

## **Food Used to Come to us by Tram**

### **Mr F Thompson was born in 1914 and interviewed in 1991**

We lived in Cowan Head village. As you go down into the village on the left hand side there are four houses there were six in those days.

They were just small with a back kitchen, a living room and two bedrooms but you could only have a single bed in the back one. It wasn't any bigger than that.

They didn't have any water in the beginning. There was a tap outside in the centre of the village and one at the top end. Then they decided to build up wash-houses and they put in Potter Fell water so we were advancing all at once. Gas and electricity came next about when I was 12 or 13. They put a pipe through the wall and we had a ring to boil a kettle or a pan on. They dug a cable from Burneside through Bowston to Cowan Head for the electricity.

We used to be charged sixpence a week for lights and a ha'penny a week for the iron. Rent for the cottage was two shillings and sixpence a week. Each house used to have a little garden.

I remember one of my mates told me his father who working nights and asked the son, who was on days, to dig the plot over so he could plant some tatties (potatoes). His father came off shift at six – his son was on days and started at six so they never saw each other. However, the son dug the plot over and was quite proud because he had dug a bucket full of tatties. The following day his father was not amused he'd only planted them the night before.

When I went to school at Cowan Head the Mill was steam driven, steam and part electric. There used to be horses and trams. There was a tramline to Cowan Head from Burneside. It was only a narrow gauge line to start with, about half the size of the railway lines. They got another one a bit bigger later on and they put these lines in up to Cowan Head. It started by the church in Burneside. It's all green now. It used to be a large coal dump.

When we had orders from Burneside we used to come down with the Cowan Head people on the wagon and they used to bring it down and reload it in Burneside Mill. It also used to be the way we got our groceries at Cowan Head. You would bring your order down in the morning to the Co-op. They would put the orders up and two or three lads would take them up to the station. They had their dinners up there and the chap on the tram would take them up and we would bring the truck down for the next loads a couple of days later

After the horses they got an engine. It was a railway engine, but it wasn't really like one. It hadn't any front like a normal railway engine. It was just like and up and across. Then they went on to lorries after that. Loading and unloading the coal was much quicker.

I should have started work at Burneside but I changed with another lad that was the same age and he should have started at Cowan Head. I was a cutter boy I used to have to carry out the shavings as they come off when they cut the paper. My wages were thirteen shillings and sixpence a week. We started at seven in the morning with half-an-hour for breakfast; then an hour for dinner (twelve until one) and finished about half past five. The week included Saturday mornings. Eventually after the War I was running a machine – the head machinist. That would be 1952 and I kept doing that for the rest of my working life.

At Cowan Head we made registered envelopes and Brooke Bond Tea Packets. We had to make the paper. It just came as wood pulp and waste paper.

I remember I was on a machine with another lad. He was a bit older than me and we would go to Carlisle Races on our bikes. So we went off on Whit Monday morning. We went up Shap but when we got to Carlisle it nearly blew us away. It was a terrible day so we just went to the race course but didn't stay long. There was so much wind we had to pedal down Shap. We just got to the Plough Inn at Selside about ten o'clock and we had never seen a race.

During the War they used to get a lot of sandbags and make paper out of them. They had plenty of orders but did have the material to make the paper. If a machine was shut down then they'd say "Go and cut rags" for the rest of your shift. So you would pull the rags to bits then put them in the boiler and boil them up with caustic soda and that would be ready for the next morning to start off again.

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