

Queen Alexander gave Grandma a Spinning Wheel

Abigail Reed was born in 1909 and interviewed in the 1990s

My parents farmed at Holme Ground and I went to Little Langdale School. We used to have to walk three-and-a-half miles to get there. There was no transport and even the five year olds had to walk. My aunt and uncle lived at the Tilberthwaite Farm and we used to collect my two cousins, Dorothy and Elizabeth. We would gather a few more on the way and go off to school with our dinner baskets. The baskets would always have home-made food in them. My mum used make her own bread and cakes and everything. I used to have to carry the blessed thing. It was the heaviest thing and my brother would have nothing to do with it. There weren't school meals like there are now so we went down to another little farm, Wilson Place, to have our lunch and a cup of tea. When we went back at night in the summer we used to collect the cows as we went home for milking time. It was one way of getting them home I suppose. I used to put the basket on one of their tails and hold it still and be pulled along worn out.

One of my mother's jobs was to separate the cream from the milk. For that she had to put the separator together. The cream went in to big bowl and in the middle it had sort of wings. It was powered by hand, just like mangling the clothes. When the thing was going it made quite a noise but we used to sit and sing in our rocking chairs as this was going on.

You would have the cream coming out of one spout and the skimmed milk out of another that we would sell at the door. The cream was all set up for churning, usually on a Thursday, and that's when my grandma came into the picture. We had a big wooden barrel churn that she turned over and over. The length of time it took to make the butter depended on the weather. IF it was hot it was more difficult to do than if it was cooler because it is soft to handle when has been in a churn. She used to let the buttermilk out through a little bung hole but if any butter came out Grandma would put it back into the churn and then knead it till a sort of whey came out.

Then she would squeeze it with butter pats and add the salt. I gave her a butter thing with a swan on it. She used to shape butter all round and then put a flat bit on and turn is over and this swan was on it. Grandma didn't colour it with carrot like some other farmers so it was just a natural white colour.

There were a lot of spinners in our family. My grandmother, Elizabeth Pepper, first got involved with linen through John Ruskin at Brantwood. He wanted her to weave a piece of linen and let him see what it was like. She did, of course, and took it to him at Brantwood and he said "Oh take it away woman I can see to pick geese through that." So that was the start and it improved as it went along.

John Ruskin wanted this lace industry, which was called "Greek Lace" in those days, now it is known as "Ruskin Lace." Nana also used to spin Herdwick Sheep wool for jumpers because it is almost waterproof. Along with a lady called Marion Twelves she had quite a big business. She went to the Home Arts and Industries in London and always had a stall there. She took orders and then came back make them and send them off by post. Queen Alexander invited her to Sandringham to teach her how to spin and gave her a spinning wheel as a present. Grandma also made a pin cushion for Princess Mary who married Lord Lascelles and lived at Harewood.

My Grandma also did Langdale Linen work. She used to spin the flax and then weave it. Of course the linen had to be bleached. It was put on a long piece of grass on my dad's land at Holme Ground and it had to be watered. My brother and me used to do this every night till

it got to be the right colour that people wanted a special thing made of. It was fastened on the corners and in the middle with Westmorland slate so that it wouldn't blow away.

There were three different stages of being bleached, according to what people wanted it for – tablecloths or whatever. She also used it to make some very coarse linen like rucksacks for the troops in the First World War. She used to dye the linen and me and my brother used to have to go, after school, and pick lichen off the stones to make the dye – green or blue. Grandma used to tell us where to go and we used to bring as much as we could back for her. We also used to gather white moss, the moss which grows on swampy places, the sort that that you put in hanging baskets. This used to go to the war front to make sort of healing things to go on soldier's wounds. When we brought her the moss she used to put it in a big oval sort of dish, add the water and some "secret ingredients" to make the dye. My auntie taught me how to make bobbin lace. I used to make it at home and sell it for half-a-crown a yard

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