

Harry Gee

Harry Gee was born in 1923 at The Hayes, Reapmoor. His family moved to Ridge Farm, Longnor where he remained for the rest of his life until he passed away in January 2018. In this interview with Sheila Hine in June 2015, Harry describes the long and hard winter of nineteen forty-seven.

Part Two. The winter of nineteen forty-seven

HG: Forty-seven snow; bloomin' heck, I shall never forget that! Phweeh, rationing were still on then. I were going out with June then, forty-seven. I started going out with her in forty-five. And eh, in forty-seven there were nothing going off, nowt went past here, that big snow. These roads, there were no snow blowers and big shovels out of th' quarry then, there werna any, just men. And of course, the men out of the quarries were on the roads, with shovels. Quarries could do nowt, there were too much snow about. The council paid the men to clear the roads.

SH: So, in the forty-seven winter, how did it affect you on the farm?

HG: Well, we were alright, because we'd got pretty well o' fodder. There were some of these places higher up they'd got nowt. They kept managing and managing. This were getting on, and during snow, there'd be three or four gangs of men between Warslow and Longnor, they werna all in one place. And Tom Sutton, he were gangmaster, he were setting em all on and seeing as they'd all got shovels and everything. Well, during night wind'd get up and blow it in again and it would be so much higher the next day for t' throw it out and this went on for quite a bit. I can remember one wagon coming up past here with a load o' fodder on. It were rough, I mean it had only been shovelled out as best they could, and nothing over it. He were rocking about. He did manage to get through eventually. I think it were summat to do with NFU. It went to Walter Cundy's at Hardingsbooth. I think I'm right. And people fetched it from there, with horse and cart or horse and sledge, and anything from there.

SH: Did you manage to get your milk away?

HG: Yeh, we were lucky. Ages and ages you couldn't get down the road here. It was just absolutely full up, below and above. All up main road. There came no end from up Newtown. Mellors come down Big Meadow. In some places on the road, just depending where the wind was, it had blown it off, then they could get down, School's clough, there's a lot of trees, int there? That sheltered it there. Turn in at the green there and come down big meadow. There was nothing on that. Blown it inta road. Went down meadows here and out onto patches, as we call it, over brook, into Holmes yard, up Holmes Drive and yer at factory. And our milk, whoever went past first "Has your milk gone?" I said "No, none yet." "Eh, put it in 'ere." School Clough they'd got a damn good sledge. It were a damn good 'un. They'd fixed some shafts up on it. Whereas if you went down a steep bank, it didna run into t' horse, it got t' bridging strap on, it didna run into t' horse, it held it back. It were fine. Eh, they flitted no end o' milk they did from up Newtown and ours and Brownspit. They picked it up and took it. Ahh, we were lucky.

HG: In that forty-seven snow I walked from 'ere down to Hartington. Philip were back, he were demobbed then, he were back at Hartington running th' job. (shop). Well, he loaded me up with as much as I could carry from Hartington. I had a big dinner bag as I used take t' school with on me back and I had another bag as I were carrying on me hand. And next day, my mother got me some things in a bag, as much as I wanted to carry again and I went up t' Badgers Croft and weren't they just pleased see me! I went from 'ere up big meadow, up Newtown, up to Miss Lomas's. Well, I was going across on the flat there and June met me. She'd seen me, I think she were in kitchen doing sommat, she'd seen me come over th' brow and down th' hill. I'd never been up there for six wik! And I took 'em this stuff. Eh what were there in that bag? I know there were custard powder 'cause they'd got milk. We were trying to think what they'd got and what we could add to it for them to do summat with. Some flour or something like that. Eh, I had as much as I could blinking well carry. There'd be tea and sugar and all that sort of stuff. Course, nobody had never got nowt! And June said that before that, they'd got word somehow that Abley had been round and he'd left a lot of bread at Royal Cottage, 'cos they used to have bread off him, and that were left at Ocker. And of course, June and Dorothy must go up to Royal Cottage and fetch some bread. That were alright. Well, June said "it were nice as they went up", and she says "when we got to Royal Cottage Mrs Brentwood had 'em to have a cup of tea and something to eat before they set off back". Well, she said, "we hadna gone far before it set in a snowing, blizzard", she said "we only just made it". She said "we couldna see where we were going". I don't know if you've ever been out on them higher roads, up there, frightening. It's frightening.

SH: No, not when it's dangerous like that. It is dangerous, isn't it?

HG: And you've got to be very familiar when everything is buried in snow. You couldna see a gate post there, you couldn't see anything on that side that you should see and she said "we nearly panicked". Anyway, they just made it.

SH: What were you like for water here? Did it freeze up?

HG: It froze up, but you had to take care of it. This were the only water we had, this spring, never went dry. But we kept it covered up. Me Dad had got some galvanised sheets or perhaps a section off a collapsed hencote or something. Then some old carpet, or anything to keep wind out and frost out. And that's how we managed.

SH: So, how did you water your cows?

HG: We had to uncover it while they come out and had a drink.