

Paid Twenty-six Shillings a month as an Apprentice Teacher

Elsie Blenkarn was born in 1908 and interviewed in 1993

When my parents came to live up here in Cumberland it was at Shap. It was a little cottage. It had one room, a living room and then a back kitchen. The stairs went up the back and there was two bedrooms. I fell down those stairs and broke a lamp at the bottom. Me dad made a barrow up in the loft but he couldn't get it down. Then on Lady Day, when the rents had to be paid we moved to Nook Farm. The house had a little porch. There was like a passage right up the middle. The living room was on the left, parlour on the right. The stairs were stone steps and there was a dairy on the right. Another little back kitchen on the left and you went through there into another room which had been built on. There was a tap in there which was unusual really because there was a well in a little garth not so far away. A garth is a small field and there was a well which never dried up. The tap used to go off sometimes in the summer and then water had to be brought up from the well. So me dad made a sledge which he put a churn on and bring the water up like that for the cattle.

We'd have about eight or nine cows, some hens and sheep. I was the shepherd. Every Sunday I went with me dad to Hardendale. I got to knowing those sheep. I could tell which one was which just by looking at their faces.

Then me dad got this big farm house at Thrimby, just between Shap and Hackthorpe which is when I moved to a school in Little Strickland. There was just one room and two teachers, little ones and one end and big ones at the other end. A playground for the boys and one for the girls and outside toilets. When it was wet we were allowed inside and we played "Poor Pussy." You all sat round and one had to be the pussy. The cat used to go round saying "Miaow." You hadn't to laugh. If you did you became "Poor Pussy."

I stayed at school until I was 15 then they transferred me to Hackthorpe, Lowther Endowed School as a pupil teacher, a sort of apprenticeship. We got twenty-eight shillings a month.

We had one day at Shap we'd a whole lot of lessons to do – arithmetic, English, a bit of history, geography and literature and we were given home work that had to be done for the following week. We had to prepare lessons at home and give a lesson a day in the week on which we were criticised.

I joined the Girl Guides when I was 15 years old. I used to go there every Saturday at the school. In the summertime we used to get out into Lowther Park. We used to watch out for Lord and Lady Lowther going up on to the moors on for the grouse shooting in August, "The Glorious 12th". First of all the ponies would go along, followed by the big van with all the food in. Then the cars came along, the big yellow, canary yellow, cars and we would see Princess Mary and Lord Lascelles they used to come. Sometimes the Prince of Wales came. I remember seeing him arrive at the Castle.

When Princess Mary was at the Castle the guides were to be inspected by her highness. It was going to be on the terrace outside. Anyway that particular morning there was snow so we were taken into the Picture Gallery.

I was a lovely little place. It's done in squares they would house would be barracks or something for yeomanry at some time or other. But it is all altered – they've got a lot more houses put up. Not in that little village, that is still as it was. Oh the gardens they were gorgeous, they were beautiful I could spend a whole day there. It was a shilling to go in and there was a rose garden, Japanese garden. There was a sunken garden and the flowers were beautiful. There was a sculpture gallery which you could see when you were round the

gardens. You could go right to it because it was glass and you could see all the sculptures that they had in there.

When we lived in Hardendale it was really nice you know because there were loads of flowers – they were different to anywhere else that I've seen. There were yellow globe flowers and there were Mealy Primroses – they're like a little Violet. The leaves are round and they eat insects. Then there was Dithering Grass which you don't see now; Cowslips, Wild Pansies growing up on that fell and heather of course.

Then there was grouse, any amount of grouse and pheasant. Crows, there'd be plenty of crows and maybe Sparrows but you never saw any of the other birds. There weren't a lot of trees about though.

When we moved to Thrimby it was different altogether. There was a vast difference because in the flowers there were Primroses, Bluebells, Canterbury Bells; there was Musk growing down by the river and Violets you would find in the hedgerows along with Star of Bethlehem. The birds were different as well. You got Chaffinches and the Blue Tits, and Yellowhammer, Robins and suchlike. There was a Corncrake used to come every year in a meadow just opposite us. You never saw it but we heard it. Oh and I remember a Wren making a nest in our garden.

We used to sit and watch some Crickets. In the evening time we put a few crumbs down and they would come out. If a little one came out and couldn't manage a big crumb it would seem to go back in and a bigger one came out. They were amusing to watch. Then in August they used to fly and they did chirp you know – they rubbed their back legs together and chirp and sing.

Interview no. R036

© Kendal Oral History Group