

The Badger and Fox lived in Harmony

Jonty Wilson was born in 1893 and gave this lecture c.1980

When I was a nipper, quarrymen from Kirkby came padding through Biggins just after five o'clock in the morning. Everyone of them wore clogs shod with iron caulkers and it was easy to hear them clattering past. Twenty or more of them were employed at the quarries and they all wore bowler hats. Bowler hats were always used by stone dressers and masons in those days. The ordinary quarrymen wore fustian trousers and sleeved waistcoats. These had a special name. I think they were called a "kersey." It was a poor job for the fine stone dressers. The dust got in their lungs and polished them off round about their fifties.

One of them was called Watson Carling and he had the sense to leave the quarries and open up the first fish and chip shop in Kirkby Lonsdale. Chips and a kipper cost two pence, chips and half a kipper three-pence. That seems cheap price but remember that sixpence bought the equivalent of twenty-five shillings or £1.25 in today's money. The chips were not the square things like we have today, but sliced and fried in beef dripping.

During the Second World War his son, also called Watson Carling, who was a hairdresser in London, was bombed out and came back home and set up the first ladies hairdressing establishment in Kirkby Lonsdale.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s I went to Manchester every week to do a short BBC programme on the radio. It went out on alternative weeks as "Country Magazine" one week and "The North Countryman" the next.

Occasionally the producer would say, "Right oh, next week you will all do a story of the countryside in June, July, September" or whatever month it was, based on what you have seen or heard the previous week.

Sometimes I would take a little ridge tent up on the crags so that I could be on the move at first light. That is the time when the world awakes or goes to bed.

At a century-old badger sett, it was probably home when Bronze Age men settled here. I've watched Brock, young and old, come hunting and waddling home. I've watched vixen and fox cubs at play as well. It has always amazed me how the clean living badger can share living quarters with a dirty, smelly fox. They both had the same entrances here and there was probably a labyrinth of caves so they had separate quarters underground.

Then there was the early morning birdsong to enjoy. The scourge of the chemical spray was still a few years away. The crags were alive with green linnets, grey linnets, yellowhammer and the small stone curlew.

I used to watch the crickets. Their antics were amusing. Then in August they would fly and they did chirp. They rubbed their back legs together and chirped and sang.

Nightjars used to jar away at night, butterflies were everywhere although the corncrake had almost disappeared from the lower ground, and so were the glow worm, I used to take along with me a few jam jars, put in a few fronds of bracken and fill up with glow worms. They looked like fairy lights hung on the tent ridge pole - oh happy interesting morning as I remember them.

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