I shall do now. Re-structuring even in typescript will be laborious and not so much fun as writing it. We shall see. Perhaps next Winter. It might be interesting if I could remember other parts of my life: school, university, the war, working for the British Council in Italy. But none of them seem at the moment an attractive prospect. Early childhood is in an odd way detached from the rest of my life. I remember it differently and every memory is a pleasant one. It might be best to let things rest, put it away in a drawer and hope that it might interest some one at a time in the future.

I shall miss the hour or two spent each morning for the last three months thinking and trying to get my thoughts coherently on paper. But it is Spring and there are other things to do.

A Northumberland Childhood



"Time can lie heavily on your hands when you are old and I thought that in the early months of this year I would occupy myself in the self-indulgent task of writing about my childhood as I now remember it."

Jim Barber wrote his account of childhood in Wooler and Lowick in 1991 at the age of 83. Thanks to him, we have a vivid portrait of life, 100 years ago, just before the first world war.

The Barber family have agreed this publication of Jim's memoir in aid of the restoration fund for Lowick Village Hall.

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