

## **Bill Brocklehurst**

Bill was born in 1943. His grandfather lived at Oldfield farm and had the grazing rights on 5,300 acres of high moorland around the Cat and Fiddle. As a child, Bill lived at Normanwood farm, then when his grandfather retired, the family moved into Oldfield farm. Both of these farms are situated in the upper Goyt valley. In this section, Bill recounts his memories of the bad winters of 1947 and 1963.

### **Part 3. Winter in the South West Peak**

CG: You're old enough just to remember the big snow of '47, perhaps. Have you got a picture of that in your minds eye?

BB: '47, I can remember we lived at Normanwood and we come out of bedroom window and slid down drifts into yard, because all 'round house were buried. And me dad had a few cows in buildings and he couldn't get 'em out, so he stacked cow muck up at back and it just about covered all windows and everything up before they could get door open for t' get muck out.

CG: There must have been such a lot of losses of livestock then, it must have been huge?

BB: In them days me granddad and me dad, they 'aint a lot of sheep, so they took lay sheep in in t' winter. They used to get a lot out of West Yorkshire. They'd bring all their hogs, the young sheep, down for t' winter. They'd walk 'em from up Holmfirth and there. From Holmfirth to Whaley Bridge must be about twenty-five miles. Each pub had a field where they put 'em in at night and there'd be grass in and farmers 'ud have a few pints and a meal and I believe they had very good dogs in them days, 'cos me dad said most of t' farmers were drunk be time they got t' Whaley. And then they'd bring the sheep, we'd mark 'em up and turn 'em out on t' moor and then them fellas they'd have walk back t' Holmfirth. They paid on what sheep they took back in spring. Anything as died in winter, me granddad didn't get paid for. And they said in 1947, there was hardly anything went back into West Yorkshire. They'd all perished, so me granddad and me dad they'd no income. Ruination.

Julia: Had you got water in the buildings?

BB: No, there was a trough outside and me dad, he carried water in in buckets to the cows, 'cos as fast as he tried to dig doors out and get cows out, it just shut 'em up again.

CG: And there was no emergency relief, 'cos obviously you've got the post war government then?

BB: Mother always had a great big sideboard in front room, choc-a-block full of tins. And they always kept hens, so she had to go neck a hen. They got sheep, so they didn't starve for a bit of meat. An' I can remember walking over to Oldfield, which is next place over, where me granddad lived. Going with me dad and there were some chaps had a sawmill up on Hulme Moor and they'd been digging for days for t' get up to the sawmill. I can remember seeing this gang of men digging this 'ere track out for t' get t' sawmill and I remember next morning me dad telling me mother, for it'd snowed in night and blowed again, he said it all filled in again, so I think in t' end they abandoned it 'til thaw came.

CG: Tom Tomlinson, he was the first national park ranger for the Peak Park, he came from a family of mill workers, and he was one of the trespass people [mass trespass on Kinder]. And when they opened the national park in 1947 or whenever it was, he remembered in his early days with the snows of '47, he was bringing groups of school children out of Sheffield to help rescue sheep and dig sheep out. Tremendous connection between town and country. That was the first job of the national park, and he was involved with that.

CG: So, later on, what was the next big thing?

BB: The next big thing that sticks in ya mind is '63 winter. That was just something. I think it was as long as '47. [Shows us photo] That was me mother at yard gate at Oldfield. There's a Bateson two-cal trailer under that and if you poked a big long stick down you could just touch top of trailer. And that snow drift, it were just like, you know these big long baps ya 'ave for t' stick sausages in. It's like somebody 'ud sliced one in half and plonked it down. It came overnight that did. Quite a lot of fields were bare, it'd blown it off, but it buried awful lot of stuff and the frost! I think it came end of January.

BB: In '63, snow were that hard you couldn't go for t' buried sheep. So, when it started melting a bit, snow went softer, we went and walked all t' gullies and walls. Took ya dog and a stick and a shovel and them that'd already come off, most of 'em, foxes had eaten their ears off and we found 'em as they appeared. We didn't find anything alive. The hefting in 'em had saved a lot of 'em. You know, there were big mortality but nothing near like '47. And it froze so hard with it. I can remember t' council opening Long Hill up, the road between Whaley Bridge and Buxton. And they got a big American Mack wagon with a big butterfly plough on t' front. We could hear this noise, we were outside and we watched. And you could see it come up through Fernilee, up Long Hill and every now and again you'd see a car go down the field what 'ud been abandoned. And he just kept going. Went straight through to Buxton. All t' road signs were gone, miles and miles of curb stones, if there were any abandoned cars they were down in t' field. That were '63 when they opened road up.

BB: At Fernilee Reservoir, obviously it froze that solid and just before they forecast a thaw, waterboard men, they fetched a great gang of men for t' overflow. It were like a big long plate that went into a spill-way, and they had for t' break all that ice. I dunno it were six to eight foot back from t' plate. It was hollow underneath, 'cos they used all t' water. There were no water goin' in. Everythin' were frozen solid. They had t' break it back 'cos they said when all t' snow thawed and came in, if it lifted the ice up and it moved it, it'd take spill-way and it'd rupture t' dam. That were tremendous thickness. And when t' thaw came, when we were all in bed one night, we could hear these great big bangs. Course we thought 'what's that, what's that?' We went outside, could hear it like cannons going off, and it were ice, fracturing on reservoir. And it were sooo loud. When water started coming in at top and it started washing these plates of ice, and they went under one another, and a screaming noise. It went through you, it were like somebody getting an old pan shovel on some tiles and scrubbing it about. And that went on for days. And all this water were coming up and ice were coming down towards t' dam, and as it come down like, it were rucking up like that, [demonstration]. It were weird. We were about quarter of a mile from t' edge of water. We knew exactly what was going on, the whole time.