Clippings

Upper Coquetdale

1889 to 1989

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Clippings One

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MEMORIES OF ROWHOPE

Hannah Hutton

Memories of living at Rowhope for seventeen years were often of long hard winters, but as years pass I think much more of how close our living there was with nature.

The joy after cold winters when the pied wagtail would suddenly arrive on the grass outside our window and sing his heart out, tripping back and forth as if to burst with happiness. Each year we came to expect him as the signal of Spring, and he became affectionately referred to as “Wor yin"and was fed with crumbs from the tablecloth each morning.

Swallows nested each summer in both pig-sty and byre, and what a sin it was if someone closed a door at night shutting out the mother bird. I remember a chap climbing up to the nest, one year, and putting a ring on the nesting swallow - part of an official survey. On his return the following year the same bird was nesting, after travelling thousands of miles.

One morning, we went up the field to see a snipe's nest and although my husband had been certain he could go straight back to the nest, we had to search, walking west, carefully and quietly. I almost stood on her, so well did her plumage blend with the dry bent where she nested, a motionless, squat mound with only the sharp bright eye to give her away. We gently retreated.

Living on the side of the burn, in early summer we saw the wild duck with her young ones, and I remember the fright I got one quiet morning when looking out of the window. I saw what I thought was a fat snake slithering into the long grass at the side of the ford. Joe realised it was mother duck leading her family of seven very young up the burn, beak-to-tail. Her head was bent in a cowering fashion in a hurry to disappear into safety with her brood. Many times, we would try to find where the ducks went when we saw young ones on the stream. A thorough search under the banksides never revealed their hideaway.

One beautiful mallard drake was a much bolder chap. Joe was playing his pipes in the sitting room and I was clearing the supper table and it was a very quiet, still evening. Suddenly, the plump drake, his gorgeous colouring like rich satin, appeared on the track in the field over the burn, head on one side, listening! Slowly he came closer to the house, every few steps pausing to listen - his head tilting from side to side. Doreen and I watched entranced, and I felt at any second he would lift his feet and start dancing.

One friend in early May was the sandpiper who would skim up and down above the water with his shrill peep-peep-peep. Many times, while washing up after breakfast, I listened to his morning song, with the door wide, to enjoy his call.

The dipper was our friend on the burn who heralded autumn and winter. To us he was known as the "parson" his front was so white and spotless. On the coldest of mornings· when all was frost and icicles, and nose and lips stung with the frost, he would be dipping right into the stream on the ford in front of the house, disappear, and emerge to sit bob-bobbing on an ice-covered stone while we shivered.

We have sat by the fire at night, when all was dark, and heard salmon and seatrout fighting their way over the stones in the ford, where the water is wide and shallow, making their way upstream to spawn. The very sound of the water can indicate winter is over. The beginning of winter 1963, a very severe and long winter, I was outside cleaning windows, and it was a calm and mild evening. Suddenly I noticed a different sound, one I have never heard since and we were to live at Rowhope 12 more years. The water was chuckling and chattering as it flowed. I asked Joe to listen and tell me if he could hear a different sow1d, and his reply immediately was "Yes, the burn!” And we knew, although the snow lay thick in the gullies and on the tops, that dreadful storm, when we were cut off for twelve weeks, lay behind us. We were free! I asked one old shepherd about this and did he believe us? He said, "Definitely. When you hear the burn "sing" there will be no more hard weather.

Not all our wild visitors to Rowhope were welcome. One Autumn, "Kitty" our old cat, would fight and resist being put outside, and came the night when we heard a terrible scuffle and her wails. Joe ran with flashlight and found her at the edge of the ford, unable to get up all the mud and dirt. We nursed her round, but after that she was put in the stable at night. (No horse in).

Sparky by then met the same fate and twice developed poison from a bite and had to be taken to the vet. One morning the children and I saw this beautiful head of a ginger cat appear above the wall opposite the scullery window. We made enquiries, had any-one in the valley lost a cat as it looked as if it had become wild to be so vicious on ours. No-one had lost a cat. By now Joe knew it was sleeping in our barn by day and we were warned not to go in as it spat and hissed. Also, the hay which the cows had to eat was getting a foul smell of cat.

Joe decided he had had enough. Having no gun, he set a trap (which he hated doing) and waited by a window to hear him caught and dashed out and killed him which I shall not go into. Joe hated doing this as it was against all our feelings to hurt an animal but by now, we were desperate. Next morning, he brought the offender around to bury and the relief we shared when we saw it was a wild cat. Tiny prick ears and a tail with dark rings, true markings of a natural wild cat and much bigger and stronger than a domestic cat. They live in forestry, we were told, and obviously he was going to take up his abode in our barn for the winter. No way.

One bird who created much interest. one spring. in the Upper Coquet was a mistle thrush who built her nest on top of a gatepost on the roadside at the burn foot. Geoff Foreman, who ran the school car. took photos of the nest. Nothing disturbed her. and her in such a conspicuous place.

Two visitors I cannot finish without mentioning are the lark, and curlew - the sign of the National Park. To stand and listen to the sweetness of a lark's song on a spring morning is indeed joy. The curlew. with her bubbling cry on her way home to the nest on a quiet still evening, is a sound we never hear enough of.

HOLYSTONE SCHOOL

E.A. Robinson

70 children attended the school and were taught in one small room. The fee paid was 4 shillings per quarter, per child. The state grant was an improvement but depended on the children's knowledge when inspected.

Mr Newton was schoolmaster for 40 years. Reading. writing and arithmetic were the only subjects taught. The children came from Burradon, Newton. Herdlaw, Hedgehope . Craig and Harehaugh. This was before Billsmoor and Netherton schools were built. Some had to walk, some had a pony. Each child carried food known as a "piece" and a tin bottle containing tea. The tin bottles were placed round the fire to warm. Some had a bottle of milk.

The desks were long and seated seven. There were three small desks for infants. Each child had a slate and slate pencil for writing and arithmetic, then followed paper and lead pencil, later pen and ink. Their ages ranged from 5 - 14 yrs. As time went by more subjects were introduced. Sir John Buchanan Riddell of Hepple Whitefield gave two books each year to be presented to the boy and girl who had made most progress throughout the year. He always came to present them. The Potts Charity also gave books. Exams were hard. The scripture exam included both the Old and New Testaments and Catechism.

During the winter children who walked 3 - 4 miles were allowed to begin at 10am. The teacher gave them a mug of coffee, and they left at 3pm to enable them to reach home before dark. In winter, the teacher sledged with the children. Clogs were worn with "loags" stocking legs knitted from Otterburn Mill yarn, (known to-day as legwarmers) which kept snow from getting into the clogs. Feet were always warm.

The boys were good anglers - both salmon and trout, not always caught with a rod. Hazel stick and cleek were often used.

At Easter dyed pace eggs were collected from the villages and farms. There was great fun bowling them down a slope.

Children walking to school noticed everything, wildflowers, wild fruits, crab apples, plums, damsons, beans, blackberries, blueberries, blae berries, strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries, sloe berries, hazelnuts, chestnuts, hips, pears and haws.

Much time was spent in looking for birds' nests. In June, the farmers made a dam in Holystone burn to wash their sheep. Afterwards they called at the Salmon Inn for a drink. The children herded their flocks and were given a lemon dash.

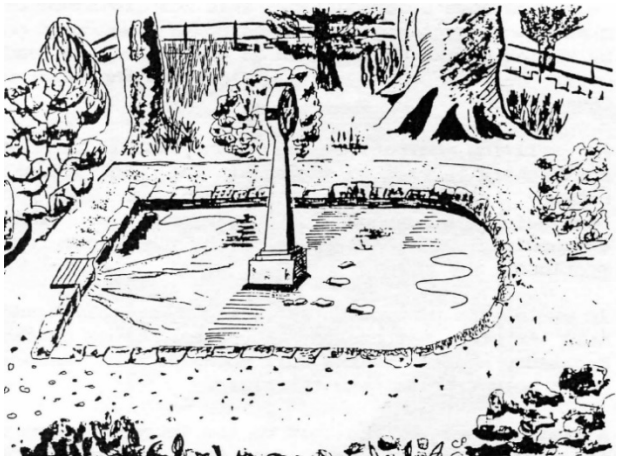
Summers were mostly dry and hot. Sandshoes were worn and some were bare foot. Girls wore cotton frocks and pinnies, straw hats or clouty bonnets. Boys wore caps. All played together down by the church.

A shop sold sweets - a full packet for a penny. The Salmon Inn sold cherry cider, lime juice and lemonade at 3d a bottle. These were supplied by Mr Thompson of Wellstrand, Rothbury - he had a wagon drawn by a white horse. Mr and Mrs A.R.G. Thompson of Lanternside always gave a huge box of sweets. Each child was given 2 sweets a day.

War came bringing many changes. There were so many evacuees in the area that half of the numbers attended in the morning, the other half in the afternoon. Two boys rescued from the Spanish Civil War by Dr Ann Clark of Sharperton attended school.

One teacher was Mrs Keen. From humble beginnings emerged many trades and professions: doctors, engineers, nurses, Forces, businessmen, farmers, farmworkers, teachers, shepherds, gardeners, postal workers, joiners, stonemasons, shoemakers, roadmen. Many emigrated to Australia and Canada.

Mrs Howey was the last teacher. With only four children on the register Frank Rutherford, Kathleen Scott, Gillian Wood and Keith Wood – the school closed 23rd July 1965.



MINISTRY 1951-56

Alec Macdonald

In those days, many hill shepherds lived with their families in remote cottages. We did not see them in church very often except at the quarterly Communion Service when the congregation would number fifty or sixty.

The Ministry was very much a question of going out to meet people in their homes. The vicar, the Rev. Wilkinson Renwick, kindly showed me the way to some of those cottages harder to find such as Puncherton and Milkhope (the old Milkhope).

The vicar and I alternated in taking an evening service in Netherton village hall. The service was Anglican one Sunday and Presbyterian the next, with much the same congregation. This was followed by a sumptuous supper at Netherton South Side, laid on by Violet Black, housekeeper to Jimmy Pringle and Cyril Healey. On was an Elder and the other a Churchwarden.

As well as Harbottle and Netherton I took a fortnightly service in summer at the old school, halfway up the hill, at Windyhaugh . Services had been held at Windyhaugh for 300 years ever since covenanting preachers came over the Border from Scotland.

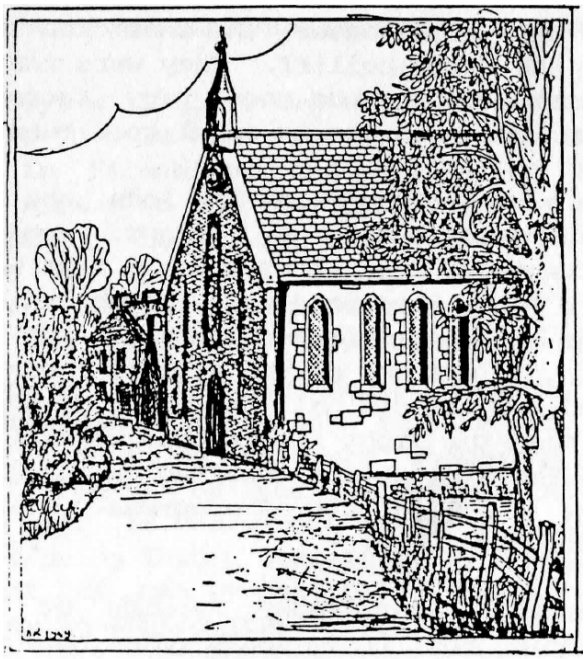
In winter, the Windyhaugh service was monthly and held in the kitchen at Barrowburn Farm on the Wednesday nearest to the full moon, so that people could walk or ride over the hills.

A similar service was held on the Thursday nearest the full moon at Grasslees farm, again in the kitchen. We were liable to bang our heads on sides of bacon, and I always seemed to be given the hot seat nearest the kitchen range.

Space does not permit me to tell of hazardous journeys made in our 1938 baby Austin; usually we had to park it up the valley and walk for up to five miles. Places like Battleshields, Fairhaugh, Uswayford and Kidlandlee did not get many visitors. (I was a governor at Kidlandlee school).

We had great fun with the Sunday School. It was curious how attendance used to improve just a few weeks before the summer outing to Bamburgh, Warkworth or Newbiggin-by-the-Sea. This always included a sandcastle competition and a free tea.

There was also the Sunday School Club. I remember cooking jacket potatoes over a campfire on the hill and making sweets in the Manse kitchen. June said that everything was sticky for weeks afterwards.



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, HARBOTTLE

ACADEMY OF WRESTLING

Jock Hall.

I was always interested in wrestling from a boy but never had much of a chance to learn properly. Then about the summer of 1947, a few of us lads got together one night a week at Campville - Jimmy Wood's place. We used to run, jump, 'and wrestle in our own style.

One of the lads had a motorbike and he and I decided we'd go to Yetholm Show and we'd enter the Open Wrestling. More by luck than by good technique, I managed to get into the final of the All Weights - 12 stone and over.

Now Jimmy Wood 's father, Dan, was so impressed that I had got into the final that he thought we should start a wrestling school at Harbottle. He got together with Adam Foster, the shoemaker and George Common, the water-bailiff. They were installed as instructors. George had been very successful at wrestling, and Adam was an awful good runner.

We had a whip round among the lads, and folk that were interested, and we bought some carpet underfelt, about £25. That was all that we had for a mat. There were some sore elbows and heads and toes! We had about fifteen members. The youngest was 10. I was one of the oldest. I was 30 then. We rented the village hall one night a week for two hours. When the light nights came, we went outside onto the Peels haugh and wrestled on the grass. We did make quite a bit of progress. I was always very dedicated.

After the first year Major Renwick at Holystone Grange said that if we could raise half the money to buy a proper mat, he'd give the other half. And I think it cost £110. We raised the half by whist drives, a dance, various other things. We got in touch with St. Dunstan's for the blind. They made the mat. It was four squares of thick coco-matting each nine-foot square. We fastened them in the centre and put a tarpaulin sheet on top.

The first Open Wrestling that we were interested in was Morpeth Olympic Games. They were noted Sports. They had two days - Saturday and Monday of August Bank holiday. I managed to win the 12 stone wrestling. That was the first triumph for the school - I got £10 in prize money.

We registered as an Academy with the Cumberland Wrestling Association. We had a wrestling strip. It was composed of a vest - generally cotton long johns - they could be wool or cotton: and a seat-piece … briefs actually. They were velvet. Harbottle Club was red velvet. Just socks on the feet...The wives and mothers washed the strips. Sometimes they could get absolutely filthy, I've seen the water and the mud squeezing up between our toes.

I was always willing to travel. I travelled as far south as Bootle in Lancashire, and north to Thornton in Fifeshire, and Bridge of Allan in Stirlingshire. We would come back the same day. George Common - he was one of the first in the area to have a car - he drove us to Berwick, and we caught the train into Scotland. That's actually the only two times that I have been on a train.

I was lucky, I worked for Major Renwick. He was very interested, and he gave me time off. I was a shepherd. Most of us were shepherds or farm workers. Plenty of walking kept us fit. Strong legs you see. If you were a little bit overweight and were going into a competition you would take a bit weight off just by probably dieting, a bit of running or something like that.

The first home match we ever had was in the tent · Alwinton Show night, back-end of 1948. The home team always put on a supper. All the local shows ran wrestling competitions. The Shows were venues for sports.

We had a terrific following in them days. It had been off all during the war and then it was revived. We had two matches in Rothbury Mart. The crowd … we could hardly get them all in. We'd generally have a couple of Open Competitions after the match.

There was seldom animosity, just good-natured rivalry. All good sportsmanship. You had to shake hands before and at the end of a match. And if you had a Fall. A Fall means if any part of the torso or upper arm touches the ground. You got one point· for each Fall. And you had to keep hold round each other's back. If you broke hold during a bout you lost the Fall.

You learn to fall in a sort of roll so that you're not hurt. I think it comes with experience. There was no biting or thumping, kicking or anything like that. Striking with the inside of the instep on an opponent’s leg wasn't classed as a foul, but kicking, or gouging with your knee…. If a fella got his knee badly twisted, you know twisted in the wrong position, he could get a broken leg, but that's about it. You learn as you go.

A team consists of 18 wrestlers: six lightweights at 10 stone, six middleweights at 11 - 11.5 stone, and six All Weights at 12 stone and over. Each wrestler wrestled three bouts with his opponent. They were matched on the programme. A lightweight could go into a heavyweight but it was on his own head. I've actually felled men of 18 stone when I was 11 stone. Not very often, mind. You can feel, the moment a man moves, you can feel instinctively on your chest what he's trying to do. Just about read his thoughts if you are in practice. If he was a big man, aggressive, you turned his aggression into a Fall. Like join with him and turn him when you're nearly at the bottom. Turn him below and you on top of him. That's the science of wrestling.

I think this televised wrestling these days is very much a fake. With being a wrestler, it is obvious to me that these fellows are putting on a show. It's a straightforward science to me. And I hardly think that it's a very womanly sport. There's not much glamour attached to it.

I never won a World Championship. But I was twice runner-up. They made me a Life Member of the Cumberland Wrestling Association. I've done a lot of judging for them.

I cannot actually remember how long the club at Harbottle carried on. Quite a few year - t'would be ten or twelve, I think. But just gradually the membership got less and less. Folk got away you see. They had transport, different interests. But it's coming back now, this last two or three year. The sponsoring's bringing it back, a bit better prize money. Wrestling was always a rather poorly paid sport.

KNICKERBOCKER BOY

Veronica Fenwicke-Clennell.

It was the Glorious Twelfth and the sun shining, promising a hot day. Gathered on the gravel drive in front of the grey stone mansion are family, friends, excited children, dogs, keepers and beaters. Among them stands a boy in a brown checked knickerbocker suit nervously handling his gun. It is to be his first day on the moor.

The shooting party move off and are soon walking in a line through the deep tussocky heather, grey green bog myrtle, and peaty bogs. There are no butts on this hill.

Cries of "mark" as the small birds rise swiftly from the heather with their heart stopping cries of "Go back, go back" weaving and whirring over the line of guns. Puffs of white smoke and some plummet to the ground while the rest fly on to live and breed again.

The dogs whimper and wait for the command to 'fetch', and then with noses down find their quarry. Holding them gently in their soft mouths, they return to release them obediently to their handlers.

The boy in the knickerbockered suit waits for no dog, but runs to retrieve his own bird, his very first grouse.

Lunchtime beneath the shade of legend's Druid Stone. The ladies and small children, hot from their stiff climb up the steep hill with the lunch baskets, unpack them ready for the guns to arrive. Everyone is glad to rest in the shade and enjoy the repast spread before them. The dogs seek to quench their thirst in the mirrored tarn behind the Stone, and then pant among the roots of the heather, finding coolness from the damp earth beneath.

The village below is dream-like in the stillness of the midday heat.

The limp brown bodies are placed under bracken fronds to shade them from the sun and from buzzing bluebottles.

The hill stretches like a purple sea towards the distant horizon, rocks scattered in the deep gullies as if a giant hand had carelessly strewn them. A few stunted rowans show the first flush of autumn on their berries.

Above the quiet chatter of the picnic party, the trill of an unseen lark is heard in the cloudless blue sky. Sheep bleat sadly on the high moor, and bees drone as they search for nectar in the heather blossom.

Sitting in the springy, scratchy heather, inhaling its sweet scent enhanced by the sun's warmth, there is a reluctance to move from this peaceful place. The shooters are not so keen to face the afternoon's drives, nor the dogs so eager, but one young lad, hoping to emulate the morning's success is keen to try his luck again.

The ladies tidy up the remains of the picnic and load the morning's 'bag' into the empty baskets carrying them slowly down the narrow, peaty path streaked with silver sand, warning the running children to watch out for zig-zagged adders that might be camouflaged among the stones.

Back to the mansion to lay the feathered bodies with their grey downy legs and red wattles onto the stone flagged floor to await the return of the guns and the final reckoning.

They come in time for tea, the table laden with scones, honey, dark sticky gingerbread, chocolate biscuits and fruit cake.

Soon the darkening will come with the cool night air to soothe tired and aching limbs. The knickerbockered boy will be in bed re-living the day's excitement. His dogs will yelp and twitch in their sleep.

Now, the purple hazed hill is nearly covered in serried ranks of black-green conifers. The wild cries of "Go back, go back" are rarely heard. Instead, the "tchik, tchik" of pheasant, the grunt of roedeer and the eerie bark of foxes echo from the changed habitat.

WANDERINGS FROM WESTMINSTER

John Philipson.

Following the last World War, it was for a number of years the practice of a party of Labour Members of Parliament to walk each Whit weekend successive sections of the Pennine Way. They had begun in Derbyshire and by 1950 it fell for them to complete the final stretch in the Cheviot hills. Arthur Blenkinsop asked me if I would plan their route and join them as guide.

My brief was to begin at Wooler. within easy reach by taxi from a London train stopping at Lucker or Belford, and to end at Cottonshope. It was specified that we should end each day at licensed premises as Hugh Dalton. the most prestigious member of the party. wished it so. I added a refinement of my own in arranging that each day, about lunchtime, we should reach a farmhouse in the hills. Both parties, I thought, would benefit when Members of Parliament met the people who lived and worked on out-bye farms.

The party assembled. on Whit Friday, at the Black Bull at Wooler and included Hugh Dalton, Barbara Castle, George Chetwynd, Geoffrey de Freitas, Fred Willey, Arthur Blenkinsop and myself. We were surrounded by a horde of reporters and - photographers, many from national papers. but the following morning as we walked by Broadstruther to Goldscleugh, they thinned out, no doubt needing to meet deadlines and to restore themselves with refreshment in Wooler. By Goldscleugh, only the Kemsley Press and the Daily Herald were still with us, and they vanished shortly thereafter. We ate our sandwiches somewhere on the Lambden burn and were refreshed with tea at Trowupburn. From the College Burn we crossed by the White Swire to Yetholm where we spent the night.

The second day we crossed by Clennell Street to Alwinton, stopping at mid-day at Uswayford to meet the Telfer family where Mrs Telfer made us a welcome pot of tea. It was a very friendly occasion. At Alwinton most of the party were accommodated in the Rose and Thistle by Mr and Mrs Foreman. In the glorious sunny weather, I seem to remember that we had our meals in the garden. For two of us there were not beds enough at the Rose and Thistle, so Fred Willey and I were whisked away to sleep at the Star Inn at Harbottle.

Our last morning, taxis dropped us at Shilmoor and I led the party up the Usway Burn to Battleshiel. Thence we crossed the hill back over to the Coquet valley, dropping down to Lounges Knowe. The fine old school building at Windyhaugh was still in use then, and the hum of school activity could be heard through the open door. The temptation of a ready-made audience was more than the politician in Hugh Dalton could resist. He entered and addressed the surprised assembly.

Eliza Murray gave us her customary warm welcome with tea all round at Barrowburn and we were sped on our way up the Coquet. It was in the late afternoon that the first hitches in the staff work occurred. It had been arranged at a high ministerial level that the Army would not be firing into the target area we hoped to skirt to reach Cottonshope from the Coquet Valley. Unfortunately, it had been arranged at such a high level that the instruction had not reached down to the man actually in charge, and there were ·the artillery vigorously pounding the area abutting on our proposed route.

In the circumstances, I felt obliged to reach our rendezvous by a slight - if rougher - diversion. It was now late afternoon of a very warm day and we had walked many miles, so we were rather non-plussed when we reached the rendezvous near Cottonshope to find, owing to some confusion between Cottonshope and Cottonshope Burnfoot, no motors there to meet us. Arthur Blenkinsop resourcefully got in touch with the Military who sent two cars to waft us down to the Burnfoot. Here Lady Trevelyan and Miss Bulmer were waiting to drive us to Wallington where we dined in their noble dining-room, in piquant contrast to the simplicities of our pilgrimage through the hills.

BOTANIST'S PARADISE

Marjorie Clay.

The entire ·year the Valley was a botanist's paradise. There was usually snow early in the winter and it draped the trees like a stage back-drop. It was good to walk through the crisp snow and to know that underneath was a carpet of snowdrops and aconites which covered the lawns and verges of the drives leading to the vicarage. One of the first Portents of spring was the catkins on an alder tree, and a hazel tree with bushy tassels waving. in the frozen air.

Sometimes, walking the bounds of the garden, one was struck by the plants of special interest. One of these was the single peony, Paeonia Coraline. We would sit in the garden and watch the gradual opening of the flowers. It is possible that these have been long in the garden which was established centuries ago. There were two clumps with woolly fruits.

Primrose and violets in their season bedecked the churchyard and were always to be found under the snow. Jacob's ladder and mimulus lent their colour and scent. The smell of the valley is one of the most memorable things. Standing by the back door at midnight a dog on either side, snipe busy overhead, one felt the excitement as the dogs' noses quivered. Deep breaths brought the scent of reeds by the river, dogroses, hawthorn and elder all in their turn.

Rue sent a waft of sweetness across the front lawn; sundews were on the Drake Stone and heather covered the crag each year. Light and colour pervading the house changed with each season. Twigs were brought into the house to be forced and arranged.

Claytonia was all much in bloom and produced many seeds. There were occasional finds such as unusual Whitlow grass on the banks of the Alwin. Perhaps Erophila (Keble Martin).

A small rock calceolaria was most charming and spread thickly under trees next to the stable. From a bedroom window we looked out at silky waving grasses stirred by the wind. We watched lousewort, yellow rattle, Northern orchid, spiked speedwell, and many more take their turn to bloom. Yellow flags waved by the river and the headiness of meadowsweet proclaimed the richness of midsummer enhanced by rosebay willowherb.

There were always thrills such as dodder well established by the dustbin, and a very tall and handsome foxglove with roots deep in the kitchen drain which attracted fritillary and red admiral butterflies in great numbers.

Birds and animals provided much interest ranging from bramblings who stripped a holly tree, to the tiny flycatchers with a nest on either side of the front door.

I gathered much material for posies or flower arrangement and found it possible to put all the wildflowers together in a vase, no matter what colour or size. Doronicums flourished by the river and would double their height if put in a vase. Meadow saxifrage grew nearby. One could stand in a misty haze of faded bluebells while the apple blossom scattered confetti everywhere.

I tried to emulate Gertrude Jekyll and achieved a large degree of clumping and colour. I used many wildflowers for this.

Pat Hedley, the schoolmistress at Windyhaugh, gave me a flowe1• like major celandine but very small. I spent a day at the Royal Botanical Gardens, Edinburgh, and left the specimen for identification. It was known that a keen gardener Headmaster had lived in the Old School House and retired in 1919. The plant grew on the site of an old garden. It was identified as Chelidonium Majus var.isciniatum. A thrill was a six-petalled three-leaved pimpernel. Common wintergreen (pyrola minor) was in the wood, and the "explosive weed" hairy bittercress grew in the Biddlestone gravel of our paths.

Parson Side was rich with mushrooms which we enjoyed each year. Occasionally we found a stinkhorn. We learnt to appreciate blewits fried with bacon, but more and more we leant towards vegetarianism. The Council sowed a new verge to the main road and the botanical finds were exciting and included polygonum convolvulus.

Rowans provided much pleasure when made into jelly. Blackberry picking provided much jelly, jam, and wine. The dogs were skilled pickers and ate as they picked. A caper spurge sprang up in the onion bed but belied the countryman's belief that it discourages moles.

In autumn, the heath and laurels had a lacey covering of cobwebs which sparkled in the early-morning dew. Droplets of rain accumulated on nasturtium, Verbascum and Anchusa leaves. One of the dogs drank from a cabbage leaf. Broom pods burst noisily in the sun. The autumn flora provided a few rarities such as Astrantia and kidney sorrel. Conkers were decorative in a flat platter in the hall and young children collected them for the Harvest Festival.

I dried parsley and mint and made mint sauce and bags of eau-de-cologne mint to go between the sheets. I protected a few sprigs of holly in polythene bags for Christmas decoration.

We picked gorse and ivy or the Christmas crib and in the darkness of December days looked forward to the hope of Spring.

LIFE AT THE MANSE

June Macdonald.

when we were first married and came to live in Harbottle there seemed to be an aura of romance in the fact that there was no electricity; we had wisely included paraffin amps on our wedding present list. However, in 1953 the village became electrified, except for us. The Presbyterian Church could not afford the £600 necessary to install a transformer. Thereafter the romantic aura seemed to evaporate, and I would walk through the village at night, gazing enviously through the brightly lighted windowpanes!

Water was always in short supply at the Manse. We were at the end of the line and up a slight hill. The birth of our second baby, less than two years after the first, presented great nappy-washing problems when water was scarce. This was solved by Helen Richardson, the doctor's wife. My husband Alec would take down a bucketful of dirty nappies and would return home with a bucketful of clean ones!

I remember, too, in Coronation Year 1953, a visit to the village hall of a mobile cinema. I was one of the few adults among a scattering of children who sat spell-bound, watching a film entitled ''Great Fights of 1924" !

THE CHEVIOT CAMPAIGN

Myra Blakey

It was in 1979 that the United Kingdom Atomic Energy Authority became interested in our part of the world. There was a problem. Quantities of highly radioactive waste were piling up and the AEA did not know what to do with it. One suggestion was to bury it in granite rock providing that the granite was in a large, unfractured mass and in a suitably obscure part of the country. A number of sites had been identified including two in ·the Cheviots one at Uswayford and the other at Threestone Burn. Planning applications were made to Alnwick and Berwick District Councils for permission to carry out test-drilling in these areas.

At a public meeting, the people of Rothbury and Wooler declared their opposition to any form of nuclear dumping, drilling, or anything else to do with the waste and banded together under the leadership, respectively, of Dr. Bernard Richardson and farmer Anthony Murray. No, no! said the AEA, the application was only to carry out a scientific investigation. The drilling would be carried out by a body of "disinterested" scientists members of the Royal Geological Society - though kindly funded by the AEA. (There was no mention of dumping in the application). Notwithstanding the peoples of Coquet and Glendale joined forces to mount the ''Save the CheviotsI campaign''. A mighty petition was gathered, and a protest march was planned for Newcastle where the petition was presented to Alan Beith MP and to other MPs and Councillors who had pledged their support.

Meanwhile both sites being in the National Park, the matter was referred to the County Council and as the administrative body, to the National Parks Committee of that Council. The Chief Officer, Tony Macdonald, advised his councillors to reject the application. As one local farmer pointed out, so strict were planning conditions in the Park that he was not allowed to have an old inconspicuous railway wagon for storing hay for the sheep, let alone a large noisy piece of drilling machinery. The National Parks Committee under the Chairmanship of Harbottle farmer, Jimmy Coatsworth, refused permission to drill, on the grounds that it was contrary to the Act of Parliament which had created the Park, and under which the National Park Committee exercised its custodianship. The AEA went to appeal.

This decision threw the matter into the hands of Central Government, and the Minister for the Environment appointed an Inspector to carry out an Inquiry. People from Galloway who had already been through the process of a Public Inquiry on their patch of granite, came over the border to advise and support us. For the locals, fund-raising became an urgent matter. In addition to the usual coffee mornings, raffles and dances, musicians Alistair Anderson and friends, and the group Lindisfarne with Rod Clements held concerts, and film star Julie Christie joined the Easter walk from Wooler to Threestone Burn to raise public awareness onto a national level.

In October 1980, legal battle commenced at County Hall, Newcastle. All sorts of people came from far and near to say their piece and to face the charming, but formidable, Queen's Counsel for the AEA, Lord Silsoe. Day after day, Bernard Richardson and Anthony Murray led their troops to Newcastle to listen to the debate, and to show their presence as a token of local concern.

Particularly to be remembered were the young scientist from the north who had discovered an unknown creature (small, it is true) in the waters of the Cheviot bogs; Jeanette Dagg who had felt the tremors of an earthquake at Milkhope; Helen Richardson peaceably doing her crochet but never missing a point; and Jimmy Miller from Rothbury who tried to explain why local folk didn't believe the assurances of the AEA that "they only wanted to investigate the rock", and told the tale of the poacher with the salmon at the Thrum who when confronted by the bailiff, professed “only to be helping the fish over the falls.”

The most telling witness of all was Dr. Robson, lecturer in Geology at Newcastle University and some-time resident in Harbottle.

A great deal hinged upon the integrity of the granite bedrock. It had to be free of fractures and schisms, so that water could not percolate through the strata and gain access to the buried cannisters (by this time, consideration was briefing given to the cannisters being buried), thus causing chemical disintegration of the protective shield and allowing radioactive substances to seep out into the natural water sources of the Coquet and Glendale valleys.

It appeared that an Indian student, desirous of attaining a PhD., had chosen this very subject -the Cheviot granite, as his topic of research. His subsequent thesis, lying in the archives of the University's Geology Department, showed that certain crystallisation had taken place in the fissures of the rock formation which demonstrated that minerals in solution had been carried through the strata, and deposited just where the student had found them.

After several weeks the Inquiry closed, and the Inspector returned to London to consider the evidence. Then one day, to our delight and surprise, the Minister of the Environment issued a statement: he thanked the Inspector for his report, but had decided not to pursue the matter further, at present.

There were cheers all round. The hope is that this chapter is closed not only for the present, but for all time.

FOR ARCHIE DAGG

Helen Richardson

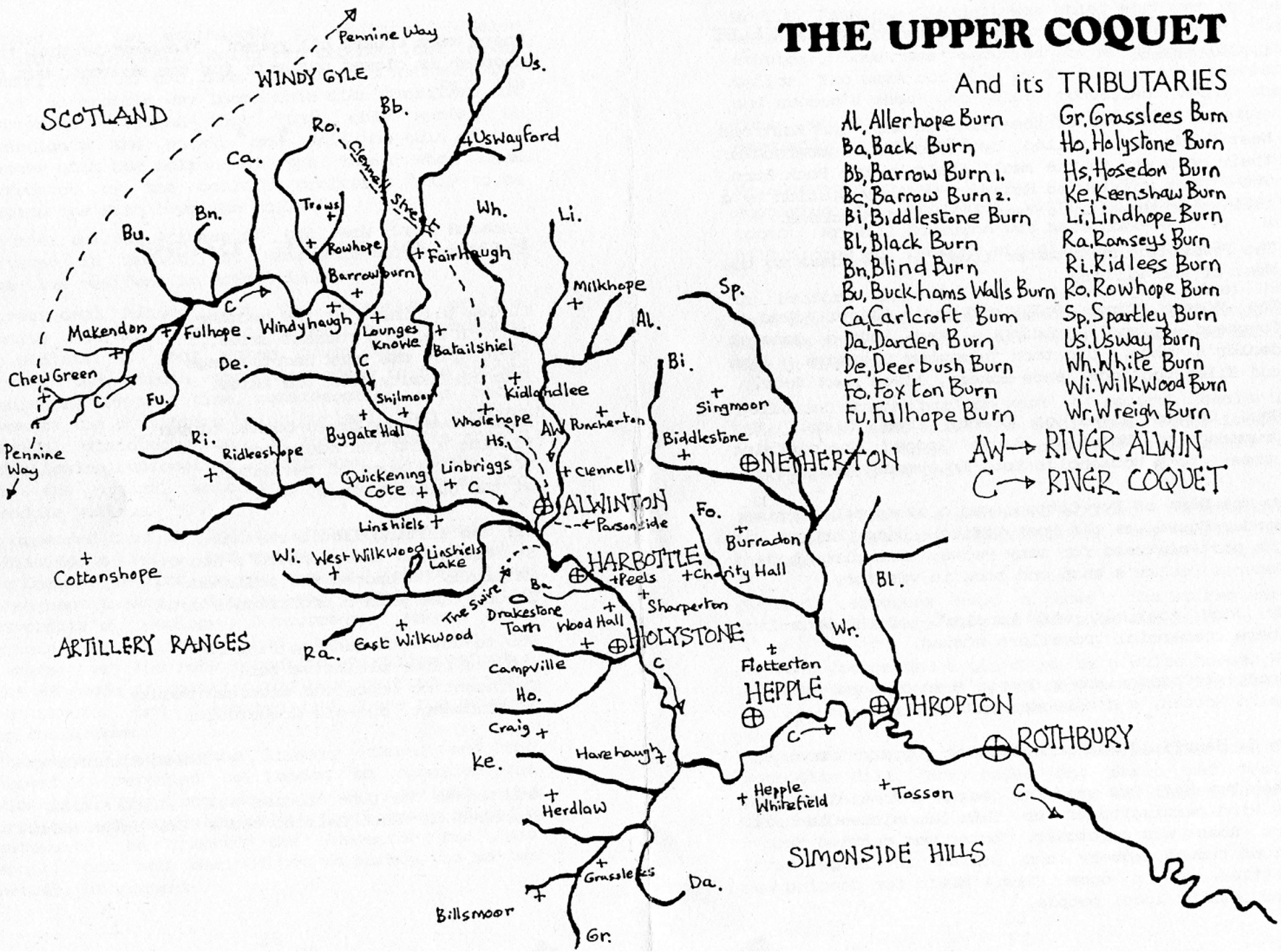
Curlew gliding o'er the heather.
Soft in melting cadence cries,
Tearing at the very heartstrings
Pouring beauty from the skies.

High above, the green-backed plover,
Fluting spins its magic spell
O'er the silence of the water,
At the quiet "Ladies' Well".

All the lilting liquid rhythms
Stored within the shepherd's heart
Skilfully he shaped and polished,
Strung them with a craftsman's art.

Now to-day with cunning fingers
Can the piper plaintive tell,
The haunting peace and timeless beauty
Of windswept, age-old Coquetdale.

Written to the tune 'Ladies Well' which Archie Composed for Kate Collingwood's play Seven Nuns.


THE UPPER COQUET
And its TRIBUTARIES
Al, Allerhope Burn
Ba, Back Burn
Bb, Barrow Burn 1.
Bc, Barrow Burn 2.
Bi, Biddlestone Burn
Bl, Black Burn
Bn, Blind Burn
Bu, Buckhams Walls Burn
Ca, Carlcroft Burn
Da, Darden Burn
De, Deerbush Burn
Fo, Foxton Burn
Fu, Fulhope Burn
Gr, Grasslees Burn
Ho, Holystone Burn
Hs, Hosedon Burn
Ke, Keenshaw Burn
Li, Lindhope Burn
Ra, Ramseys Burn
Ri, Ridlees Burn
Ro, Rowhope Burn
Sp, Spartley Burn
Us, Usway Burn
Wh, White Burn
Wi, Wilkwood Burn
Wr, Wreigh Burn
AW → RIVER ALWIN
C → RIVER COQUET
Pennine Way
WINDY GYLE
SCOTLAND
Us.
Bb.
Ro.
Ca.
Bn.
Bu.
Trows
Rowhope
Clennell Street
Usway Ford
Wh.
Li.
Fairhaugh
Barrow Burn
Milkhope
Sp.
Al.
Makendon
Fulhope
Windyhaugh
Lounges Knowe
Batailshiel
Bi.
Chew Green
De.
Fu.
Shilmoor
Kidlandlee
Singmoor
Ri.
Ridsdale
Bygate Hall
Wholehope
Hs.
AW
Runcherton
Biddlestone
NETHERTON
Pennine Way
Quickening Cote
Linbriggs
Clennell
ALWINTON
Fo.
Parsonside
Burradon
Linshiels
Cottonshope
Wi.
West Wilkwood
Linshiels Lake
HARBOTTLE
Peels
Charity Hall
Bl.
Sharperton
Tve Swire
Drakestone Tarn
Wood Hall
Ra.
East Wilkwood
HOLYSTONE
Wr.
ARTILLERY RANGES
Campville
Ho.
Flotterton
HEPPLE
THROPTON
Craig
Ke.
Harehaugh
ROTHBURY
Hepple Whitefield
Tosson
Herdlaw
SIMONSIDE HILLS
Grasslees
Da.
Billsmoor
Gr.

VILLAGE LIFE HARBOTTLE

E. A. Robinson.

Towards the end of the 1914 -18 war, the East and West Woods were felled by Canadian lumberjacks; their camp was in the small field by the Back Burn. The timber was led to Rothbury railway station by a pale wagon drawn by a team of Canadian horses.

The Presbyterian Minister lived in the Manse to the West of the village.

The Misses Sarah, Polly and Annie Oliver lived at Townhead - a small-holding. They had a general dealer's shop and took in summer visitors. John and Ellen Bootiman, shoemakers, lived next door.

Mrs. Common lived at Cherry Tree House. Mrs Drummond of Waterloo House lodged the district nurse; both households took in summer visitors.

Mr Tom Dunn of Ivy Cottage was a successful artist. Border House was the Post Office. Miss Herbert was the post-mistress for many years. She also had a General Dealer's shop and took in visitors.

Mr Jack Bootiman was Landlord of the Star Inn, where commercial travellers stayed.

Woodbine Cottage was a draper's shop owned by Mrs Bella Norden, a dressmaker and milliner.

Mr H. Hearfield was schoolmaster for many years.

The New Hall was used for dances and whist-drives, by kind permission of Mr T.C. Fenwicke-Clennell. Mrs Ross was caretaker. Water was carried from a stone trough near-by and boiled in large metal kettles on an open fire. Music for dancing was provided by local people.

Mr T.C. Fenwicke-Clerinell was chief employer in the village. There were three small cottages near the stables: one was occupied by Mr Andrew Tait, a tailor. Two were occupied by Mr R.Davidson, carrier and grocer's shop; he also travelled round the farms collecting butter, eggs and rabbits which were sold in the towns.

Mr Adam Forster was boot, clog and shoemaker, supplying the shepherds with the famous Coquet boots. Mr Bill Rogerson was head gamekeeper. Mr Bill Storey was roadman and also grave digger.

Dr Bedford did his visiting on a push-bike: he wore navy puttees. His Gladstone bag was strapped to the back-carrier of his bike; he enjoyed being out in a storm.

Bella and Marty Charlton kept a general dealer's shop. They sold milk from their cows. They lodged the village bobby. He made his rounds on a push-bike and on foot.

Mr Tom Bootiman was greyhound slipper - he attended all the important coursings in the north of England.

Several cottagers kept a cow: the stirks were driven to Rothbury mart to the back-end sale.

Mr John Common had a gig drawn by a white horse. He transported visitors to and fro between Harbottle and Rothbury railway station.

The water supply was from a collecting tank on Harbottle Hill. Many moles and sheep met their death in this. Maybe that was why the villagers lived to a ripe old age.

CLIPPING TIME

Hannah Hutton

With that expression I can hear the sound of the steel blades of hand-shears clicking away at soft white fleece, and the more precise term" shearing" brings to mind the whirr of the electric machines.

Clipping time to us was early 1960's when Rowhope and Trows were hand-clipped by a gang of hired clippers. Woven into the memory is the smell of the oil in the wool, and the pungent smell of the hogg. The latter was a branding iron with the initials of the farmer (R.T. in our case). The iron was heated red in a fire which was kindled in an old drum. The hot iron was then pressed on the horn of the hoggs - this was quite painless. Hoggs is the name of "keeping ewe lambs" kept to replace "draft ewe lambs" which were sold in the Autumn.

Hoggs were usually clipped mid-June, and ewes on the second Monday of July (weather permitting). Should the gang who came for the ewe clipping be held up by wet weather ·at other farms, it meant ours was also delayed. Unless a farm had a large shed to house sheep to keep them dry, we could be held up for days. This was no easy job for the wife at a farm as there were twelve to fourteen men to feed, four meals per day.

Baking was done the weekend before, no freezer in those days. Girdle scones, wholemeal fadges, gingerbread, rock buns and anything one could think of to fill up the tins. The potatoes were peeled on the Sunday night - an enamel milk-pail was used for these and the veg. also prepared. Meat was either roast mutton or brisket beef. "After" would be fruit tart, or jelly, fruit and custard made Sunday also. We were up very early on the Monday morning, 5am. We milked our two cows, then the shepherds would gather up the ewes and lambs which were held in a field, and the lambs were run-off from their mothers before breakfast. This was cornflakes, bacon and eggs with thick slices of whole-meal fadge, our own butter, and marmalade.

Lunch at twelve, and by the time the washing up was done, it was time to prepare tea for 3.30 or so. Supper was usually 6.30-7pm, and was often salad, cold meat, and scones and cheese. A long, tiring day for everyone but a lovely satisfying sight when the ewes, so white and clean, went out the hill with their lambs at night. here was always time for a crack and banter round the table at mealtimes. During clipping week, the young men slept in the wool sheets in the barn rather than travel from the Powburn and Wooler area, so the smell of greasy overalls filled the house at mealtimes, and the day after they finished was spent scrubbing floors and putting furniture back. With so many to feed, we had to make space in our small kitchen to put extra leaves in our big table. It almost filled the room together with all the chairs. On busy days such as this, and the pig killing, I had the help of a friend from Alwinton. One could never have managed alone with so many meals to make.

When the diesel generators were installed in 1964 the sheep were sheared by our own men, with electric machines, and the "clipping days" were no more. Much less work for the wives; but those early days of friendship and banter were a miss for us. Another way of life was swallowed up by progress

WHERE'S LONDON?

Gordon Evans.

It was in September 1929 that my wife Gladys and I, she driving her 1913 Morris Oxford, decided to explore beyond Rothbury. The sun was setting as we came to the top of Sharperton Bank. She caught her breath at the glory before her: "The land of Beulah" she said - the last stopping place where pilgrims rest before entering heaven. If heaven is as lovely as Coquetdale, it must be beautiful beyond all description.

With exclamations of delight, we drove on in our little car until we came to Alwinton. We asked if there was anyone who could give us a bed for the night. "Mrs. Dagg", someone said, "at the Creel", so thither we went. She gave us a delicious supper and we slept like tops.

Next day we explored as far as Linbrigg. It was there, on a promontory beside the pool, that I wrote my best poem, my wife sitting a few yards away reading a book by someone called Dippie Dixon! So began a lifetime of love between ourselves and the Valley.

One blazing Bank Holiday we walked from Akeld over Cheviot, past Henhole and stopped at Battleshield for refreshment. Mrs Rutherford gave us a superb and unforgettable tea, everything home-made for there were no delivery vans. This was before the spread of radio and I asked Mr Rutherford what they did for news as they never saw papers. "We have all the news we need", he replied, pointing to the large family Bible from which they read daily. The Bible contained names of generations of the Rutherford family going centuries back.

I well remember the Rev. H.E.Y.Breffit, vicar of Alwinton, famous. for his classical scholarship, his snow-white beard and his herd of pedigree goats.

And living in Sharperton were Jannett and Lizzie Robinson, Lizzie with her mailbag and bicycle maintaining the links between the Valley and the outside world. I think of the awful grief we felt in 1959 when Jannett died suddenly, and Lizzie was left to carry on alone. How magnificently she has risen to the challenge and how right the Queen was to invite Lizzie to the Garden Party at Buckingham Palace in 1973.

No wonder local people say to me, "London where's London?" I almost agree with them. They've got everything that matters here!

THE LATE TWENTIES

Mary Philipson.

Between the years 1924 - 29 my family (father, mother and five children) spent the month of August on holiday in Harbottle. We stayed at Cherry Tree House which was occupied then by the grandparents of John Common, the postman. Old Mr. Common looked after the farm and his wife was a splendid cook.

We came out from Newcastle by train to Rothbury. Those of us who could ride bicycles brought them on the train and cycled to Harbottle. The luggage and the non-cyclists were brought out by George or Eddie Common. They ran a taxi service using Ford cars which were high enough off the ground to clear the fords up the valley, for there was no bridge beyond Alwinton.

In 1927 a bridge was being built at Linbrig when a flood carried away the scaffolding, and great baulks of timber came pounding down the Coquet past Harbottle.

We all enjoyed our holidays here: exploring the neighbourhood, climbing the Drake Stone, paddling and swimming in the lake, and having picnics by the river. There was no forestry on the hills to the south, only open moorland and heather.

We older ones would go with our father on longer expeditions into the hills, cycling on the rough road up the Coquet, leaving our bicycles at a farm, and then walking. We went as far as Makendon and the Roman camps at Chew Green; climbed Windy Gyle by Clennell Street guidepost or by the peat road from Barrowburn; explored the Ridlees valley and bathed in the peaty water of Linsheels Lake - (neither of them was within "The Range" at this time).

The hills up the valley were covered with grass (no forestry), and with large flocks of sheep. The high hill farms were all occupied, the houses very well kept, and the wives often willing to provide us with a marvellous home-made tea. They had their groceries brought up by cart or sled, and were self-supporting in things like milk, butter, vegetables and garden fruit.

Coal was difficult to transport, so peat was cut from special places on the hill and stacked in brick-like shapes beside the house after it had been left to dry out. Peat made a beautiful glowing fire - (Eliza Murray's scones made on a girdle hung over her fire were "out of this world''}.

The postmen (several of them from Harbottle) had to deliver by bicycle, or on foot. Sheep were driven over the hills to markets in the Borders. This could take days, but the shepherd would know where he could stop, with a meal and a bed for himself, and an enclosed field called a "park" for his flock to feed and rest.

Once, at the farm called Wholehope on Clennell Street, my father asked the shepherd's wife if it was not lonely living up there. ''Oh no'', she said, "we are on The Street. There's plenty of people passing". This same lady told us that she would sometimes walk to Harbottle for a Whist Drive - 3 or 4 miles down and the same back up - at night!

The general appearance of the village was not so very different all the old stone houses were there, though non derelict and unlived in. One house behind the fountain has had to be demolished and replaced by three Council bungalows. The road from Rothbury came in round the other side of the Stables, and whe1"'0 the road runs now there were three cottages.

The Post Office was in the house called Silver Birches. The mails were carried by Lee of Rothbury who had a contract with the GPO but ran a little transport business of his own. He would bring up the mail in the mornings in a vehicle very similar to our present post bus and stand it in front of the Hall. Then he would take down movable shutters that covered the windows saying, "Royal Mail GVR", and load up any passengers for Rothbury. There he would wait for the afternoon train, and bring out any passengers for Harbottle, put up his shutters again, and return to Rothbury with the letters.

SNOW BOUND

E. A. Robinson.

In years gone by no-one was panic-stricken by a hard and snow-bound winter. They were all prepared and began to stock up in September.

The firm of Cowans and Oliver in Rothbury, millers and grocers, supplied Upper Coquetdale. They had a warehouse at Alwinton next to Janies' Cottage. Job Tait was the firm's journeyman. Each householder came by horse and cart or walked via fords and footbridges to collect his supplies. There were no road bridges beyond Alwinton until the early thirties.

Each household started with 30 stone of flour, 1 cwt. of sugar, 2 rolls of Irish bacon (33lbs. each), 14lbs. tobacco. 1 stone of rice and 1 stone of pot-barley. Fresh yeast was delivered every two weeks and passed from house to house.

There had to be sufficient food for the dogs and pigs - 30st. Indian meal, 30st boxings, 30st. Kositus. Hens 20st Indian corn and 20st of split maize and other grain. Each farm had two cows and their fallowers: 5 cwt of Bibby's or Catton cake to keep them up during the winter. The cows provided milk, cream, butter, buttermilk and cheese. R. Davison, Carrier, Harbottle bought surplus butter and eggs. The old hens were eaten during the winter months.

Two pigs were kept until they reached 30st, then killed and cured - 5st. of coarse salt, 1lb saltpetre were needed to cure them. A good pig gave 25lbs of pure lard, spare-rib, black and white pudding, pork sausage, brown liver. The tongue and cheek were pickled. Breakfast could be a crowdy made from oatmeal, barley cake and fat bacon, or dried salmon and may be braxy-hogg.

Most farms had a peat stack, which lasted a whole year, others had 2 - 3 tons stored and 20 gallons of paraffin. The haystack was built where the sheep were to be wintered, a horse-drawn sledge was used to reach them. The sledges were made by the local joiner George Robinson of Sharperton and the runners were made and fitted by the local blacksmith, Bob Cummings at Harbottle Peels. Adam Foster of Harbottle was boot, shoe and clog maker. The Grey family of Woodhall were tailors. Both kept the valley shod and clad. Water was carried from a spring which did not freeze. Most springs were quite near to the dwelling. The netty was at the bottom of the garden. The garden provided all the vegetables and fruit which were preserved until they were needed. There was also a tattie yard. If it was a very bad winter the stores had to be renewed.

Barrowburn was a halfway house. Mary Barton and her daughter Eliza Murray always kept a big stock and were able to help out. The men's wages were paid twice yearly - Mayday and Martinmas.

A SPECIAL RACE

Helen Richardson.

A few years or so after the end of world war 11, Bernard and with our young family came to live, and work, in what was then a remote and peaceful area.

The people of the Valley seemed a special race. Kindly men of strength, of great endurance and compassion. Used to all weathers and often sleeping out with the ewes during lambing. Some were skilled at knitting their own socks and stockings, and dressing sticks. Music was important - the fiddle, pipes, and accordion.

The women were resourceful, competent and adaptable. They were entirely responsible for feeding the family with whatever was to hand or could be grown, tending their hens, cow and pig, and caring for any weakly or sick animals. They

made their own bread, and butter - and could do anything from making hard-wearing hockey or proggy mats and quilts to fine, skilled embroidery. Each had her own talents which would be displayed at the local "Show" in the Autumn.

They seemed to have a natural wisdom and an innate sense of design. No inequality of sexes here, but mutual dependability. Life was hard, often a struggle. They had to depend upon one another in order to survive.

Visitors in the hills were seen approaching from afar, and the girdle was put over the fire for fresh scones. The enormous black kettle would be singing merrily, ready for the tea-making as one entered the door. With luck there might be a boiled, fresh-laid egg with the homemade bread and butter. The warm welcome and hospitality was extended to. all who passed the door, friend, or stranger. I cherish wonderful memories of sitting on long benches at kitchen tables with Annie and Dawson Telfer at Uswayford. with Liza and George Murray at Barrowburn, Olive Hedley at Linsheeles, Matt and Nell Cowans at Shilmoor, the Rutherfords at the old Battleshields, and Thora and Billy Pigg at Biddlestone.

The reading in the house was often an encyclopaedia and the Bible, and they were well-thumbed. Memories were retentive and informed on all manner of things and events, and opinions were well-considered and very independent. A strong liberal tradition filled the countryside.

From these good people one learned to observe the earth. the river, the sky, and the birds.

Aware of Bernard's great knowledge and love of birds, word would often be sent down the valley to tell him to come as soon as he could in order to see some strange or unusual new arrival. Word came by the postie or by the van-men surprisingly quickly. I remember the excitement of the first appearance of an osprey in the valley, and of following it from a respectful distance from·p6st to post up-river, watching the darting neck, and the skill of the dive for fish.

I shall never forget my first sight of moor-burning on the lower heather clad slopes, the line of fire running against the night sky, and the sudden thought of what a fire, or smoke on the horizon must have meant in the days of border raids. The exact knowledge of which neighbours were up in flames and who might be next on the path, must have struck chill and terror into the heart.

Memories, too, of joining the W. I. and discovering new friends and new crafts and sitting on forms in the village hall near a great open blazing fire, with a large black kettle on each side of the hob - one for tea and one for washing up. In those days all the crockery had to be carried up a draughty open wooden stair, and then down again. The kettles had to be filled at the sink downstairs and carried up to be put beside the fire before the meeting started so that they would be boiling by the time supper was due. The lighting was by Aladdin paraffin lamps - much later there were calor gas burners downstairs, and a boiler.

Upstairs there were two large substantial screens which either closed in a small warm area around the fire for committee meetings or helped to keep out draughts at the two upstairs doors, one of which opened onto the wooden stair to the lower floor, and the other straight out into the cold world at the top of the stone steps.

The hall ceiling in those days went up to the roof and it was quite draughty. Before the floor was renewed (the gift of Mr Drew-Wilkinson of Clennell), if there was a dance in the hall, the bouncing about sent chaff showering down through the cracks in the lower ceiling, a remnant of the days when the hall had been the Fenwicke-Clennell coach-house. Downstairs the walls were bare stone, and the floor flagged, and the damp used to seep through from the cow-shed next door.

Stored there was a backdrop on a roller and side wings for a stage. The side wings had opening doors and were beautifully painted by Dunn, an artist who had lived in the village. Apparently, long before the war, one of the then Mrs Fenwicke-Clennell's had been very interested in amateur dramatics and had produced plays in the Hall. Much later, when there was electricity, Bill Walton from Wilkinson Park built, with the estate carpenters, footlights out of a row of cocoa tins, which were very effective.

Whist drives in those days had to be seen to be believed as people had to climb out over the high backs of the forms in order to ''change tables''· The tables were just marked with chalk on the long trestles, and if there was a good attendance, another "table" might have to be squeezed on, making arm movements, and dealing, a little tight.

A generation of people in the community have carried out voluntary work with the Hall Committee; over three decades spent lowering ceilings, renewing floors, installing electricity when it became available in 1953 with money from the Coronation celebration.

Heavy forms and trestle tables were replaced by stacking furniture with the aid of a Carnegie Trust Grant of £100. A new committee room and store was built, and more recently neat, fitted kitchen units downstairs, new lavatory facilities and murals on the lower hall walls.

GOING BACK

Len Peach.

I was born in Hull but when I was 17, this was July 1940, I went off to join the army. I heard the chap in the recruiting office say, "If you want to be near home join the Green Howards or the East Yorkshire". But I wanted to be further afield than that, so I joined the Northumberland Fusiliers. And I went from Hull to Bellingham, our first posting. I spent 2 years in Northumberland.

In 1942 our Battalion as such moved six times. We as a Company were in Gosforth, Weldon Bridge in this order Harbottle, Acklington, Wark and Ashington. We weren't in the same place very long. We moved along so fast in 1942 that we'd hardly get unpacked before we were away again in no time at all.

We spent seven or eight weeks at Harbottle. It was in the winter - bitterly cold. I thought it was the back of beyond. Sort of place you could walk up the main street and never see anybody.

I remember the pub - The Star. But that was out of bounds in a few hours of landing there. Some of these bright sparks went along and had a punch-up - not with the locals mind. Very quiet place. Still is. So, on the odd night off, with having transport, we went to Morpeth. A lot more going on there. Our Captain - Major as he was later, he came from Morpeth. Chap called Sanderson. He was a regular. Extremely elegant. Extremely smart. First class chap.

We were a great crowd. 250 of ua. We were bil1eted in the grounds of the castle. A couple of Nissen huts near the river. You can still see the foundations. The officers had the upstairs in the house, and downstairs was the Company office on one side of the door, and the Major's office off to the right - if you were on a charge you'd be marched in there, of course. Stores were at the back.

I have a feeling about this house was it something to do with floors covered up? For army boots, I suppose. All studs you see, plonk, plonk, plonk in and out of there. Strikes me it would be a charming house before the war. And the grounds I imagine would be lovely. Not untidy like when we were there. We used to do night manoeuvres in the woods close by. Big tall trees, and one that stood above the others. The grounds were haunted, supposedly. Used to walk at midnight did the ghost. It's when you're young, you know. Impressionable. Wherever you go the same sort of places are haunted. A lot of the time we should be tired out. Train, train, train. That's what it's all about. We 'd go up on the moor manoeuvres, foot-drill, ·arms· drill, weapons drill, route marches, force marches. It's a hard life is an infantryman's life. And one moor gets to look the same as any other Simonside, Bellingham, Harbottle.

I remember the Coquet. A very strong river. Really rushes fast in winter. Deep. Powerful. We had a chap drown in the Coquet. It was freezing cold and snow on the ground. What happened was a cross-country run on the road to Rothbury

from Weldon Bridge. Then over the river and back down the other side. Back to the Anglers Arms. But this chap - dead keen of course, he thought he was going to be first back. So, he jumped in the river for a short cut and it killed him. Only 19, he was. It's damn cold in that river in winter.

A few years ago, maybe eight or nine now, it showed you Cragside on the telly. The first house ever to have electric. We thought - we'd like to go there and see that. So, we took off from Skipton to Rothbury. It was a sentimental journey. Pretty strange feeling you know going back after all these years. Sitting there at the Star Inn having a drink. Thinking of your mates who 've been and gone.....D-day, Egypt, Palestine, N. Africa, Cyprus. Lebanon …

A CENTURY'S RECOLLECTIONS

Douglas Robson.

In April 1889, Hugh Dalgleish, gamekeeper on the Fenwicke-Clennell Estate, died at Peel Cottage, Harbottle, at the age of sixty-three years. His first wife, Ann, had died in 1873 at the age of 39 years and Hugh had subsequently remarried. His second wife, Elizabeth, who was under forty when her husband died, remained a widow for over thirty years. Elizabeth came from a local family and her brother, James Rutherford, was shepherd at Singmoor for over 50 years. He, like the Daggs of Linbrigg and numerous ott1er families in those days, was a staunch member of the Presbyterian community, and each Sunday morning he could be seen tramping from Singmoor, past Biddlestone, to the church in Harbottle Village.

It so happened that, soon after Hugh Dalgleish's death, a certain Emma Robson was spending a brief holiday with some of her family in Rothbury. Emma was the wife of John Stewart Robson. He had two married brothers. All three Robsons had young families, fourteen children in all, living at Monkseaton and Whitley Bay. One day during their Rothbury stay, Emma organised a pony-and-trap ride out to Harbottle, which was unknown territory to them. They found themselves walking over the suspension bridge (a very slender affair compared with today's structure) that crosses the River Coquet at the foot of the village. On the far side they saw Peel Cottage, in its delightful woodland setting, exactly as it looks today, almost one hundred years later. They were charmed with its situation and they walked up to it along the path by the river.

There, at the door of the cottage, stood Mrs Dalgleish who, in the course of conversation, mentioned that she was doubtful whether she could afford to stay on following her husband's recent death. Emma Robson suggested that she might try taking in guests during the summer months she was sure she said that other members of the Robson families would be interested. Mrs Dalgleish expressed some hesitation, as she had never before entertained visitors. However, she agreed to give the idea a trial which, in the event, proved an unqualified success. From that time there grew a close association with the Robson families which lasted over thirty years until her death in 1921.

As the fourteen children grew up (only one child died before reaching her teens) they looked forward with enthusiasm, summer by summer, to the holiday that they would be spending at Peel Cottage. There they played in the woods, romped in their favourite pool at the foot of the garden with its gentle waterfall, roamed the hills of Upper Coquetdale and came to know the hill shepherds. Sometimes there was not enough room to accommodate everyone at the cottage, and they overflowed into the village where Miss Nicholson, Mrs Drummond and Mrs. Common were glad to find accommodation for them. Hilda Robson (a younger daughter of Emma), the last surviving member of those fourteen young people recalled that, on one occasion, there were more than fifteen of them, with their parents, staying in and around the village during the same week.

My father, Arthur Robson, was the eldest of those young people, and in due course his affection for Harbottle was passed on to my mother, my brother and myself. Indeed, I am told that as a squealing infant, I was introduced to Coquetdale in 1914, the families expanding from Peel Cottage rented the Presbyterian Manse for a few months while it was undergoing a change in occupancy. I was not popular at the Manse that summer!

In the early years of the century, two ways were used to reach Harbottle from Whitley Bay – bicycle or train. The train journey was a longish one which meant a change from the mainline at Morpeth on to the railway which wound its way through Scots' Gap, Ewesley and Brinkburn, to terminate at Rothbury.

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There was an occasion in the summer of 1905 when Alfred Robson - one of the fourteen yow1g people who made up the families - was driven, at Kidland, to take shelter from a long and sustained cloudburst which so swelled the Alwin that the family living at Low Alwinton had to be rescued from their bedroom windows. The flood swept down the Coquet and carried away the suspension bridge at Harbottle. No doubt Alfred must have had difficulty in reaching Peel Cottage that night.

The more active members of the Robson family would sometimes walk over the Swire to Otterburn. But the time came when much of the area was taken over by the military. This eventually led to the abandonment of numerous shepherds' cottages, including the two Wilkwoods, Dykeham's Edge, old Bygate Hall, old Quickening Cote, the Ridlees (a delightfully situated cottage up the Ridlees Burn) and Ridleeshope. It all came about some years before the first world war, as Thomas Thompson of Charity Hall once explained. After he had led a shooting party across the moors between Redesdale and the Coquet one of the shooters paused, looked about him, and exclaimed: "This would make a splendid military range". It was Winston Churchill and he no doubt passed on the "good news" to his colleague in the Liberal Government, the war minister, R.B.Haldane.

There are countless photographic records of the Robson families, dating back eighty years, and a special one of Wholehope now alas reduced to rubble, but then a neat cottage with roses round the front door. Beside the door a small boy is playing with a litter of collie pups. Seventy years later the boy was identified as Matt Cowens, that rugged shepherd from Shillmoor, who died but a few years ago.

There was a gap of nearly fifty years from Mrs Dalgleish's death until a new base was found for us in Harbottle. Then on a parcel of ground in the middle of the village a stone cottage was built so that, today, the fifth generation of Robsons after Emma are beginning to learn that there is something special about Upper Coquetdale.

TRAVELLING FOLK

Eleanor Renwick.

One of the highlights of my life was the arrival, in the small village where I lived, of the hawkers or muggers as they were called. They were not a bit like the "muggers" we hear of to-day; these were a harmless, wonderful type of people. During the winter they had been living in their little old stone-built cottages, some of them just over the Scottish Border and quite a few from in the beautiful old ducal town of Alnwick.

They would have put in their time during the winter "drying" the rabbit skins which they had bought from the country people during their treks in the summer; these would probably have been bought for one penny each they would also have sorted through the sheep's wool gathered from the fields during their journeyings in the summer or bought "bits and pieces" left over from the sheep-clippings at the numerous farms which they visited. One of the first jobs when they came out in the late spring, or early summer, would be to journey up to the old little woollen mill at the historic village of Otterburn, and there find a ready market for this beautiful pure wool.

There were also tin-smiths and basket- weavers among these people, the baskets being made, I seem to remember, from a special kind of rush, growing in the Wooler, Annan and Selway districts. These articles found a quick sale at the isolated farms and hamlets where most of the shopping was done at the door.

My dear old friends of the crocks and were called 'muggers' because pets which they carried round with them, always the sort of thing needed by the housewife. One of their specialities was a huge brown glazed earthenware jar, often with a lid. This was generally called a "mug" and would be large enough to hold a dozen loaves of bread, and oh how beautifully fresh and crisp bread kept in one of these.

To me their crockery seemed marvellous. There were china dogs and china cows with a hole in the back to pour in the milk which would pour out into one 's teacup through the mouth. They had wonderful ornate vases, gaily coloured cups, saucers and plates and an enormous selection of combs, pins, elastic, hair-slides, cheap jewellery and what always so intrigued me - a vast quantity of leather bootlaces. These would be hundreds of narrow leather strips cut to within an inch of the piece of leather at the top, the seller cutting them off as required.

Their mode of travelling was by a pony, (which they called a Galloway), and a small flat cart heavily · laden with their goods and chattels. We lived on a farm and my father always allowed these travellers to stay as long as they wanted - generally one or two weeks. We got quite used to them setting off on their journeys round the countryside early in the morning and returning, probably after a hard day's bargaining, late in the evening.

They would sleep in one of the barns or a loose-box (empty of horses at the time) and there they would bed down at night, ever so snug in masses of hay and an old horse-sheet on top.

The kettle was boiled for them in the farm-house kitchen morning and evening, and my mother took down the ham from its hook in the kitchen and fried a pan of ham and eggs. While this was in progress, we would get their news of the day. They were what is called a "wonderful crack", that being the Northumbrian expression for "a real good conversation''.

Among our visitors was the elderly couple who came from the lovely old town of Yetholm. The old lady used to come round to the door with an enormous basket (very much like a laundry basket) packed to the lid with what was called "draperies": pillowcases, towels, tablecloths and much-embroidered ladies' underwear often slotted with pale blue ribbon.

I loved it when the old roadster we called the "Songman" came. He was a native of Ireland, came on foot and arrived, or nearly always seemed to, when we were busy with our mid-day meal. Out we would rush and the greetings over, we would stand at the door listening to his wonderful Irish voice singing songs such as the "The Mountains o' Mourne" and ''Take me Home again, Kathleen' ·He was given a huge plate of meat, potatoes and gravy, his impromptu dining-table being the lid on the rainwater barrel. This finished he was given sixpence, and then took his departure, showering us with thanks and blessings until we were out of earshot.

NATIONAL PARK

Terry Carroll

Coquetdale is a truly beautiful place. Local people probably wouldn't choose to live anywhere else. visitors are attracted here too, but certainly not on the scale of the popular tourist traps elsewhere, and the area remains relatively peaceful and unspoilt. These special qualities have not escaped the notice of the legislators and officialdom and, as long ago as 1956, much of Coquetdale above Rothbury was designated as part of the Northumberland National Park.

The creation of National Parks in England and Wales was prompted by public pressure for protection of our most cherished landscapes, and access to open land for outdoor recreation. A report prepared by John Dower during the dark war years of the 1940's defined the purpose of the National Parks. The Hobhouse Committee made recommendations on suitable · areas for designation and legislation appeared in 1949. Thereafter, ten National Parks were to be created during the 1950s.

It is clearly a difficult task to define a precise line on a map which distinguishes, for administrative purposes, beautiful landscape from the commonplace. For the Northumberland National Park this task was carried out by a Committee of the National Parks Commission over 4 days in July of 1954 led by its Chairman, the Rt. Hon. Lord Strang. Its membership also included Pauline Dower of Combo, widow of John Dower. Their itinerary on the final day took in the College Valley and the

whole of Coquetdale, an estimated 140 miles, plus an overnight return to London by train. There was obviously little opportunity for lengthy debate over minor detail. Basically, a line was sought demarcating open hill land - which was relatively wild in nature and offered prospects for unhindered public access from enclosed agricultural land. In this way the whole of Coquetdale above Alwinton was included in the Park. Below the village the river itself became the boundary as far as Hepple, and thereafter the minor road to Tosson, so enclosing the Harbottle and Simonside Hills. So, what has the National Park meant to local people and what is its relevance to-da? Park status enables special protection to be given by the County Council to landscape and wildlife: to improve public access, to provide facilities and services for visitors. In the early years after designation achievements were modest, given the level of resources available (the Park budget in 1957/58 was £3,144, over half of which went on salaries). A scattering of parking and toilet facilities was developed, an embryonic wardening services formed largely relying on voluntary assistance, and basic information literature published.

Two main preoccupations seemed to be: limiting the effects of military training activities; and controlling the spread of afforestation. Regarding the latter, the Council's Position was not a strong one. For example, a proposal to plan 585 acres at Fairhaugh in Upper Coquetdale was submitted in June 1969 for consideration. The land in question was described as strongly characteristic of the Cheviot massif and was zoned as "strong presumption against afforestation" on the relevant Policy map. Whilst confirming the validity of the Policy, the Council's Countryside and National Park Committee concluded that "it would be unreasonable .... to ask a farmer or landowner not to sell his land for afforestation if it was profitable for him to do so". The Committee was much more successful · in opposing plans submitted in 1957 to create a large regulating reservoir in the valley of the Grasslees Burn. This proposal would have completely flooded the valley and involve the construction of an earth dam 82ft. high and over 1,000ft. long across the valley where the Harehaugh picnic site is now located.

National Parks today have more staff, finance and powers; and consequently, their influence has grown. In particular, more practical work has been done. In Coquetdale, numerous tree planting and stone walling repair schemes have been carried out on farms. This enhances the landscape and provides work for local contractors. Farm ponds have been restored, native woodlands brought under proper management, and agreements reached with farmers to conserve traditional hay meadows. Unsightly telephone and electricity lines in Harbottle Village have been placed underground and assistance has been given to repair a number of historic buildings including Holystone Church. The Park has now six full-time wardens who are actively involving the local community, particularly with the schools where wildlife gardens have been created at Netherton, Thropton and Harbottle.

Visitors benefit from better parking and picnic facilities. A walks book for the Coquetdale area has been published, and guided walks are offered throughout the year. Despite this, surveys suggest that the number of visitors has fallen. In 1975 an average of 850 visitors was recorded proceeding up the valley beyond Alwinton on fine summer Sundays. In 1980 these numbers had halved, and surveys since do not suggest a return to past levels. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons. Are there too many appealing attractions elsewhere? Have recreational habits and demands simply changed? Whilst day visitors from Tyneside have declined. can we expect more holiday visitors? Does this benefit the local economy, and should it be encouraged? A major visitor survey in the Park will be carried out in 1990 so that some of these trends can be identified and assessed.

The Northumberland National Park, now one of a family of eleven (the Broads having just joined in 1989) attracts the fewest visitors of them all. The reasons are many and varied and largely historic and geographical. We should take comfort in this and not be alarmed. The advertisers used to say that Northumbria was England's best kept secret. It certainly applies to Coquetdale, so don't let on!