

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 Fernilee reservoir, which was built in the upper Goyt Valley in the 1930's.

Part Five. Fernilee Reservoir

BB: Stockport Corporation, when they bought the valley that made Fernilee Reservoir, they bought all the farms below the dam as well, so they could have a say-so as to where they wanted to put the pipelines. Then they sorta got bought out by Northwest Water who got bought by United Utilities. In them days, they wouldn't allow any cattle on the catchment area. All farms and houses on the catchment area, they were all moved out and t' farms were all flattened. I think they flattened about thirteen properties in Goyt. They wouldn't have the sewage in case it leaked in t' drinking water, but you could have sheep muck. And they wouldn't have cattle, 'cos cattle were too big and made too much muck. So, you had to work with the water authority and all top end of moor, Lord Derby he rented about two and a half thousand acre grouse shooting rights. So, we worked in with Derbyshire's gamekeepers as well and everybody seemed to get on well. Fernilee were built int '30s.

CG: So, your Mum and Dad would remember this amazing change to the landscape. Did it make them sad?

BB: Everybody in t' area were saddened, because a lot of farming families went phwoop, out you go. 'Cos they compulsorily purchased all this land and all these farms, then evicted 'em all. Some of 'em went into farming, rented different farms and all that, 'cos they were nearly all rented properties, belonged to various estates. And there are still some of t' families about. I don't know how many of 'em still be farming or not.

CG: These are amazing shocks, aren't they? It is kinda the arrival of the modern world, like new water systems, everything changing and a landscape that is totally changed forever. Also, it's where town meets the countryside in a way, because it's the demands of these burgeoning urban areas, like Ladybower and Sheffield, it's the same. And it was happening all over Britain really.

BB: Oh yeh, water was a scarce commodity, and it was accepted. Quite a lot of land as they took belonged to estates. And Erwood especially, that were about on its way out, 'cos they were about dying out. Like Harper Crewe, they were spinsters and bachelors.

BB: The next big thing that sticks in yer mind is the '63 winter. That was just something. 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 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, we could hear it like cannons going off, and it were ice, fracturing on reservoir. And it were sooo loud. 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.