

Escorting Shire and Clydesdale Horses Across Town

Melvin Crawford was born in 1938 and interviewed in 2008

I used to go to Dean Gibson , the Catholic school on Gillingate. I hated school. Mother would put me through the gate in a morning. I used to go through the school yard and away down to a farm and go all over with the farmer horse dealing. I learnt twice as much there as I ever did at school. I hated school because I could add up for fun, all in me head, but I couldn't write it down. It's the same with writing and spelling I can't read something and do it but if I'm shown something I can do it there and then.

I can always remember a teacher telling us about Adam and Eve being the first two people on the Earth and then Adam and Eve had two sons, Cain and Able, and Cain slew Able and found himself a wife. Any Questions? So I asked "Where did he find his wife?" So I got a four hander for that – you lay your hand flat out, palm side up and were hit several times on each hand with the cane.

When I was a bit older I always had a lurcher dog and I used to skip school and go and get rabbits for t'pot. We used to go down to a butcher on a Saturday night, in them days there was no deep freezers, with half a crown (2s6d) and give him that and he used to give us a parcel with bits such as a sheep's head, maybe a few offcuts of lamb breast, perhaps half a cow's heart and it would go into a big pot along with her marvellous dumplings.

I used to meet the Mother's Pride van first at seven o'clock in t'morning and go with him. Then during the week I also had a paper round in't mornings as well to get some money for me mother y'see we were always short. One morning the milkman knocked on the door for his money and me mother said "Tell him I'm not in." "When will she be back" he asked So I shouts "Mam when will you be back?" I got a good clattering for that.

When I was eleven I used to take posies, primroses with all the leaves round, little mixed flowers in moss and a big basket full of watercress, bunched up, sixpence a bunch and I went until I left school when I was fifteen. You just set your stall up, sat on a little bench with your stall spread out in front. Same people came nearly every week, and rushed in and got this and that before they went. I made quite a lot of money by that.

I was never away from the auction mart 'cos they had a horse day. I used to run horses up and down as a kid and I got thruppence for each one I ran up and down. Anyone who was selling horses had a Spring sale and a backend sale. I used to go and help out one of the locals who lived down at Wattsfield Farm, where the Kendal College is now, he had a big field.

If he bought any horses, I've seen him one sale, have three or four Shires or Clydesdales, which we had to take back right across Kendal from the auction mart to Netherfield Bridge. I used to love getting there about dinner time 'cos the Bridge was full absolutely solid with folk and they used to all jump out of the way of these horses and which we took up t'farm. At the auction there was another fella who used to buy a lot of cattle out of Ireland. I think it was a Thursday was the day the cattle used to come. By the side of the railway station there were cattle pens. I used to meet them there. The trains used to come in, drop the carriages there, and open the doors and all the cattle used come out into the pens. Then we used to run down and drive all t'cows along the road from there up Shap Road and then turn just off Mint Bridge and then right along to his place. He used to give us two and six for doing that. I never used to go to school that day. You didn't get two and six for going to school.

There used to be what they called "Boon Days." Say one farm was threshing, well half a dozen farmers would send t'lads or they'd go. The first one I ever went on, I was only fifteen and I was given the job of clearing out the chaff, a real dusty job. I thought how can I get out of that so I said "Can I carry them bags" and this little man said "I don't mind doing cattle hands job" probably because it was the easiest. So I ended up carrying ten stone bags of corn all day.

I remember one threshing I went to and I went down the yard to bring out the drinking, like a bucket or two. You used to dip in with your cup and there was a basket of sandwiches, cake and what have you. While I was walking back I saw this rat just in front. My mate walking alongside of me gave it a great big kick with his boot and it went straight up in the air and landed right in one of the tea buckets. He got the rat out of the bucket and threw it away. I didn't have a cup of tea that day.

I moved on to Penrith. At the previous farm I got one pound ten shillings a week seven days a week six am to 6 pm. But at the second farm I asked for four quid and I got three pounds seventeen shillings and six pence.

Then I saw this girl walking at Garnett Bridge. I thought "By God she's a fit bit of stuff." So I took her to the Roxy picture house she offered to pay but being a gentleman I said "No! I'll pay." So we then went to a shop in Wildman Street with a little room to sit and eat fish and chips with bread and butter and a glass of Cream Soda each. I took her home to Garnett Bridge and I still had change out of ten bob. So I thought I'd done quite well there. But that was me I was lumbered with her for the next fifty-odd year (Wife laughs)

Interview – 0150 Interviewed 2009

© Kendal Oral History Group