



## 18 STEPPING OUT OF THE SECOND MILLENNIUM ...

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The latter part of the 20th century has, inevitably, seen many changes both in the way of life in and around Stainforth, and in the structure of the village. From the 1950s onward, the rate of change has accelerated, with the village becoming less self-sufficient, whether in food production, education, employment or access to services or entertainment.

In 1954, the creation of the Yorkshire Dales National Park as a planning authority, with the dual role of encouraging economic growth whilst preserving the built and natural landscape, would seem to have been successful in the latter, if, arguably, relatively less successful in the former. National boundary changes following the Local Government Act 1973 took traditional control from the West Riding of Yorkshire and transferred it to North Yorkshire. Shortly after, in 1974, the Stainforth bypass was built to take through traffic away from the village centre and stop the grounding of heavy vehicles on Stainforth Bridge.

Since then, present generations of old Stainforth families have had to adjust to a flood of new faces and families, some from within the county, some from further afield. No doubt, some characters will be long remembered in this part of the Dales.

**Jimmy Metcalfe** died in January 1997. Always smartly dressed, even when barrowing stone for walling, his wiry frame



*Jimmy Metcalfe on the bridge at Townhead House  
- photo courtesy Ronnie Chapman*

barely heavier than the barrow. Like many farm workers used to hard manual work, he could work longer and harder than many younger men. He, invariably, visited Settle on Tuesday, market day, and cut a fine figure in suit and trilby. The following is from an article in the *Dalesman* by W R Mitchell, MBE, who interviewed Jimmy shortly before he died:

‘Born at Beck Hall, Malham in 1923. As a lad he spent most of his summer holidays at Jack Coates’ farm, Low Trenhouse on Malham Moor, he was the “can lad”. It was haytime and he took out tea to Irishmen and other workers who had been hired for a month for a fixed sum. Out of doors work began at four o’clock when the horses were caught for mowing. He was asked to climb Fountains Fell with a biscuit tin and bring back a load of fine white sand from beside the Tarn. The sand was for the use of the Irish scythesmen. They worked with long-poled scythes and sharpened them with a strickle, a piece of wood rubbed against a piece of greasy bacon. The strickle was pitted with holes and, when well greased, the scythesman collected some white sand in the palm of his hand, patted it with the greasy wood till all t’sand stuck in the holes and was bedded in.

He began his working life at fourteen, having walked over from Malham to arrive before seven o’clock in the morning at the Settle Hirings. “Farmers weren’t so keen if you were moochin’ about after seven o’clock, so if you weren’t hired by then, you’d be classed as idle.” Men looking for farm work would line up outside the Naked Man Café and women stood at the other side of the road looking for domestic work. His first wage was 13 shillings a week including keep and insurance stamps.

Jimmy worked for a number of local farms in Arncliffe, Darnbrook, Malham and Bowland before serving five and a half years in the Navy, returning to farm work in 1946 in Malham. In early 1947 he worked for a while for the railway. He was living at his parents’ home in Long Preston and had applied for a job stacking railway sleepers at the Dump at Hellifield. On the Monday morning he was due to start work he opened the door only to find he couldn’t see out. “There was snow to t’top.” That was the start of a wintry spell which still sends a chill through anyone who experienced it.

For 13 weeks he did nothing else but help with snow clearing in Shale Cutting on the Settle-Carlisle line at Dent. A train with German prisoners was entombed one night. “We dug ‘em out next morning” ... the diggers, warmed by their efforts, hung their coats on the tops of telegraph poles. One night the workmen’s train came off the line. “I said to my chums ‘I’m not dying up here, I’m walking back’. There were me, a young fellow called Eccleston and a Webb from Settle. We walked all the way from Ribbleshead, in t’blizzard, to get back home. I left them at Settle and walked by the line down to Long Preston. I had half an hour at home before it was time to get ready for next day’s work”.’

It was typical of Jimmy that, although seriously ill, he should offer to help in building Andrew and Louise Sharp's new house, Blashy Nook. Concerned about Jimmy's health, they were inclined to turn down the offer, but Jimmy was insistent and after a day or two helping out, he seemed to perk up from his labours. He was fond of his allotment alongside the former School (his strawberries continue to give fruit for those who took over his plot). The photograph below shows Jimmy and colleagues building the bypass in 1974.



*Building the Stainforth Bypass 1974 - photo courtesy Brenda Greenbank*

#### **Estates broken up ... tourism increases**

Stainforth's last sizeable 'estate', that belonging in turn to Thomas Foster Knowles and his heirs, Vice Admiral Im Thurn and J F Koppell, was sold in 1980. It continued the trend of earlier estate sales, splitting up ownership of the estate into its component parts with a number of houses being sold to the sitting tenants. Since then, there has been some 'infill'—new building within the village boundary. A small number of barns have also been converted to dwellings. Despite this building, the population remains a little over 200, a remarkably consistent figure from the early 19th century onwards, when accurate population figures began to be collected by the census. The exception occurred during the building of the railway when itinerant workers and their families swelled the population temporarily. Second homes and retirement to the country—accompanied by increases in property prices—have become a feature of Stainforth, as elsewhere in the Dales.

Tourism, begun with the coming of the railway, increased significantly with car ownership and rising disposable income, coupled with free time to enjoy a day trip or longer holidays in the country. Increasing mechanisation and the dramatic decline in farm incomes, particularly marked in the last five years, has meant that tourism is now the major industry in the Yorkshire Dales National Park area.

A campaign run by the Friends of the Settle-Carlisle Line, begun in 1984, culminated in success when, in 1989, the then Secretary of State for Transport, Paul Channon, announced that he was turning down an application by British Rail to close the line. The line has continued to justify that decision, providing a link for those working in Bradford and Leeds, while in the holiday season it provides not only the means of travel to holiday venues, but a memorable experience in its own right on one of Britain's most scenic railway routes.

#### **Clubs and events**

A variety of organisations have sought over the years to improve the lot of our inhabitants. The Church of England Temperance Society, formed in 1911, and the Glee Club (a society for singing part-songs), set up in 1912, have long passed into history. We have records that show the Annual Sports was held in Dyer's Field in 1912 and continued in the form of the Stainforth Gala until 1989.

Latterly, the Gala had become a major undertaking with dry stone walling competition, brass band, army display team, fell race, competitions and stalls of all types—more like a small agricultural show than a typical small village event. In 1984, the Gala Committee formed a Wellie Throwing Association with the object of holding a World Championship to publicise the Gala. There was correspondence with the Guinness Book of Records; Dunlop Footwear Limited, which supplied rules; the Duke of Wellington, who



*1986 Gala Princess - Sandra Parrington, attended by Polly Truscott and Jamie Warren  
- photo courtesy Sandra Warren*

(graciously) declined the burden of President of the Association; Terry Wogan, who declined the invitation to open the event citing on his radio programme that as Stainforth did not attend his party he was not attending theirs. Radio Lancashire was asked to publicise the Gala that in 1984 was linked with an exhibition at the school to mark its final closure after a brave struggle to keep it open. Appropriately, Miss Muriel Lowe, the school's head teacher for its last ten years, opened the Gala and other teachers judged the fancy dress competition. In 1986, there was even a display by John Chapman and his collie as 'One man and his dog', although no doubt to save space, they performed with ducks rather than sheep.

Annual outings and Christmas parties for children and the elderly featured throughout most of the 20th century, run by the Mothers' Union or was it the Women's Institute in early days? The Parochial Church Council and Village Hall Committee now collaborate on events like the Harvest Supper and auction in aid of a nominated charity and village hall funds. The annual barbecue, bonfire and quiz night organised by the same committee are also popular, as are the events staged in collaboration with Rural Arts North Yorkshire and sponsored by Craven District Council. The children's lantern-making workshop, combined with a candle-lit procession carol singing and a special church service featuring readings and poems by the children proved especially popular with children and adults alike.

Stainforth is the home of the Guinness Book of Records world's largest dog or rather he was, until he was put on a diet for his health's sake. Known to all as Murphy, this English Mastiff has featured on television and had stud enquiries from as far afield as the United States. Of a placid and friendly disposition—just as well since he is the size of a donkey—he occupies a disproportionate space in his owners' cottage!

#### Today ...

Stainforth at the commencement of the second millennium is very different from the village that was first settled over a thousand years ago, but much has remained the same. Having escaped sprawling development, the old and new buildings still sit snugly beneath the hills that gave shelter to those first settlers, and within the same boundaries shown on the Tithe Map reproduced in this book. Although some people 'commute', many still carry out their work from the village. There are those who have been involved in farming for generations—some of whom have diversified into tourism or have taken on other skills—and some who are taking advantage of modern communications to carry on their trades and professions from home.

In October 2000, the tragic drowning of two Leeds schoolgirls in Stainforth Beck saw the village featured in national media reports of the incident for some days. It was a sad time for all.

At the very heart of the village, crossing the beck on its way to the River Ribble, remain the Stepping Stones—how we wish they could speak!