

Carole Dickinson

T: So the date is the 1st November 2017 and we're at Abbot Park Farm talking to Carol Dickinson. Hello Carol (both laugh) so you were just about to tell me where you were born, shall we start with that?

C: I was born in Ulverston on the 4th November 1956 at Oubas Hill, which is now a Youth... well it was a hostel wasn't it but now it's a holiday home.

T: The Walkers' Hostel?

C: The walkers hostel was the maternity hospital.

T: Oh, right okay

C: Yeah, so I was born there and I've lived here all my life.

T: So you were brought from Oubas Hill back to the farm?

C: Yes. And then we went to Colton school and we walked from... we walked to the bottom of the hill and Boyrens at Hill Park they taxied from the bottom of the hill to Colton School.

T: Okay, so how many generations of your family have lived up here on the farm then?

C: My Grandad and Grandma, and my Mam and Dad came here in 1950 and we've lived here ever since.

T: And what... they were farmers?

C: Yes Gran... my Dad didn't stop to farm he then got a wood round and a coal round and spread lime, but Grandad farmed. And then when I left school I stopped at home and farmed with him.

T: So what do you farm mostly up here?

C: er, suckler cows and sheep for meat and wool, but Grandad had dairy cows when... at first when he came here, shorthorns, he had pedigree shorthorns. But the water, cos it's out of the well and that, didn't pass the test, the water tests and that, so he had to give up selling milk and he went onto sucklers.

T: Oh okay. And is it good ground for animals up here?

C: Not really, it's a bit rough (bursts into giggles) but they survive. If they're born here they're used to the ground. But you couldn't fetch animals from down Furness back up here, you should always fetch from your own sort of ground.

T: So for people who don't know what it's like up here, it's incredibly beautiful with fantastic views, but how would you describe the sort of grazing of the fells and what the farm's like generally?

C: Some of the ground, the mowing ground where we get the silage from or hay, it isn't that bad, but the rough grazing and the fell's just rubbish really, it's ... just sort of... they survive. You have to give them more feed, and the grass isn't that good a quality that if you buy in hay or silage it's better quality grass, it has more feed in it than what ours has.

T: Right okay, but they're used to it so you just leave them up on the fells...

C: yeah

T: ... for quite a long time

C: Yeah, they're all right up there till sort of winter... like Christmas time then they start and need extra feed and then through lambing time they have feed and that, and then when it gets to sort of May, June they sort of survive on their own for a bit.

T: Would you say it's a good life? Do you enjoy it up here?

C: Yeah it's... it's what I'm used to, but it's hard work I suppose. If you want to do it you're tied, you can't go away when you want to. But no, I'm lucky to live

up here. It's a way of life and you haven't to want a lot more, you've just got to be satisfied haven't you? So, yeah.

T: Do you mind being up here on your own, cos you're not...?

C: No I like it, I love it on my own (chuckles) I don't have to fall out with anybody then do I? I can tell t'animals what I think and they don't answer me back (chuckles)

T: So you're three generations up here basically.

C: Yes

T: So in that time have you noticed any changes? Changes to the landscape or changes to the lifestyle up here, or is it just exactly the same?

C: Well, we... when I... we got electric in when I was five, I can remember not having electricity. Water's always been a bit of a problem, with the fell you know, with the hot summers and that you might end up with no water but no.

T: What do you do if you don't have any water?

C: You just... (laughs) we always had plenty to drink, you just had to be careful how much you used for bathing or washing and... but you didn't have

electric washing machines that use as much did you? You used to have tumble driers... tumble... twin tubs.

T: So you haven't run out, it just gets a bit low?

C: Just gets low, yeah. But we've put borehole in now so then we've got plenty of water. Our well has never actually, you know, it's never actually run out but you wouldn't have to use a lot a day. You've got to be really really careful.

T: Have you seen many good changes? Can you think of any changes that have happened for the better

C: I don't think things... up here things haven't really changed that much. You don't have neighbours like you used to have. Like my Grandad's gener... when Grandad farmed and his neighbours, like there was Bobby Milburn at Stock and Joe Jackson at Ickentwaite they were... all helped one another, but people aren't like that any more. People keep themselves to themselves, I think they're all just scared that somebody's doing better than them or something and don't want anybody to know what they're doing. I don't know what it is.

T: So there's something missing in the kind of community spirit.

C: Yeah, yeah there is. It's gone. And farms are all breaking up, they're not like they used to be are they? They're all going and off-comers come and it's not the same, and they don't really want country things a lot of them.

People... they're not quite satisfied just with the countryside and wildlife and nature and things are they? They all want more. And they all have to have loads of lights on don't they? They're scared without loads of lights all glaring from their houses round. And then you can be here and you think 'oh somebody's coming, all the lights are coming on so there must be car lights coming up' they've switched all the lights on. (I) Don't like change.

T: Have there been some changes... some bad changes, some changes you're not happy with do you think?

C: Well, no but, it's just me isn't it, and technology and stuff and everybody on smartphones and things like that isn't it?

T: Just very different

C: It's just very different and people don't talk to one another do they really? When people go running or walking or something they have music playing in... don't really see what's going on around them do they? People don't talk to each other as much, people don't care really.

T: What have been the greatest challenges for you living up here then?

C: I suppose money really isn't it? Money. Making ends meet isn't it and thinking... wondering how you're going to... I've been really really lucky cos things have always turned out. Cos you think, you know, I never ever thought I'd probably end up wi' th'farm, but I ended up wi' t'farm. And before I did end up with it you sort of thought, well even if you can afford to buy it, cos I've two other sisters, how on earth are you going to do it up cos it was in such disrepair getting and that. And somehow something always happens and you can manage.

Like we had lost everything in 2001 when Foot and Mouth¹ was, so you got paid out so you got some money. I know it was awful and I kept thinking 'what on earth am I going to do?' cos I'd never done anything, I'd...

T: How many sheep did you lose?

C: Oh (pause) about three or four hundred, and forty cows and calves and... cos all t'cows had just finished calving. And I had land rented off... down at Mearness, so all them went and everything went. And I kept thinking what on earth am I going to do, I've never been out to work before, what am I going to do? And I got this money so then I could buy half o' t'farm off our dad cos Grandad had left me his half, and then I could still... there was grants then for t' barn to be done up and that, so you could start working your way doing that. And I got a job and I went out to work. That's when I opened the campsite cos I got fed up of going out to work and working [*on the farm*] as well.

¹ Foot and Mouth epidemic which lasted for 6 months, Cumbria worst affected county. Hundreds of farms lost all their livestock

T: So did you train as a farmer then?

C: Ooh! (sounds amused)

T: Went to Colton School

C: Yeah I went to Colton School then I left Colton School went to Cartmel School, and after Cartmel School I left and we... there used to be, in Ulverston, down Cavendish Street a café; and you used to go on a Tuesday to the café up above... and quite a few went, and it was day school for Myerscough Agricultural College². So you went every Tuesday and then twice a year you went down to Myerscough for a week, and then you could do your City and Guilds stage 1 in agriculture and then I think next year was arable, but that's... I got fed up so that was as far as I got.

T: So you did year 1.

C: I did year 1, set off on year 2 and didn't finish that because I thought, you know, you go and learn this stuff and none of it was any good for up here.

T: So you did your sheep in year 1?

² Agricultural college near Preston

C: Yeah, we did sheep. We went down there and you sort of milked cows and you fed the calves, and they had loads of pigs and that, and you did that for a week. It was, it was quite... it was good. Yeah, it was good, it was a holiday, yeah (chuckles)

T: You learned about livestock

C: Yeah you learned about livestock and that, and it was all right. So we did that but, yeah, that was in Ulverston, so we did that and I don't know when they packed up doing that.

T: So what age were you if you don't mind me asking, when you came back here and started farming, about 20?

C: No, cos I never went anywhere, I only ever went to day school in Ulverston

T: In the café

C: In the café, then my week, you know, you did a week down stayed there for a week and that was it. So I never went anywhere I always stopped here.

T: So you were just here then?

C: Just here, yeah (chuckles) and I'm still here, never to go anywhere.

Difficulties, not having enough money.

T: But you've always got by

C: We get by, where there's a will there's a way. I hate snow cos you've to try and get things fed and you couldn't get about and then when it melts it was all sludge wasn't it?

T: But you must get snowed in up here

C: Not now we don't, you don't get the same amount of snow. When we were little you used to get snowed in but I suppose vehicles weren't as good then were they to get about in? But you see you didn't have 4 wheel drive the same did you? T'isn't a struggle, t'isn't ... like when we were younger and you only had an old grey Fergie³ or something, you didn't have a quad [*bike*] to go round the sheep on, you had to walk everywhere didn't you? And if a sheep and lamb wanted fetching back you'd to get it back best way you could and if sheep wouldn't follow the lambs when you were carrying them... whereas now, I mean it's a doddle isn't it? They don't know they're born do they a lot of them? But I mean we don't ... round here isn't like, like... it's sort of a hill farm but it's not like if you were up Langdale or something like that is it?

T: No but you've got quite remote ground haven't you up on the top there?

³ Small versatile Massey Ferguson tractor very popular until the late 60s, early 70s, most farms had one

C: Yeah but I still don't think it's anything like if you were going up Coniston Old Man or something. I suppose really we, we're sort of lucky aren't we, in some ways? You know, we don't, we don't get too much snow, we're quite... cos probably we're near the sea really aren't we? And it melts quick.

T: Do you get involved in community life up here?

C: No I don't have time.

T: But you do all sorts in this lovely café don't you?

C: Oh we have coffee mornings for different things, yeah, and if anybody wants to come here we make time, yeah but I don't do... don't do social. I'm not very dependent. [*dependable?*] If you have something and you're meant to go to it every week then I get fed up after the first night, I think 'oh why have I said I'd do this? (chuckles)

T: But I mean you do... you do stuff for some functions and things

C: Oh yes, we'll do that. I just meant if you... like being a member of the WI or something like that I couldn't (chuckles), or anything like that. I'm not... I just don't, just don't need it. Some people have to have something to go to don't they?

T: Mm

C: ...and like joining in things, but I'm just quite happy on my own. Everything I need's here. My big deep freeze, full of food (sounds amused).

T: What do you think we've lost in what I call the Rusland Valley?

C: We've lost like families really haven't we? When Stephen was small, my son, he went to Satterthwaite school and there was about forty something children there. And all the families got together at different events at different times of the year and that and it was really good. But there isn't that now, I think there's about two children in Oxen Park. And even young people under twenty five, cos they can't afford to come back. And the parents when... as soon as the children sort of left Satterthwaite school and went to Ulverston school they all sort of moved into Ulverston so they didn't have to run up and down after them. Cos their jobs, cos I suppose ... when we were young, people worked on the forestry. People worked in the forestry commission. Cos when I was sort of ten or eleven and they used to come in the wagons and they'd get out of the wagon and walk down the field and into the wood and spend a day thinning and whatever, and there'd be about a dozen men but...

T: Was that all by hand?

C: That was all by hand yeah. And then they used to have them on fire watch as well, they used to sit with the beaters in towers somewhere dotted about in

case there was going to be fires if it was dry summers. There's none of that now is there?

T: Well Mike was telling me about all the different people who used to come round the valley, all the tradesmen and...

C: Yeah, we had the Co-op van on a Thursday night and there was Bennet's [*baker?*] out of Ulverston up Soutergate, they used to have a van and come round on a Tuesday night. Yeah and there was Harold Hutchinson [*butcher*], he used to come on a Friday night or alternate dinner times one week and... yeah, they all used to come round when we were little. Tysons from Backbarrow, they used to come, we didn't have them but they used to come to the house down t' road. Cos Angela out...on the house just down t' road, she had a load of henhouses out on the fell, there was about twenty of them, and she used to have loads of eggs. And they used to be... like school bus used to come up on a Saturday, we used to call it school bus, and we used to go to Oxen Park and you could get 9 o'clock and come back about 1 o'clock.

T: And that would take you to Ulverston?

C: That would take you to Ulverston yeah. But that doesn't... I mean you don't even have a school bus any more do you? They go in taxis now don't they for t' few there is? Cos we, when we went to Cartmel school Les Sproat taxied from the bottom of the hill then you used to catch the Ribble bus at

Haverthwaite crossroads and then you used to go round by t' dolly blue⁴, which isn't... it's not there now. And t' bobbin mill down in Spark Bridge⁵; Angela gave up having her hens and went to work in the bobbin mill at Spark Bridge. And from Colton, when we were at Colton school we went swimming to Grange baths on a Monday with Penny Bridge school. So that took all Monday up.

T: yeah. So now you've got your son Stephen up here

C: yes

T: And little...new family

C: And his partner Karen and Rosie, she's nearly three.

T: Do you think they'll stay up here?

C: Stephen wants to but he can't afford to give up his job. He'll have to see how they can manage.

T: Would he like to take the farm over?

⁴ Reckitts blue works in Backbarrow where blue additive for washing powders had been manufactured since the 1890s, it closed in 1981 .

<http://www.cumbria-industries.org.uk/a-z-of-industries/chemicals/backbarrow-ultramarine-works-company/>

⁵ Mill where wooden bobbins were manufactured for the spinning/textile industries, closed in 1983

C: He wants to yeah. But he likes to spend as well, he likes new toys to play with on the farm. So you can't have everything can you?

Yeah, campsite... I was potting shrimps, (chuckles) I was potting shrimps and I got fed up of doing that so I opened a campsite and decided that that was no good because it wasn't all year round, so we'd have to have some camping barns. So camping barns were built in 2012 and they've been really good, yeah, it's all-year-round income. Tea room's quiet at times, I think people like to fetch their own things with them when they're camping and that. I think things are getting harder aren't they? Incomes aren't going up. I think things are getting harder for people, they don't have as much...

People are wanting to do more things and spend less money. You find there's the sort of really really rich isn't there, and then there's the just ordinary people. When I first opened the campsite and tea room it was really busy, but then about three years ago, or maybe four now, things changed and people really started watching what they spend.

T: Do you ever think about diversifying what you're doing here and doing local meat or you know, your own lamb or something, would that bring people in?

C: No. Too expensive. People... I ... you listen to people when they're in here and nobody seems to want to pay more than ten or eleven pounds for a main meal. But if you go to a butchers or whatever and you get a piece of steak you pay £8 for a piece of nice steak, or £9 don't you? Then you've to take it home and cook it, and then you've got the VAT on top of it. So, how can they expect something like that for £10? And then they were saying something like fifteen,

sixteen pounds was getting a bit expensive, well to me, if you're going out, fifteen, sixteen pound is normal. And I think you get southerners... whether there's a lot more cheaper places to eat in cities, I don't know but when they come out to the Lake District a lot seem to think it's far too expensive. I had some people, four lads from Blackpool, th' other week and I was saying did they come to the lakes and they said 'no because it's cheaper to get on a plane and go to Prague or somewhere for the weekend'. Or... wherever, it's cheaper to do that than come up... come to t' lakes, and they only live in Blackpool.

T: So do you ever think about the future up here then or do you just...?

C: Oh I dread to think

T: As you're getting on

C: I dread to think what'll happen. You look around and it's not only round here, how everywhere's falling to bits. All the farms are falling to bits, the land's falling to bits. You don't really see anybody working out in the fields any more.

T: What do you mean the land's falling to bits?

C: Well the... all the... like you go out of Bouth on the causeway, it's an absolute tragedy isn't it? It's just covered in rushes. When I went to school that was mown but now it's like waterlogged and it's just a mess.

T: So we don't take ... we don't look after the land in the same way?

C: No, it isn't looked after in the same way is it? And all the... you know, a lot of hedges have gone. Well a lot of the trees, a lot of the forests have been felled and a lot of them aren't being re-planted are they? They're meant to be re-generating themselves and they just end up a mess. They're not looked after not like up in Scotland, they're all tidied and cleaned, and re-planted and looked after. But round here they're not. Nobody has any pride any more, no. And all the ESA⁶ money, environmental scheme money and stewardship money and all t' rest of it: you were given money to put the wall gaps and everything back up and look after hedges and things, and look at it all, it's not being done is it? It's awful, and it's not only round here. It must be about ... I don't know, twenty years ago like, you went... to in Yorkshire they were all given... if they wanted to put... to do all the barns up in them fields, which are beautiful, and you go...

T: to do them up as barns?

⁶ Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme, began in late 1980s. A rolling agreement for individual farms lasting 5 or 10 years with annual payments to encourage farming that preserved or enhanced the unique features (e.g. woodlands, walls, meadows, traditional buildings) of the area and discouraged land-use or inputs that might be detrimental to these aims.

C: Yeah to put them back, one or two they did let them turn them into camping barns and things as long as they didn't change the outside, and they weren't allowed to put electricity and that in them, they had to leave them basic which one or two did. But if you go back now not many have had either any creosote or anything, and a lot of them are starting to fall back into disrepair. And it's like everywhere, what is... the average age of a farmer's about sixty eight or something (chuckles). Something... not that old maybe but it's somewhere up there, and whatever part of the country you go to, probably anywhere in the world really it's the same isn't it? Everywhere is going backwards because nobody really wants to take on what generations have done before and all the work ... you know, you look out up these fells and all them walls that there is all around don't you? And, how them people must have worked cos they didn't have tractors or helicopters to drop stuff off did they...?

T: No

C: ... when they were doing it. Younger ones don't... it's all throw away, nobody wants anything that lasts. Cos I know, I must have been about 40 maybe and you listened to people that were all retiring in their 50s, and so their children can't have been that old can they? Would they be sort of, not even 30 maybe, or some a lot younger, and they have been brought up to a life of leisure, that people don't work. And people don't think of working any more now do they? Everything's leisure time, nobody wants manual work, it's all got to be like office work or something hasn't it, or they can work from home. And everybody wants loads of leisure time don't they? Nobody ...

people aren't committed any more are they? And also nobody seems to be very happy, nobody enjoys their work really. It's very rare you get anybody that enjoys what they're doing do they? And so that's why they don't want to go to work they want more leisure time don't they, or they're not really interested how they do the job maybe.

And you see everybody's meant to be the same aren't they? They don't... you're not meant to be... (chuckles) like we went to school and there was like brilliant ones and remedial slow ones and whatnot but everybody knew where they were and what they could do and accepted it didn't they? Everybody can't be the same whereas today everybody's meant to be the same aren't they? And there's not competition. But you see, you knew that you weren't clever so you'd have to do something with your hands or something didn't you?

T: And there's nothing wrong with that either

C: And there's nothing wrong with it. Everybody... I mean everybody can't be the same can they, everybody can't be equal. Everybody has to... I mean I don't see why if you're a cleaner and that you should be tret⁷ any different to anybody that's really... cos everybody has to do a job don't they? That's wrong if people don't accept people as equal. So there's different people, but some people don't think like that do they? But that's what's wrong with this world isn't it? (chuckles)

⁷ treated

T: So listen are there... is there anything we've missed are we... can you remember any interesting characters that used to be around?

C: Oh Charlie Ellwood

T: Go on tell us about Charlie Ellwood

C: Well he used to go about when it was dark, bless him, with his Tilly⁸ lamp and his sack round his shoulders and his calves on his helters (*halters*).

T: Where was he from?

C: Down in Oxen Park, he lives, he lived at Greenbank Farm. And he always kept a pig and Grandad used to go around killing pigs (chuckles) so he used to go and kill it for him when it got time to be killed. And then when you used to go and cut it up he'd get his rum out did Charlie and you had to have a glass of rum before you started chopping it up, yeah.

T: And he used to walk round the area...

C: He used to... yeah and he used to walk his cows to Ulverston when he wanted to sell 'em, on a helter, yeah. And you'd look out of the bedroom window at night and the whinny⁹ bushes'd be... cos he used to have the field

⁸ Paraffin lamp that gave a bright light

⁹ gorse

down across there and he'd set fire to the whinny bushes at night, and you'd look out at night at t' fire and you'd think 'oh, it's only Charlie'. Yeah. And he had a little field up past us, it was a garden, Burns's garden, and he kept two or three calves in there every now and again. And he used to get his bucket of water out of the well to mix his porridge... well it was brown mealy stuff and you put water on it and mixed it up for the calves. He used to keep a lot of geese and turkeys down on t' bottom o' t' fell and they used to get pinched before Christmas cos they'd fattened up, somebody knew he... you know, they must be getting ready, they'd go and get them, one or two years he lost them.

T: (sympathetic) Oh

C: Yeah

T: Oh that's so sad.

C: It is, and he lived with his ... don't know whether it was his brother or his cousin, Ted. And he tried singing as well but that wasn't so good. (wheezy chuckles)

T: So he had a sack round his shoulders?

C: Yeah, he used... when it was raining he used to put a sack round his shoulders, yeah.

T: And a Tilly lamp.

C: Tilly lamp yeah

T: How long was he around? When did he...?

C: I can't remember when he died. But Ted died when I was about seventeen, and Charlie lived quite a bit after him. But there's a book¹⁰ somewhere with a photograph of him, but yeah, that was Charlie. And then there was Norman at t' bottom of the hill, he was... Norman Allonby, he was related to Jack and them. He used to... he used to come out when you were waiting for t' taxis or something and talk to you and show you his photographs... old photographs of when they were charcoal burning and that, yeah.

T: Cos he was a woodsman was he?

C: Yes, he used to work with Jack now and again. Not all t' time though I don't think, cos I think before Procters [Proctors?] moved to Bandrake Head Farm they farmed there so they were probably farmers. And then when he retired he got t' cottage at the bottom of t' hill that's now empty. There was Chadwick's lived at Oxen Park and they used to make swills, can't remember the name of their house in Oxen Park, but they were two brothers. And then they left Oxen Park and went to live at Lowick, on Lowick Common, it was a

¹⁰ The Road to Paradise : Irvine Hunt

white house after Esps Farm, and they went to live there, cos I can remember going with Grandad to get a swill cos he put his silage in it to feed cows.

T: Did they make baskets then?

C: Yeah. Only... well only the swill ones they made, they didn't make any other sort of baskets no, just did swill making.

T: Is there anything else we should talk about do you think?

C: (small sigh, suppressed chuckle)

T: Anything else you wanted to have a chat about or...?

C: No probably you've got a load of rubbish (suppresses laughter)

T: It's been great, thank you very much

C: Thank you.