

Won a Scholarship to go to Kendal High School for Girls

Olive Clarke was born in 1922 and interviewed in 1997

I went to Old Hutton School. The teachers were Mr and Mrs Siddall. Mr Siddall had served in India during the war and he loved that country. He would have us stand in front of a huge map of the world and he would show us the British Empire and in those days a quarter of the world was covered in red.

We had to learn our times tables by rote. We chanted them parrot-fashion we didn't know what they meant, but it made us concentrate. Kids take ready reckoners into class now – tap, tap, tap, tap.

At eleven years old I won a County Minor Scholarship, I think there were only about a dozen given in the whole of Westmorland and I was able to go to the Kendal High School as a scholarship child. At High School I was made to feel very conscious that I was very privileged because I'd won a scholarship. It was a fee-paying school then and I was reminded by all the fee-paying young ladies that I was not in their social class. Dr Drewd was the headmistress and after the results of the matriculation (it was called that in those days) she wrote to me saying any university would be proud to have me. Sadly, there were no free places at university and farmers could not afford to send their children to University. My father had started farming in 1920 and the slump came in 1922.

We lived in Far Audlands just down from Barkin House, Crooklands. I used to ride a bicycle to Oxenholme leave it at Oxenholme Station Inn, then went on the bus or train into town. On Thursday I stayed behind for German lessons and it was easier to catch the train direct on that day. On very wet mornings I was taken to school by my father, he had a motorbike and sidecar. In the evening I set off walking home and he would meet me on the way. On those days my father would have to leave his milking, take me, and then go back and start again. I have never ceased to be grateful for that upbringing, upbringing with precious little financial resources.

While I was at Kendal High School and about 14 or 15 years old I joined the Young Farmers Club. The Young Farmers hadn't been going very long in this area and I believe the agricultural industry owes more to Young Farmers clubs than it owes to anything else. Until the coming of the YFC farming had been an inarticulate industry. In this area, the majority of farms were comparatively small, certainly by today's standards. Sadly, today, because farms are all so big, there is no place for the young farmer to start.

In 1938 the first ever public speaking contest was held at Hutton Young Farmers. I suppose because I had an unusual advantage for a farmer's child, I'd been a scholarship girl at a good school, I won that public speaking contest. The fact that it was about the management of a dairy herd – heaven knows how much or how little I knew about it at that stage - I won because I was the only person with any idea about public speaking having been to the High School. Dr Drewd, the headmistress had also started public speaking contests in the school. Because of this I suppose I'm the oldest young farmer in the business! They have their courses on whatever is needed. In my day we had a course on accountancy because in those days keeping books was something which was new in farming.

I also joined the Women's Institute in 1940 and I'd go to the meetings with my mother. The W.I. taught home-making skills. Its "Jam and Jerusalem" effort is something which I think is its most treasured possession. I know that the erudite laugh, but the erudite could learn a lot by joining the W.I. for its practical household and home-making skills. They campaigned for telephone boxes in every village, for piped water, for electricity, for a probation officer in

every court and it still has a tremendous influence even now going into the 21st Century. Lord and Lady Bentinck started the W.I. at Kearstwick and Henry Bentinck's opening words were – "It would be a source of good." I think that is what it has been in every parish where there is a W.I.

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