

Arthur Slack

Arthur Slack was born in 1931 at Reddish Farm in Whaley Bridge. He worked for Mr Lomas at Shallcross Farm near Taxal in his youth before moving back to work on his father's farm and then starting out on his own at Glebe Farm and then moving on to Overton Farm. Arthur is the father of Peter Slack and grandfather of Matthew and Sam Slack who also contributed to this oral history of farming in the South West Peak. Arthur died in September 2018.

Christine Gregory and Sheila Hine talked to Arthur in 2017 about his memories of growing-up and farming in the South West Peak over the past eighty years. This second section covers the period that Arthur spent working for Mr Lomas at Shallcross Farm near Taxal.

PART TWO – Working for Mr. Lomas

I left school in 46. There were 4 lads at home, and obviously we all couldn't stay at home and I went working on a big farm locally. And this farmer had two sons, one a bit older than me and one younger. And we were milking and we'd tie-ins for 72 and we milked about 76, because behind each stall there was a cow tied on the footpath. Do you remember when they used to do that when they were short of stalls?

[That was a big milking herd in those days ?]. Oh it was. We used to milk with 8 units you know and I didn't do a lot of milking cos I was busy mixing corn and feeding and cleaning out all the time. But no, in those days we got up to 24 cans in a day, which you know was a hell of a lot. That was 10 gallons in a can. We had Ayrshires and he used to go to Ayr market about twice in the back end and buy a load of cattle. There was Mr. Lomas and his brother that farmed at Mosley Fenn, and they both used to go to Ayr. They used to drive to Manchester, leave the car and go on the train up to Ayr. They'd have their breakfast in the railway hotel in Ayr, then buy a load of cattle, and they'd come down in the night. They'd come down in a cattle lorry that would turn up about 3 o'clock in the morning with them.

Course, we used to grow a lot of green crops then as well. Cabbages and potatoes and kale and all sorts. It were all labour intensive, yeah. We used to cut kale with a binder and feed it through a chopper into a big wooden silo. That was bloody work you know. We cut kale by hand. I mean, I did cos there was that marrow stem kale with a stem as thick as your wrist and there was leafy stuff. Course you could cut the leafy stuff with a binder you know, and we grew acres of mangolds at this farm. Course it all had to be harvested by hand and then in winter it had to be chopped and mixed with corn.

We grew a lot of cabbage. I think we put in 21 thousand in one year. There used to be a fellow stood in Bakewell market from Stone in Staffordshire. At a certain time of the year he'd be there and his lorry'd be there and it was in bundles of 200 and we used to take them home and chuck 'em in a dolly tub or a bath, cos they were dried out you know. And then we used to set to on planting them in twos. One of 'em had a shovel, dug it in and sort of prised a bit of a hole behind him and you popped it in and stomped your foot on it. That all wanted cutting and carting in the winter-time. We'd feed the whole cabbage to the cows and we'd go between them and drop the cabbages in front of the cows. They'd roll them round a bit in front of them but they cleaned 'em up. They had mangolds and turnips. Course they didn't use them at the same time. They'd use the mangolds then the turnips. And they were covered up for the winter and we had to go and uncover them every day. When the cabbage was done we had to change.

We used to have trucks of beet pulp come into Shawcross sidings. We used to have to cart that home. After they got the sugar out, it came from the factory in trucks. It came up from Bury St. Edmonds and places like that and there'd be nearly a trainload, you know. You could go there and there'd be about 6 farmers carting it. You used to have about 3 loads at a time, about 60 ton. We had 3 traction trailers and carted it and chucked it in to a silo. We had some of those concrete silos. You remember those round concrete silos. We had some of them and we used to chuck it in them. We used to put greedy boards round to make it carry more.

There was a railway station yard at Whaley Bridge. We'd got a big gas works there and a lot of stuff used to come to the gas works and a lot of local coal merchants used to come in there too.

There was the boss Mr. Lomas, and Walter and Dennis, his two sons, and myself worked on the farm, and there used to be a fella would come about 4 hours a day. They worked in the bleach works on 8 hour shifts and they used to come and do 4 hours. There was quite a few of them used to come, one at a time. They probably started coming at hay-making time. They used to muck in you know. There were always a lot of mowing, muck spreading to do and you know there were plenty of work. There was always wheelbarrow work. It was all wheelbarrow work in them days.

Mr Lomas had one of the first muck spreaders. The first lot I ever did, it broke and I thought 'this is some bloody use'. I had to clean it up. Cos a muck spreader is one of them things - they only break down full of muck. I had to fork it all out and find the chain link. But I spread thousands of tons after that. The trouble was we used a lot of bedding, a lot of straw and when you used to set off, you would overload it obviously and a big heap would fall off. And we'd have days where we'd go out muck knocking and spreading it out and layering those big bits of muckheap out.

[How many months were the cows kept in ?]. They always used to say a 200 day winter. Anything less than that was a bonus. The recognised turning out time was 12th of May and I remember because it was the day my brother got killed in an accident, 12th of May. But it sadly started growing forward with fertiliser and that. My younger brother farmed at Bosley. You know, about 16th of April he could turn 'em out down there. Like every day's a bonus if you can get them outside.

I stayed there. The thing about when I went working there, I was amazed how little I knew about farming. You know, I never questioned anything about what me dad did. Cos I thought that was it and there was only that way. And I went there and did things totally different. I used to think 'why have they done that?' And then you realise, there's more than one way of doing a job.

[What would you say your Dad did that was different ?]. Well, we were milking by hand. We didn't have a milking machine. We didn't have electric until 1947 and then we had electric in at home. Of course, we had a big milk round you see. We reared a lot of stock and we had a lot of hens at home and there weren't many of them at Lomas's.

I didn't do a lot of milking. I was always cleaning out and mixing corn and getting hay. You see, hay was loose in them days and there was a great big barn full of hay and I'd have to get a hay knife and cut a big lump out and carry it up to the fodder bin ready for night and so much straw. Cos there was a fair lot of grain and you know we threshed a fair lot and they were fed a lot of straw in them days. It were all jolly hard work you know. Some

people fed them a whole sheaf but that were a waste of time. It goes straight through 'em. You could tell by the muck spreader. You could see the birds following the muck spreader cos it was full of grain. But we used to take grain down to the corn mill and we'd have it rolled or ground depending on what we wanted it for. Very often it were for the horses.

At Lomas's farm, when I went there, there were 16 horses. I wouldn't say they were all working, but a lot of them were and they never seemed to get rid of any. One of the first jobs I had was burning all this harness. You see I had a tractor, a Standard Fordson and in this tractor shed there was harness hung from three walls. And this boss said to me one day 'just get rid of that lot will you?' and of course it were full of grease and oil. He did say 'keep a pair of aims and a collar and plough pads and a pair of reins. Find the best ones of them'.

[When you went there, did you do much horse farming ?]. I didn't do any horse farming. They had a Standard Fordson tractor and then they had a 'sit up and beg' Major 47 when I were there and then they had a little Ferguson while I were there.

At home, I used to deliver milk with a pony and float and we had one more horse. And originally, years ago me father used to hire out a horse and cart to the county council. He employed a fellow that did nothing else. He used to come out at 8 o'clock, take this horse out and he was gone all day and then if me father wanted to use the horse he had to wait to use it until after 5 o'clock. It'd only been emptying grids. You know it hadn't been doing much really. Emptying grids at the side of the road and sweeping. But it was an income.

I worked at Lomas's about two years. I was there 'til I was 20. The milk from there, it went in churns down to Stockport Co-op. It was collected on a lorry. He came in the yard and we had a churn stand in the yard. Fidges used to come and pick it up from Ashford but they went mostly to Stockport Co-op and then they started sending it to express dairy at Wythenshawe.

The biggest problem with the churn job when I were at Lomas's, were short measures. Oh God, it was horrible. The churns, you see, only had a mark on. It wasn't accurate. And of course, anyone that filled a churn full of warm milk, you go back later and it would be down that much. We were sending 24 cans and when they came to tip it and weigh it properly, it was short. And every day we used to get that short measure ticket. I know when I used to go to farmers union meetings it was always the main topic. They used to do trial runs and the farmers would complain and they got down to Stockport and there was a gallon short in the churn from when he set off. They just paid you what they received cos you couldn't really argue with it, because it was on a weighbridge.

We used to spread a lot of lime be hand too. We had those little, what did they call them? It was like a car axle with a disc on top, a car back axle but instead of the prop shaft being forward it stuck up and they welded a big disc on the top. 'Little Herberts' they used to call them. And of course, we used to load the trailer up and it had a centre cone and you stood on the trailer trying to chuck it on the cone and the cone spread it out. This was before we had lime spreaders. And we spread tons and tons of small lime and by night we couldn't see - the eldest lad and me. It didn't do the breathing any good. That's why I've only got 40% now. It was all this dust, it didn't help, it was everywhere. We spread tons and tons of lime and we used to go round with the threshing machine.

There were three lots of threshers used to go round. That was a dirty job as well. There was Horice and Percy Joel. They were butchers off Fairfield and they'd got a set and they

used to bring eight land girls from the hostel for land girls at Chapel. And then old Harold Cartridge at Sparrow Pit, he had one of them in his Grisett. And then there were Jimmy Goddard at Budworth, he had a set. I spent a lot of time with him. He killed himself with a tractor. He pulled it over the top of himself he did. He dived with death always. Some of the daft things he did. But I spent a lot of time with him and I allus fed the drum. You know cos some people they used to drop 'em in - the sheaves and never cut the bands off. And you know the old standard Fordson tractor it would go grrrrr. And all of a sudden it'd gather itself and set off again.

[So no one ever said anything about wearing a mask?]. Oh you never wore masks, no. I mean when you went in the shuppen and there was this white dust everywhere, and they used to block everything up to stop the draughts.

[It used to be lovely and warm in the shuppen in winter?]. Oh it did, oh aye, you get your head on the side of a cow, milking, and you'd soon be asleep. Oh aye, it was lovely them days. Yeah, but I wouldn't go back to 'em.

Anyway, I stopped with Mr. Lomas and I enjoyed it. I had all my meals with 'em, everything, they looked after me. Mrs. Lomas was a lady. She looked after me very well, you know, and I'd three meals a day, every day and you know, she was wonderful. She just treated me like I was one of her own. Cos she had two daughters and another son besides.

I worked half seven 'til about half seven at night. I did six days. I never worked on a Sunday. You know the lads used to say to me at the farm 'what did you do yesterday?' Cos me dad had a milk round I went on that on Sunday and they always had this saying 'Six days shalt thou labour and on the seventh do odd jobs'. Of course, he had three tractors and we'd fill them up with fuel and grease and oil them. You know you were never still. You know farming was a life, you didn't know anything else.

I was involved in Young Farmers and the boss hated me going to Young Farmers and he'd find me any job he could on that night when I were going to try and hold me back, you know. He kept his own family down. He ruled them, you know.

Mr. Lomas was on the War Ag. Committee. He used to go every day looking at farms and telling them what they should and shouldn't do. There was a chap called Bowsmith who was the top man from the Ministry. A big shooting man, he used to go shooting every day but they'd go round and depending how many acres a farm had they'd say you've got to plough so many acres. Well, these people had only got a horse. So the Ministry decided 'well somebody's got to plough this land'. So they got these two fellows and they used to go round ploughing and that. I was tractor mad. At that age, I was about 14 or 15, I were really tractor mad. I used to come home from school, jump on me bike and I knew roughly where they'd be working. I used to go and help them, especially cutting corn.

When I worked for Mr. Lomas, the Ministry came round giving lectures and telling you what to do and what not to do and I went to this one at the town hall at Chapel. Of course, he was always curious to know what had gone on although he didn't agree. We were sat having breakfast the next morning and 'what did you learn last night?' They were talking about winter milk production then. That's when you want to get the milk when the price is better and when it's more needed. I said we were going into this winter milk production getting a calving in August and that sort of thing. He listened to me ranting on and then all of a sudden he said to me 'Arthur, I've never known a cow calf at wrong time yet, and the

other thing is, don't let the others see cos they dry off'. I always remember that. He shot me down right away.

The Ministry came round and this particular meeting I remember. They've got all this foodstuff there; hay, silage, a heap of mangolds and sugar beet pulp. Telling you what to feed. You see, a cow has a maintenance ration to keep it going and it has a production ration depending on how many gallons of milk it gives. And he was telling us how much to give it if the cow gives two gallons. A chap at the back stands up and says 'what happens if it gives three gallons?' and he said 'oh you give it a bit more of this and that'. He got up again 'what happens if it gives four gallons?' and then he got up again 'what happens if it gives five gallons?' Everybody turned round and said 'shut up Harold, you've not got a cow that gives five gallons a day.' You know it wasn't heard of then. These little Irish heifers, if they gave three gallons you were doing well with them.

I stopped there 'til I was 20 and my brother had his fatal accident and I had to come home then.