



11 FARMING & EMPLOYMENT

Hard and fast laws cannot be applied to land and treatment of stock in a climate like ours.

Lime burning and limekilns go back at least as far as the Roman and possibly earlier times with lime putty and sand making a strong mortar for building. Slaked lime, produced by mixing quicklime from the kilns with water, made a good whitewash for the interior walls of houses and shippens and was still in use up to 50 years ago. A new use came about in the 16th century with the rediscovery of lime as a soil conditioner. The action of the alkaline lime renders acid soil more neutral. By this means much moorland was brought into cultivation for crops and grazing for sheep and cattle. For this purpose small limekilns were constructed alongside the fields where the lime would be used (see Chapter 12). The industrial scale Craven Lime Works in Langcliffe provided employment for a number of residents—including its one-time manager, Mr William George Perfect (1841-1909), of Ribblesdale House—until it closed in 1939.

In 1250, a grant of land to Sawley Abbey (Salley Abbey at that time) was confirmed in Stainforth and described as being at the foot of the hill near the peat road. In the 1940s, Stainforth House was still using peat cut on Pen-y-ghent (see Chapter 16).

In the 19th century, coal was still being dug on Fountains Fell, just outside the Township boundary, as the following extract from the Craven Pioneer of 1853 illustrates:

On July 13 as the cart driver of Messrs Clark & Wilson, lime burners was leading coal from the pits at Fountains Fell and coming down the hill into Stainforth, one of the horses commenced kicking and getting loose galloped away. The horse was so unruly that, whilst the driver had hold of its head, it pitched him completely over the wall into an adjoining field.

Quarrying for building stone, stone slates and flagstones at Helwith Bridge, Horton and Giggleswick provided past employment. When the railway was built, there were a number of stonemasons, quarry labourers, drillers and blasters living in the village, but they were mostly itinerant and would have moved on once the work in this locality ended. On the old footpath from Stainforth to Helwith Bridge, and also in Tongue Gill, there are still old narrow clapper bridges over the becks constructed from Helwith 'slate'. Helwith slate also still forms the floor in at least one cottage on the West Green. Many of the old farm drinking troughs to be seen around the parish are built



*Joe Forster (engine driver) and Billy Bullock at Craven Lime Works late 1920s
- photo courtesy Kathleen Handy*

from five large Helwith slates, a large base with grooves for the four sides, the two long sides grooved to take the short sides and the whole held together with a blacksmith-made bolt at each end.

We know from the monastic records that Stainforth at one time had corn mills, both water- and wind-powered. The water corn mills were later converted to cotton mills. In the 18th century, there was also a linen industry in the village. Censuses indicate that papermaking provided an important source of employment in the 19th century, particularly for women.

Farming

The following articles from the *Craven Herald*, 26 November 1920, give a flavour of farming at the time. Apart from the use of horsepower, rather than oxen, some modest improvement in agricultural machinery and stock and produce breeding, the methods employed had changed little in five hundred years. The two, or rather three, farms (Mr Mitton also worked Nook House Farm), are no longer working farms and at least two of their outbuildings are now also converted to housing.

Cracks with local farmers by the author of 'Cracks with West Cumberland Farmers'

'Quite a bucolic village is Stainforth—probably a village that took its name from a stoney ford across the river, Stainforth had a bit of military history attached to it long before the recent World War, for it actually sent seventeen men to the Battle of Flodden Field in 1513, Langcliffe sending nine. This was in the time of the Shepherd Lord Clifford, who was no mean soldier. The peaceful body known as "Quakers" were strong here two hundred and thirty-one years ago, for a licence to hold meetings was granted to the "Friends" at Stainforth in 1689 under the Toleration Act.'



Joe Mitton of Townend Farm - photo courtesy Margaret Walker and Bill Mitchell, MBE

No. 23 Mr John Mitton, Town End Farm, Stainforth

‘Town End Farm is close to the Post Office and the village hostelry. You would scarcely take it for a farmhouse with two hundred and fifty acres of land attached to it. It is not a ring fence farm by any means. Farms in or near the ends of villages seldom are. The soil varies greatly. In some parts it is a bit gravelly, chiefly on the low side. On the high side heavy clay is met with. About eight acres are inclined to be wet, and although the land is roughish it is sweet. Here and there blue stone is in evidence, and elsewhere there is a limestone basis. Much of this land is too rough for the plough. Under the C.P.A. about three meadows were turned up. In 1918 nine acres were broken up and about an acre of this area was devoted to potatoes and turnips. Last year there were six acres of oats and three of potatoes and turnips. The tubers grown here are King Edward and Great Scot. This year there have been sown three acres of oats, an acre of potatoes and one of turnips. For the first time, in addition to the above-named kinds of esculents, the potato known as The Majestic has been sown. All the varieties have turned out clean and good. Turnips have been remarkably free from finger and toe and fly. A field of three acres of lea hay was sown, and would have been all that could be desired but for weather. Meadow grass was regularly grown in pre-war days. At present fifty-five acres are grown. An adjoining farm of one hundred and forty acres is also held by Mr Mitton. Most of this land is pasturage and meadow land. Town End will have about one hundred and eighty three acres of permanent pasture—all good, excepting portions abounding in rush, and those of a stoney nature.

The cattle on this holding are chiefly of the shorthorn class. There are usually thirty milkers and about 10 two-year old heifers. About thirteen cows are in calf. The complement of beasts here is as a rule fifty. The stock bull is rising two years. He is believed to be of pedigree strain and came from Mrs Hargreaves and Sons of Langshaw Farm, Clapham. There are no calves. The system followed at Town End consists of buying and feeding for fat stock, and this class of animals go to Skipton Auction Mart, calves proceeding to Hellifield.

Sheep are mostly Swaledales. There are one hundred and forty breeding ewes and four rams. Sheep are never sent away for winter feed: lambs are sold in August at Settle Fair, a few being disposed of later on—about October. There are two White Yorkshire pigs kept for home use. Poultry is represented by a score of birds—White Leghorns and cross-breds.

The buildings are fairly good. One byre near to the house ties up six beasts; two in the village accommodate fourteen each. Above these are hay mows which serve the purpose of a Dutch barn. There are six byres in the fields, with barns attached; two of these hold a dozen each. Another known as the Billinger byre ties up eighteen, the Far Billinger eight, while two on the Low Side tie up respectively eight and six animals. There is one stable at Town End, and at the other farms, which has no name, there are two stables.

A few more loose boxes would prove an advantage. Turnips are hogged outside; hulls for potatoes, turnips and cake are also a desideratum. Carts are kept in the barns. Of field machines some good up-to-date ones are noticeable, among them two Albion mowers, one with reaping gear attached, Martin side deliverer, Blackstone swathe turner, scaler, wheel and stitch ploughs harrows and etc. There are four covered manure steads and mows adjoin all the barns. There are eight liquor ammonia tanks, a moveable pump, and likewise a tank distributor. Good farmyard dung is made here and liberally applied. Other manures comprise turnip manure, basic slag for high land—from what I saw and heard the soils all round are in as clean and productive a condition as it is possible to have them. Much of the land is self drained, but the higher area would be all the better for practical drainage were such drainage possible.

From forty seven to fifty gallons of milk are sent daily to Leeds. At this time of the year the average amount sent once per day is forty five gallons. Labour consists of two sons. In hay time three extra hands are generally employed. There are both garden and orchard.

Mr Mitton has farmed Town End Farm twenty four years. Previous to settling in Stainforth he farmed at Middale Salter, Outhwaite, Nr. Wray seven years. He is a native of Outhwaite, and is the son of the late Mr Edward Mitton, who farmed at Cowgill, Thornton Church Stile forty years or more. Among past tenants at Town End were Mr James Howarth¹ who had the holding two and twenty years and Messrs. Hodgson who were also on this farm many years. Mr Mitton followed Mr Howarth. The Farm is the property of Lieut. John Stackhouse and family, a family of some antiquity in this neighbourhood, and probably connected with the hamlet of Stackhouse near to Langcliffe, anciently written Staykus.

Mr Mitton, whose name is doubtless allied to Myttop, the 'mid-ton' or town, has some doubt in regard to the wording of the Agricultural Bill if passed into law, as it at present stands. Like all his brethren in husbandry he fears it will prove too complicated to work either to the farmers' advantage or to the greater benefit of the country. So many exceptional circumstances are likely to occur for which a fixed rule is impossible, and if precedents are created as time goes by the danger is that one precedent will obtain in one place and another in another. In respect to cropping and compensation this danger would appear. Hard and fast laws cannot be applied to land and treatment of stock in a climate like ours. Constant appeals to law would prove irritating, frivolous and vexatious, and landowners and farmers would often be landed in dilemmas which, but for the provision of the bill when passed into law would never arise or at any rate very rarely. The less of law for farms and farmers the better for everybody. We shall see, however, if any further amendments will be made ere the proposed measure is entered in the Statute Book.'



*H Ward hand shearing a sheep on a stock assisted by Dennis Greenbank and Alf Farrow
- photo courtesy Joan Greenbank*

Messrs J² & T Sharp, Town Head Farm Stainforth

‘This farm is pleasantly situated and has an area of one hundred and fifty acres of rough, hilly and scattered land attached to it. It is a breeding and dairy farm. Under the C.P.A. about five acres of corn were produced, but little or no grain is now sown. It is green side up again. A few potatoes are grown. Hay turned out fairly good considering the atmospheric strikes and the direct action of the often uncanny rain-god, Jupiter Pluvius. All this meant loss of time and overtime for haymakers and a conscription which meant in either case extra cost, loss of profitable hay and eventually less remuneration.

This holding contains some grand cattle, shorthorns for the most part. There are eight milkers all the year round unless abnormal circumstances arise. Here many ‘pollies’ are grazed and fattened for market. Fat stock is bred. Cattle are bought in the spring and sold off in the autumn. Fat animals go to Giggleswick butchers. This past summer there have been about forty-six bullocks grazed—thirty of them fattened. Milk is used largely for young calves, for butter making and what little may be over is sold locally. There are some good Swaledale sheep—one hundred and thirty at time of visit, but in summer the number is one hundred and sixty. Many are sold at Settle Fair every August. Of pigs there are four of the Yorkshire type. Poultry consist of forty—White Wyandottes and Leghorns—and eight ducks.

Among the outsheds are four byres with barns joining up—the two in the garth tie up respectively fourteen and twelve. Out byres and barns tie up sixteen and six. A hayloft runs over the stable, and there is one over the calf hull

for bedding. In place of a Dutch barn are mow steads. The stable is a decent structure, so are the two or three loose boxes. There are cake, turnip and potato hulls. The cart and implement sheds are of fair size. Basic slag is put down on meadow and pasture in December and April. For green crops superphosphate and sulphate of ammonia are used. Feed consists of best decorticated cotton and linseed cakes. Thorley's food is also given, with bran and thirds for pigs. Not much soft food is given to the cattle.

Messrs Sharp are the sons of the late Mr Anthony Sharp, who held this farm close on forty years. He was the son of Mr Henry Sharp, who also farmed in this locality many years. Mr Anthony Sharp is buried within the churchyard of St Peter's Stainforth on the very spot where stood the house in which he was born, the said house occupying part of the area upon which the church and burial garth now stand. He was parish clerk from the time the church was consecrated, and on his retirement he was the recipient of an elegant clock, in recognition of his long and faithful services in the above-named capacity.

Mrs T Sharp comes of an old agricultural family originally located at Priest Hutton, with connections at Grayrigg, Westmorland and Penruddock, near Troutbeck, Cumberland. This lady has also relatives engaged in husbandry at Greystoke, and has many interesting reminiscences of the old folk in the two counties which both of us could claim as the lands of our sires and dames. Mr Sharp has little sympathy with Government control of farmers and farms. Agriculture can do the best of regulated naturally by its own



John Greenbank and horse in Stainforth House coach yard. Gamekeeper to Thomas Foster Knowles, he was killed by lightning on the moors in September 1924. He was succeeded as gamekeeper by his son Frank - photo courtesy Brenda Greenbank.

laws and the experience of those who have to breed and feed cattle and till the soil.’

It is interesting to note that even in 1920 both Messrs Mitton and Sharp had little sympathy for interference by politicians in the farming economy. Little has changed in the last 80 years, in this respect at least.

The tractor had replaced the horse...

By the end of the 1950s, the tractor had replaced the horse on the farm and the car had almost entirely replaced it as a means of personal transport. The two Stainforth smithies, in use in the 19th century, had both fallen into disrepair by 1930.

Grouse shooting at one time provided employment for gamekeepers. Alfred Ward, who worked on the former Malham Tarn Estate, father and son John and Frank Greenbank who worked for the Thomas Foster Knowles Estate for a combined 104 years, and George Perfect (now of Horton) were gamekeepers spanning some 150 years. However, after the Second World War, farm subsidies for sheep production led to the reduction in heather cover from over-grazing and grouse shooting declined.

From monastic times until the arrival of myxomatosis in the 1950s, rabbits were a source of food and their pelts were a valuable commodity for the felt-making trade early in the 20th century. Moleskins were also valuable as raw material for the fur trade and Stainforth had a mole catcher (see Chapter 16). In the 1960s, Stainforth even had its own mink farm. There are still



Frank Greenbank and his son John about 1937 - photo courtesy Brenda Greenbank.

occasional sightings of solitary mink on Stainforth Beck above the village, but at this remove in time these feral mink could be descended from escapees from almost anywhere in the country.

Currently, Neil Handy with his colleague Ron Charnley from Horton, who work for the Environment Agency, are mounting an emergency rescue operation in collaboration with Paul Bradley, a visiting researcher from Sheffield University at Malham Tarn Field Centre, for the native white-clawed crayfish (a miniature freshwater cousin of the lobster). They are threatened with extinction by a fungus disease carried by the introduced American Signal crayfish. It is hoped that by keeping a disease-free stock of our native crayfish in quarantine until after the fungus has died out in our rivers, it will be possible to reintroduce fungus-free native crayfish from the quarantine stock.



*Mr & Mrs John Dinsdale haytime at Garth Nook
- photo courtesy of Margaret Chapman*

¹Mrs Sandra Warren, nee Haworth, reports (in year 2000): The Mr Howarth mentioned was my great, great grandfather who lived there in the late 1800s. Prior to that he farmed at Capon Hall and we have a clock presented to him in recognition of his services to Malham Moor. Great Grandfather moved to Rylstone, but then grandfather came back to Townhead Farm in the late 1920s.

²Mr Tom Sharp (who wrote the foreword to this book) lives and farms in Stainforth and is the son of Mr John Nelson Sharp.