

I Used to Run Home from School for lunch

Robert Wilson was born in 1913 and interviewed in 1988

My parents had a small farm on the edge of Barbon Village. I was born there in 1913. They moved to another slightly bigger farm in Middleton when I was two. It had a flock of fell sheep on the moor and that appealed to my dad. He liked sheep. When my dad's dad retired we moved to a farm just outside of Middleton

I went to school when I was five. There would be about 30 pupils, a Headmistress called Miss Bowness and a pupil teacher. I was a very reluctant pupil because I'd lived an isolated life. The farm was fairly isolated. I'd no brothers or sisters, I'd never been with any other kids. Later in life Miss Bowness, Margaret Bowness, said she never had such a battle with anybody as she had with me. Initially it was a bit of a shock but when I got going I never wanted to leave school.

I stayed at Middleton School until I was fourteen and left dead on my birthday. My dad wanted me on the farm. I was reckoned to be the star pupil they had in a long time. In those days if you passed an exam you could go to the High School at Queen Elizabeth's, Kirkby Lonsdale. The Headmistress, Miss Bowness, came to our house pleading with my mother and Dad to let me sit this exam. "I was really good" she said, "a flier". My mother was quite willing but my dad said no, I'd to stop on the farm to help him out. They had a lot more facilities at a school like that. They played cricket there and rugby. I would have liked that but I would have had to go in the Army (World War II) and I was in a reserved occupation on the land. School meals were unknown in those days so my mother made me a packed lunch then, after the first few years, I started going home for lunch. I still remember going home. It took me 20 minutes to run home; 20 minutes for my lunch; 20 minutes to run back to school. That was the hour I just fit it in exactly.

My main income, in fact my only income for a number of years, when I left school, was from rabbits. We'd a lot of rabbits on the farm and I was allowed to catch and sell them to the man who used to collect the butter my mother made. Thank goodness myxomatosis didn't start then. It would have wiped my income out. They weren't the bad old days when you were used to them. The few pals I had round about, we were all in the same boat. We didn't expect anything else.

I was 30 years old when I met my wife at a wedding of a mutual friend. She was from Preston and she had a brother, an insurance agent, in Kendal. She had a job in a mill and she hated it. Her brother invited her to come and live with him and his wife, and she worked at Netherfield

In August, in the shooting time, we used to earn a bit of extra pocket money grouse driving on the moors. It entailed an awful lot of walking. We used to walk miles and miles to circle a whole lot of the moor and bring the grouse right across over the guns. We got ten shillings a day for that work. It was marvellous pay in those days.

On the farm my dad used to hire a man for a month in hay-time. There were hiring fairs at Barbon, Kirkby Stephen, Bentham, Ingleton, Kendal and they used to have mostly Irishmen come over from, but a lot from Millom, where there was very little work, some of them straight from school. Some had a pretty rough time. They were exploited were a lot of them. They were very good workers. I always remember my dad saying that in 1914 when the First World War started he was at Barbon he went down to the hiring fair and got this Irishman. There were talks than about the war starting and he said he was in the middle of hay-time,

right at the busiest time, and there was some announcement came out that there would be a call-up. This Irishman just disappeared back to Ireland.

Hardly anybody owned their own farm. It came up that our farm was going to be sold. Of course tenants were given the first chance to buy and of course my dad fully intended to buy it but he wanted it at a very low price. The land agent was a chap called Garthwaite. My dad went to see him time and time again. There was a lot of haggling. Garthwaite lowered his price by £100. My dad went up by £100 but they still finished at about £500 difference. I think Garthwaite got fed up of my dad and he sold it over his head to a timber merchant in Kendal. My dad was up in arms about it being sold over his head. Then my dad wanted to finish so he went to the buyer and asked if he would turn the farm over to me. He said "Oh he can buy the farm if he likes but when I finish it's going on the market to the highest bidder I'm giving you no favours". I wasn't in a position to buy. So that's how we lost the farm.

I got a job at the Electricity Board thanks to a neighbour. Frankly I hated it and after 18 months I went driving for the Cumberland and Westmorland Farmers, the cattle feeding stuff firm delivering round all the farms. The pay was dammed awful and I realised that I'd been well off on the Board.

Anyhow this job came up at Castle Green as a sort of driver / mechanic. I didn't get interviewed but then they caught the two who got the job stealing petrol from the boss's car. So they looked at the previous interviews and picked me out. Then the Manager wanted a chauffeur and I was put on that job and I had a real happy time at Castle Green. I used to go all over the country with the manager. The furthest I had been before I got married was Lancaster and that was only because there was a big agricultural show there one year. He was really good to get on with. I stayed until I retired.

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