

Hay Making at High Farnhill – and other memories of growing up at Hellifield House

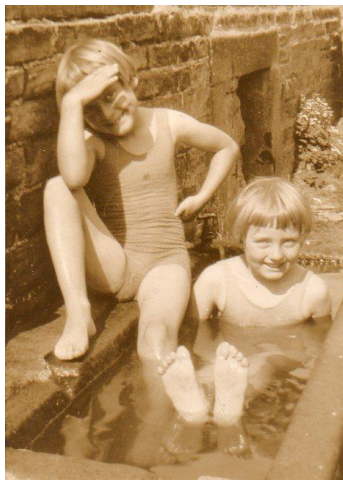
The following is an account written in 1997 by Gladys Crossley about growing up in the 1930s at Hellifield House in High Farnhill where she was born in 1925. Her father, Lister Rishworth, one in a long line of farmers originating from Addingham Moorside, moved to Hellifield House with his wife Sarah Jane and seven children in the early 1920s.



Above: The farm as it was then. Today the scene is very different with a conservatory extension at the front of the house, the adjacent barn is two cottages and a workshop that was built in front of the barn is now a house.

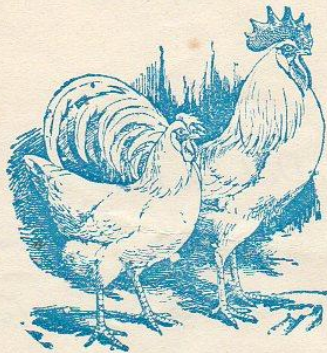
Memories

“Write it down before you forget” so said my youngest daughter. But where to begin ? I could begin now at the ripe old age of 72 and go backwards or start at the beginning. Perhaps childhood is the best time to begin when one’s world is small and every day revolves around you. But, being next to the youngest of nine children on a twenty acre farm wasn’t just for me.



Dad was a warp dresser by trade but after leaving Radcliffe, where he lived for a short time after marriage, he took up poultry farming, first at Delph Farm on Silsden Moor and then at Hellifield House in Farnhill where I was born. He hatched eggs and sold the day old chicks sending them in cardboard boxes by train from Kildwick and Cononley stations to various parts of the country. Occasionally he would “stand” the market at Carlisle taking the chicks by road in a T Ford van. Some of the eggs used for hatching were collected from a farmer over at Greenhow, near Pateley Bridge. Going to collect them along with my mother and younger sister Renee was quite a major outing.

Left: Fun on the Farm. Gladys and Renee cool down in the stone water trough in Summer 1933.



Telephone : CROSS HILLS 113.

Goods : CONONLEY, L.M.S.

Memorandum from

LISTER RISHWORTH,

Breeder, Exporter and Importer of Pure-Bred Pedigree Birds,
FARNHILL, near Keighley, Yorks.

BREEDS :

White Wyandottes :: Anconas
Rhode Island Reds (both varieties)
Black, Brown, and White Leghorns
Buff and Barred Rocks.

NAME NEAREST STATION AND RAILWAY

CHICKS :

3,000 HATCHED WEEKLY DURING SEASON.

All varieties as mentioned.

Any Chicks dying on rail replaced if returned next post after delivery.

50 Chick size Brooders supplied. Eggs for Hatching.

Terms : Cash with Order or deposit with any Poultry Journal.

Hatching eggs was a time consuming business in those days. The eggs were placed on trays and each egg was marked in pencil with a cross before being put into the incubators. The eggs had to be turned twice a day by the simple method of dipping a finger in water and gently rolling the egg over with the wet finger until the mark was underneath, uncovering the mark the next time. It was lovely and warm in the incubator shed but rather eerie, the only light being from candles. I am told that my sister Nellie once had her hair on fire when working in there. A fire of a more disastrous nature occurred in 1933 (*at what is today the Old Vicarage where Lister also had incubators*):

A FIERCE KILDWICK BLAZE. May 19/33

10,000 Eggs Destroyed.

FLAMES FED BY GAS FROM INCUBATORS.

A disastrous fire broke out in an outbuilding of The Vicarage, Kildwick, on Friday evening. The centre portion of the building was in the occupation of Mr. Lister Rishworth, poultry breeder, Hellifield House, Farnhill, and was of two storeys. It housed 33 incubators, which contained approximately 10,000 eggs in various stages of incubation. One end of the building was used as a stable and the other end as a garage.

The fire was discovered about 10-30 p.m. by Mr. J. Moore, Priest Bank Cottage, Kildwick, who observed smoke issuing from the building. He immediately informed Mr. Rishworth, who telephoned for the Keighley Fire Brigade. Meanwhile, nearby residents made strenuous efforts to quench the flames with buckets of water. Prominent helpers were County Alderman J. J. Brigg and Alderman W. A. Brigg, who brought fire extinguishers from their residence, Kildwick Hall, some 100 yards away.

The fire, however, helped no doubt to a large extent by the gas with which the incubators were fed, had got too firm a hold and raged furiously. The gas supply was quickly cut off, but it was not long before a large portion of the roof fell in. The flames rose to a great height and the glare could be seen for miles around, drawing large numbers of people to the scene. Immediately afterwards the Fire Brigade, under Chief-Officer Normington, arrived and quickly ran a line of hose from a nearby well. Fortunately, there was a good supply of water and the fire was soon under control.

VICARAGE NOT ENDANGERED.

Although it was too late to save the incubator house, which was entirely gutted the fire was prevented from spreading to the stable and garage. Water had, however, to be pumped into the incubator house for a considerable period to prevent the fire from breaking out afresh.

A portion of the Vicarage is within a few yards of the outbuildings, but luckily the breeze blew the flames away from it and it was in no danger.

The fire was caused, it is thought, through one of the incubators becoming overheated and bursting into flame.

It is estimated that the damage is from £600 to £700. It is understood that the loss is covered by insurance.

We also had about a dozen milking cows on the farm and the older boys would often get into arguments about whose turn it was to help with the milking. The bulk of the milk was sold to and collected by a Dairy from Leeds. We had a small milk round in the village – measuring the milk into jugs or basins at the customer's doorstep. If they were out at work we would leave it in pint milk cans. My brothers and sisters would deliver the milk before school and after the evening milking, clattering down the village in their clogs. Clogs were good for growing feet the old folks said. Yes, they kept the rain out and they were fun. When the pavements were dry, with practice, you could make sparks on the flags with the clog irons, and you could build a platform of snow on your clogs and stand three inches taller. But oh dear; new clogs could rub your ankle bones very sore. We never wore clogs on Sundays and gradually shoes became the normal foot wear unless one was working on the farm.



Above: Bringing up the rear. Bill Rishworth brings the last of the cows home in 1933.

Working on the farm ? Cleaning out the hen huts. Scrubbing the mistals (*cow stalls*) and whitewashing them out in the summer. And summer time meant bringing the cows up from the low land over the canal bridge for milking. A new cow would often take fright at the swing bridge and set off down the tow path. Here the dog, first Gyp, then Nell and later Floss, would quickly turn the cow back and it would charge snorting across the bridge to join the rest of the herd. I don't remember Gyp but there is a school photograph of her lying down at the front of the scholars. Apparently she was a frequent visitor at school. Probably waiting for my brothers to finish afternoon school and go with them straight to the field to bring the cows up home.



Above: Gyp waits patiently for Alan (far left) and his sisters to finish school. 1926.

Back Row: (L to R) Kathleen Whitaker, Emily Booth, Verna Rishworth, Doris Rishworth, Ivy Greenwood, Nellie Rishworth, Annie Heaton, Edith Bracken. (2 small children unknown).
Front Row: Alan Rishworth, Jessie Bracken, Annabelle Stewart, Jack Stewart, Kenneth Sharpe, Willie Whitaker, John Heaton.

Tommy the horse would also wander. He didn't like being left alone in the low land and once he discovered he could lift the gate catch he would make his way home round Cononley Lane End and up home. All the gates had to be chained. He could open the farm gate and would trot up the road and on to the moor. Sometimes we heard him going past the pantry window and quickly caught him.

I don't think Tommy was a very strong horse and Dad never over worked him, but he worked quietly and well at hay-time with the mowing machine, strewing machine, and side delivery rake, and carting light loads of hay back up to the barn.



I remember Dad being angry with my brother Alan one hay time. Alan was walking Tommy with a load of hay up home but instead of criss-crossing the steeply sloping field twice he only crossed once. Tommy slipped and most of the hay toppled off. Tommy fortunately was none the worse but Alan certainly got the sharp edge of Dad's tongue.

Left: Lister and Tommy take a break

Hay time was a busy time for us but it also provided entertainment for the villagers whose houses overlooked the hayfields. They would see a line of ten or twelve haymakers all working at the same pace - their arms moving together as they turned the swathes of drying grass - like dancers on a stage.

Every last bit of hay had to be gathered and my younger sister Renee and I had to help fine rake the field after the loading. A very boring and seemingly endless job for a ten and eight year old so we sang and danced and played cock horse astride the rakes as we went up and down the meadow.

Right: Family and friends hay making in the fields between the canal and main road.



Skipton Gala always coincided with hay time. Some of the older members of the family, especially the girls were always eager to finish hay making and get off to the dance in the Town Hall. How they grumbled when Dad said "There's time for just one more load" or "It looks like rain so we'll just hub* this lot". There were also many Irish men out of work and they thronged Skipton High Street on market days just before the hay making season, looking for two or three week's employment.

* pile up into a small rick

We always seemed favoured with the weather at hay time unlike our neighbours at Box Tree farm. His meadow land went right up to the river and thunderstorms would cause it to flood. I remember one year when he lost most of his hay crop; the floods being exceptionally bad. We did get caught one year however when we had a freak snow storm.

Cousin Evelyn on mother's side came to help us one hay time. The cotton trade in Lancashire was bad and she was out of work. Mother certainly needed help cooking for the family and the extra hay time help. One of mother's specialities and a favourite with us all was apple and suet roly-poly. She made them in two long rolls tied up in cloth and boiled on the fire in a large boiler. Evelyn measured them and told all her friends that Sarah Jane made a yard of apple roly-poly.

Looking back, I wonder how Mother coped with us all. We were always well dressed and well fed. Monday was wash day. The fire had to be lit under the set pot* in the wood house long before breakfast to get the water hot. By the middle of the afternoon she started the ironing and the older girls would finish it after tea. When Renee and I were big enough we helped by turning the mangle, needing all our hands on the handle to turn the rollers. Ironing was done with flat irons heated on the fire. Tuesdays and Thursdays were baking days – bread and teacakes, pastries, jam tarts, parkin – everything to feed hungry growing children. All done in the fire oven. Wednesdays would be upstairs cleaning, mending and sewing, and shopping. If mother was out when we came home from school we would ask “Where's my mum ?” and the answer from dad would be “She's gone off with a black man”. We knew he was teasing. The only black man we had ever seen was in a picture book or at the pictures (cinema). Friday was cleaning day when the fire range had to be black leaded – what a dirty job and everything had to be spick and span !

**A set pot is a pan (usually copper) for boiling water (or other liquids) set into a stone or brick housing with a fire at the base.*

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Hellifield House was lived in by different generations of Rishworths for around 70 years. Lister's eldest son Walter followed in his father's footsteps as a poultry farmer. The other children followed different occupations, including Alan who had no interest in farming whatsoever and to escape farm duties ran away to London and joined the Army under age, later emigrating to America sometime after the war.



Gladys attended Kildwick School and Skipton Girls High School then joined the Civil Service working in the Land Tax office in Skipton and the Ministry of Food in Blackpool. She married Farnhillier Harry Crossley in 1950 and they lived at Hellifield House with her parents before moving to Harding Houses near Junction in 1952. After raising a family Gladys returned to work undertaking secretarial and non teaching duties at Kildwick School for over 20 years retiring in 1987. She had many happy memories of her time there and died in 2008 aged 82.

Left: Gladys at Kildwick School shortly before retiring.

Acknowledgements: Memoirs and images courtesy of Gladys's family. School group photograph courtesy of V. Midgley.