

## Rusland Horizons Oral History Project: Interview with Zella Slater

Thursday 13th July 2017 and we are in the home of Zella Slater who lives in Oxen Park and I am Carol McNeil with Roger Layfield who is recording.

Carol: First of all Zella can you give us a little bit of background when you came to Oxenpark with your family.

Zella: I moved here when I was nine (1951). Me dad had been working in the woods up Dale Park and he'd seen this house had come to let and he had just changed to a coal business and he was just starting up a coal business and he came home to my mum who was living in a little pokey cottage and said how would she like to live in a five bedroomed house. Mother was astounded of course. Five bedroomed house turned out to have four very small bedrooms and no water but we were used to not having electric, we had light here. We had one socket I think in the two or three rooms downstairs - not much more but we did have electric and I can't remember how long it was till we got water but we used the pump outside the front door beside the post office to get the water. Mam was very pleased to find that there was a shop that went with it which was running the post and we sold tobacco, ready marine twist if I remember right, and cigarettes - I can't remember which ones - and sweets, Bluebird toffees were the ones I remember best and biscuits Macvities and possibly Macfarlane but there was two sorts. Mcvities have taken over and I never hear of the other one. McVities were the main ones and the travellers use to come to the shop and get Mam's order and I don't know how often but that is how we first came.

Carol: In the village were there any other shops?

Zella: No. Mrs Casson had run the Post Office for 45 years. My mother ran it for 42 years so she didn't quite make it. She ran it till she was very nearly eighty and the only reason I encouraged her to stop rather than carry on from the September to the January till she was eighty was because every Post Office, every Post Office in the whole area apart from hers had been broken in and I didn't want it to end like that for her so thought better get her stop before it happens. It was such a real problem that the Post Office put us two lines in. There was a line for them privately and a line, that happened later of course, not at the beginning and now it means that our telephone comes into the upstairs instead of the downstairs because they did away with one and did away with the downstairs one.

Carol: Can you tell me a little bit about as young girl of say nine to fifteen you remember how it was living here.

Zella: Well the telephone kiosk was very important because very few people had telephones. We had because we were the Post Office but we shared it with the telephone box which was quite interesting at times because our calls could be heard in the telephone and if we so wished we could lift up the phone and hear the telephone box. When it rang in our house it rang in there and vice versa because my friend Mary Watson as she was then wanted someone to phone her and she had given them the telephone box number and she was waiting outside and I was waiting for a call from Frank and I asked it first. (Zella laughs) much to Mary's surprise (Zella laughs again). But that was still going on when I er was eighteen - it was still a party line with the box when I was eighteen. Um there were a few children my age in the village funnily enough cos it seemed to go in gaps of about ten years really. There was Myras just the same age as me and Mary Gibson who was very similar age - Barbara Bell was slightly older John was a year younger, there was Raymond

Allonby who er he was different, he was two or at least three years older and I can't remember other than what there was when I moved here.

Carol: Did you all go to the same school?

Zella: Yes. We walked up to Colton

Carol: Walk across the fields

Zella: Er we would walk across the fields if it was, er nice, but we did use the road as well according to I suppose the weather and things. Yes we did go across the route and that path um it the one I was saying was I understand was this is my understanding was a coffin route and at one time you could tell the path quite clearly but of course now you can hardly pick it out at all - there was a definite track certainly across the first field the big hill field which also had a hedge removed as well.

Carol: So that was er that was the coffins from Oxen Park

Zella: I assume so - er it was just really a right of way but it was one that was considered easy enough to carry a coffin, I suppose. I don't really know what a coffin is route other than perhaps a traditional way of taking a coffin from here to the Church but I but don't know for sure because when I knew it there was a little kissing gate, well there was one or two little gates so wouldn't have got a horse that way but um whether they carried I don't know because that hearsay at times as I am concerned.

Carol: So do you remember. were they using horses for farming

Zella: Oh Myras was - he didn't get a tractor until um young Myras who is my age - that means now he is seventy five - er was fifteen - and then his father decided that he would move forward and he got a tractor then but not until Myras left school until then it was - I don't know whether it was one or two horses - and there were other farms that kept the horses as well as the tractors - but just immediately round here Myras was the only one who only used horses as far as I can remember.

Carol: And when you came was the forge working as er a horse like as a farrier

Zella: No I think Myras would have done an odd horse there - certainly when I first come here he would have maintained his own horses, I don't think he was doing much smithing for anybody else I think he would be looking after his own horses and I think I have seen that but um I don't think he would be doing anybody else's horses so it wasn't in very much use - the smithy we called it.

Carol: So thinking again about you walking to school and sometimes over the fields um can you tell us how you have noticed the changes over the years of the landscape of the field patterns.

Zella: I remember walking to school um in the Spring. We looked for the primroses and there were primroses along the road but also one of the field hedges was always very good with primroses and the corner where the Oxenpark sign is always had the celandines there. That is going back for a very long time um the hedges er across from Stoney Lane had very high very high always had high hedges and there weren't layered like the others - I think they have been cut down

sometimes now but for a long while they were never cut for some reason I don't know why. Maybe it was the farmer and the wild flowers I remember but the roads were trimmed back but they would be done with a Lengthsman then which I don't remember much about but that's how it was done so they didn't ever grow so right out into the roads now and when we walked across the fields the only reason I remember the field pattern is that my Grandma once pointed out as we were walking to Church because it was a regular Church way of going was that path and looking down the fields she said look how they look like patchwork and I remember looking at them and seeing and they still comparatively little fields compared to some places - but there were a lot more hedges then - a lot - the fields have been opened up a lot - they were little fields then. The one you walk through to the Church was always quite a big one but you tell there had been more hedges.

Carol: I think that's a very distinctive change on the landscape. Can you remember any other changes while you have been here

Zella: I suppose there is a bit more post and fencing the main changes is when you go er behind the smithy and down towards Longmire that was all open - all open

Carol: Was it all open when you came?

Zella: It was all open then and you could take a line from the top of the hill to New Close Gate across and to Longmire - and straight down to Longmire you could do it - it was a bit of a mess in the middle where the little beck went across because it went a bit puddley there - in the end we didn't use unless it was very dry - but it was never fenced and it never had much growing on it - didn't seem to have a lot of bracken either it just seemed to just rough grass.

Carol: And as children did you feel you could just wander around everywhere?

Zella: Oh yes and we played down Robin Haw? but the bank just down there you know where the Hooping Pool is or was, where they put the cart wheels in to cool them when they were doing the cart wheels just down there - well the bank across didn't have trees on then and er we use to make bracken houses that was a great thing - even the boys use to make their own dens - we use to put sort of sticks into the wall and cover with bracken and sort of supports and make these bracken houses - some people called them baby houses but we didn't like that. The other big big change is that Robin Haw and that bank must be one of the few places in the country that is naturally regenerating. There wasn't anything like the same amount of trees - there was one or two big trees which occasionally people use to fell for fire wood because it didn't seem to belong to anybody so who decided what and when to fell a tree I have no idea they just felt like it and decided which one they would have - I don't know but it completely looks different now and I don't remember the bluebells on the fell when I was young and there is big patches on the fell now - you must have seen them but I don't remember them at all. And the tarn - Nanny Cote - was quite a lot bigger and er much more water in it - and I remember Dick Burrows saying it is naturally filling up how tarns do and he said if it doesn't get cleaned out it will just fill up and it's in the process of doing that.

Carol: Mm that's the little tarn just over the back of Robin Haw.

Zella: Nanny Cote - we use to go there use to go there to escape not that I ever liked sliding on ice as I didn't but the others use to scurrel we called it scurrelling across and which meant you take a

run and you go straight across the whole thing and er tadpoles were of course we went to look for tadpoles there - I never ever strayed that far - er Nanny Cote and Robin Haw beck was an adventure - occasionally to go to the top of the hill and there was a reservoir there and it was a concrete block um with water inside I suppose and for a long time from here you could see the railings but at the top and of course you could go and have a look at that but that was quite an adventure to go that far or maybe I was lazy I don't know.

Carol: That's gone now

Zella: Yes there is no trace of it now - I know where it was but no - I suppose it would go when they built the one at um at the to of Bessie and brought the water from over there but it did come from the top there.

Carol: You mentioned about the natural regeneration of trees um have you noticed a change changes in the presence of woodland and forests.

Zella: Well thats a big change because there is wood there that did not use to be - I don't know much else - I mean the wood further over had been felled but it is still a wood - it is still growing again - Bessie Wood was planted with conifers at one time it has been felled and it's beginning to regenerate - do remember red squirrels were much more common of course - haven't seen one for a long time now - perhaps ten years since I saw a red squirrel up there - seen grey ones but not reds and I don't remember but there might have been I don't remember the roe deer in the fields coming right up to the houses like they do now but we get the roe deer just in the field round about at times not all the year round but we do get them and I don't remember that but it doesn't mean that they didn't - it just means I didn't notice things very much when I was a child.

Carol: What about other sort of wildlife of birds and ...

Zella: Lot more hedgehogs - don't see many hedgehogs now - and am afraid once the cars got going you used to regularly see squashed hedgehogs so much so that when Irvine Hunt lived here he wrote a poem about the sad fate of hedgehogs and the Corn Crake - I remember the Corn Crake when I first came but I couldn't tell you how long but I do remember it but I didn't realise that it was a rare thing then. I have always liked to hear the Curlew and it doesn't seem quite as many as there use to be but when the Curlew come it was the sign of Spring - um that was the one for me was when the Curlew first started calling and I am sure we had more Cuckoos but we still had a Cuckoo - but they use to seem to be a few calling then. As regards the birds in the garden I think we have more variety than then. Grandma always fed the birds - we found the Wagtails came to the front and never come to the back but because we hadn't windows out the back we didn't see the back that much and Chaffinches and Wagtails and Sparrows were the main thing. I don't remember all the other little birds - at the back now we get Gold Finch and Green Finch and Siskin- they're regulars and we get a few other visitors like the Woodpecker. I remember seeing Green Woodpecker but now it's the Pied Woodpecker now we get but I do remember seeing Green Woodpecker flying over and of course they're on the fell. Use to be Yellow Hammers you could hear them every time you went down umm Robin Haw and through the lane to follow the beck they used to be there in those fields - there used to be Yellow Hammers always there - and further on you would hear the Stonechats and I haven't heard them for a long time - but you still get some of the Warblers, I didn't know them then - my Dad used to call all Warblers Millicums which I thought was a very good name for them but it just mean't a little bird he didn't know - well he thought I suppose they were all the same bird as far as he was concerned. And I think we

always had Dykies which were Hedge Sparrows but this might be North Cumberland dialect I don't know but Dykies is what I know it as because that was Dad's name for it.

Carol: When your parents came in the Post Office and the Shop you must have met a lot of like local farmers and families coming in. Do you remember any particular characters?

Zella: Oh Myras was a character alright and so was Henry Fenton Watson, which we knew as Harry, Harry Watson that was the Watsons now er that came that live here now they use to come occasionally I don't know whether he came so much to the Post Office or called out for other things. Later on Dad sold grocery stuff so people came for things like that. Myras if he came about anything er you never asked him what he wanted cos he would probably go away without telling you then he would come again another day - but you just leave him and er he would get round to it probably the last thing before he went but if you asked him um what he come for you would never found out - so that was a quirk of his - he had quite a wicked sense of humour had Myras. Harry Watson but a lot - he was for a long long time a tall and fairly thin man but he did put a lot of weight on at the end - er he came once and sat in an old American rocking chair that mam had which was all wooden and lots of little joints and it must have dried out with sitting in our kitchen in all that time and Harry sat in it and he was chatting away because he was great one for talking about old times er was Harry that was one thing he did do a lot and he was talking about something and this thing decided to collapse and he couldn't do anything about it but it just folded round him and he was sitting in a heap of sticks on the floor (Zella laughs) - he wasn't hurt he went down very slowly but it certainly stuck in my mind (Zella laughs again).

Carol: So you said he talked about old times

Zella: Oh he was full of tales like that - can't really honestly really remember any - I think the saddest thing was that Tom (*Watson*) told me that he never saw that side of his father - he never talked to them or not to him like that because he was the youngest of course and he would have been interested but he said he never saw that side of his father which I thought was quite odd but perhaps how it is you know.

Carol: You mentioned your grandmother - did she live here with you

Zella: Yes she use to sit in the corner doing usually knitting er often knitting lace and as she got older er she was always quite a difficult lady lets put it that way. Er there was a Mrs Lindsay called Tamar Lindsay that use to come over and sit and talk to her and Tamar used to sort of lean back and talk with her eyes shut and Grandma use to talk about one thing and Tamar use to talk about another and they quite happily have a conversation for an hour without either of them talking the slightest bit of notice of what the other one was saying and that way they got on cos they had very different opinions about things. Tamar was a character she kept Houdan Hens - I have no idea where the connection comes from but she looked exactly like them - she had a shock of white hair and quite a sharp nose that use to get quite red in the winter or sometimes in the summer and she kept these hens where Chris's bungalow is now (*Borran*) and that was really like a rubble heap and I didn't know for a long time the rubble was when they took they took the top off the barn where the Cart House is now when you first remember it it was a flat garage wasn't it we called it the Manor Garage, but it had been a big barn and I don't know how high because it wasn't there when I came but the rubble had been just tipped on that land and a few people had wanted to do something with that land and they never let them - Bob - Bob Bell wanted to make a garage there but they wouldn't let him and a few people wanted to and for a long time they wouldn't let them

touch it and then for some reason and I don't know why some people got planning permission and I cannot remember the name of them - er a couple with three girls the last one was born when they were here - not Bennett before them - and they got planning permission and they sold it to Chris (*Hill*) - Chris would remember the name of them. But the other thing I remember from a child was um the parties at the Manor. We use to have two big buses come regular - sometimes twice a week - quite often er once but it wasn't unknown to have twice a week, and Mrs Park use to do dinners and they were usually functions where people came had a dinner and perhaps spent the rest of the evening. I don't think they would have music so I don't think there was that but um there would um I don't know some societies I don't know what er would book the Manor and she was famous for making the meals and there was big buses use to park along the wall by the Manor - er that was a regular thing when I was very young.

Carol: So we have covered quite a lot now which is really very good Zella - um we have a little bit of the village - the surrounding immediate countryside which really changes - um a little bit about the natural re-generation and wildlife, birds... Is there anything else that you think about particularly with the landscape or farming practice.

Zella: Mrs Lindsay kept hens like I said er we kept hens and geese in the orchard out the back. Charlie (*Ellwood*) had little huts dotted around the fell but so did Jim Chadwick and they both use to both go and er have hens and geese down there. The geese use to petrify me and later on not my children but Margaret Hind's children as they were then certainly Johnny but they kept the all around the beck was short grass and that was entirely due to the geese - I didn't realise for years that was why it was, but it was the geese that kept it down. I think the geese were all Charlie's but Jim Chadwick definitely had two or three hen huts and they just seemed to put them I have no idea how they chose where to put them but they were just dotted across the fell and some of them would have quite a walk sometimes would have quite a walk um to them. There might have been more people that kept hens I don't know but that was quite er usual and I think we were the only ones we once or twice kept pigs um but I don't think many other people in the village - I don't remember anybody else other than the farmers and Charlie of course cos Charlie had a pig - pig killing was quite an occasion when he ventured that far.

Carol: Did you hear the pig ever?

Zella: Oh when we had a pig killing here it was a very very busy time I don't remember the actual pig killing but the kitchen would be full of awful things boiling which was turned out to be brawn or potted meat and lots of lovely sausages of course and the hams were hung up to dry and where my toilet and er washer and all that is there was sconces that were for for salting the pig er before it was hung up and hooks where they were hung are still there - used to be difficult to get down the lobby when there were one hung at either side you know - but there you go - Um so yes we had bacon and sausage which was fine, pigs trotter and brawn were not. Carol laughs

Zella - not as far as I was concerned

Carol - And did people who had pigs did they butcher their own pigs or did you bring someone in

Zella - Yes and Charlie did for quite a long time well I don't know whether he did his own but it would be just be somebody he would know who would do that - I mean for a long time um um Harold's family I think his father use to come and do the pig killing - I mean my Dad didn't kill his own pig um but I think it would be Harold's father that would do it then. Latterly I think it was it

would be somebody else because Charlie had a pig for quite a long time but yet you have to get - I don't whether you had to then but people did - did get someone who was usually a butcher.

Carol: When I came here Charlie was getting quite old and but I know he had geese and a cow was he a sort of distinctive solitary peasant farmer or were there others like him?

Zella: He was a bit one on his own he did have a brother when I knew him first who was also a quieter unusual character but they lived just on their own um but there was a lot of little farms - more little farms than very little farms now but just managing but um I don't think there was many quite as eccentric as Charlie - er there was er Mr Redhead up at Side House there was Mr Shuttleworth at Bandrake where Myras is now Chadwick I don't think he ever had what you called a farm he just had the hens as far as I know but yet I think the little farm the one at Colton was very little er at the times well at Dixon's - I don't know I think a lot amalgamated but I didn't take enough notice of things like that when I as a child.

Carol: So is there anything else that you want to tell us?

Zella: The village room was quite a busy place in those days - there was the Women's Institute that Myras called the 'Wild Indians' and the Mothers Union which of course got 'Mother's Onion' and lots of other things - whist drives were held there regularly - it might have been through the Women's Institute but I do remember them putting plays on er and one time it was where two or three did a little play and they were judged and things like that and I just I thought I remembered it being extended I think it was extended just after we came that was I don't think it was just before but that was very new, and I know I had my 21st Birthday party there - yes it was quite a hub in one way although I don't think I ever used it all that much but er it was certainly quite a main thing really. And of course people didn't go - it was a funny village as regards the pub - because I only remember er when I first come Bob, Bob Bell, being a regular man going to the pub - I don't think any of the others went every week which is I suppose is unusual because usually villagers do go but not from this one

Carol: And that was the pub – Bert's little bar at The Manor?

Zella: The Manor yes, the little tiny Manor

Zella: It was more the other men in the village weren't pub goers um I think it was an unusual village that way. One other thing I can think of is the Church Fete was also very important and Mrs Burrow which is Dick's mother, my mother, Mollie Jackson and anybody else, Mrs Allonby, Norman Allonby's mother from Bandrake Head, a lot of people would do a lot of work making things and they made quite of knitted lace, crochet lace put onto things like pillow cases and sold the church fete people were working towards it most of the year and as well as the baking they did a lot of handiwork for it. Mrs Burrow did a lot of tatting she was a very clever lady was Mrs Burrow and she used to make dishes which she starched with sugar and then sort of varnished so they were crocheted dishes - they were very pretty and but she did lots of things for the church and there was others I just don't remember who but a lot of the ladies would be working for this, possibly through the Mother's Union but I don't know for sure which was quite a busy thriving society at the time.

Carol: Tell me a little bit more about the school Colton

Zella - Oh yes, Miss Snaith lived at the school house which is just down from it er she was the Head Mistress and we had one other lady Mary Barr - Mary Barr from Torver - and she could drive - she had a little car she use to come in a little car - and that was the two school teachers. There was a big iron stove at one end and I remember the windows always being too high to look out of I suppose - that was to keep our minds were they should firmly be and er Miss Snaith had the innovation of us of having an exchange sports day with her brother's school was at somewhere near to Southport so that was a big day out and then the next year they would come to us. I hated sports day they were always cold and uncomfortable (Zella laughs) - but that was me - I think other people enjoyed it and our nature walks were exactly that - we didn't have school trips we did have nature walks where we all trooped out and Miss Snaith did her best to tell us about what was around us. She had one very unfortunate time when we sat - that is a little wood that's gone - it was where the car park is now for the church and going along there there was trees there - we all sat down in the wood to be told about something and it was completely distracted by one little girl getting ants in her pants which was fascinating for everybody (Zella laughs) and the whole thing broke up in a bit of a mess (Zella laughs again). Wet days weren't good either because the poor lady was trying to get everything dried off and there was the dreadful time when a spate of diarrhoea hit the school and Miss Snaith was quite beside herself as you can imagine. And the other thing from school we use to have school dinners and the one I remember the most vividly was Mr McKenna who was the delivery, came in one day looking quite excited and he put down the big canister of hot food and he stood to attention and said 'The King is dead, long live the Queen' and Miss Snaith went ooh and she got all the children round her and we stood and stood to attention because that was how we found out the King was dead and he saluted you know stood there, and that of course made an impression. The other thing was we did plague her at times because she had bell she rang when we came in and occasionally we would stray beyond hearing the bell and er she wasn't too happy about that and then we would be told we hadn't to go out - it wasn't tarred but it was sort of rocky bit er it was always hard surface where the horsing steps are and such like but we had to stay on that bit and then she would relent and let us go a bit further again.

Carol: Do you remember it closing?

Zella: Yes - it closed before our children came but Mary no Bert's eldest daughter Bert Gibson's eldest daughter would go there she would be - no no no she would be the first to go to Cartmel from - was she - yes it is the same time Leven Valley was a Secondary School then and you used to go from Colton to there, and I do believe that Julie Park as she was then went from Colton to Leven Valley. Now she was older than ours but I am not quite sure how much that was - that's Bert's eldest; his next daughter was younger than Matt (*Slater, Zella's son*), younger than Trevor (*Slater, Zella's son*) but older than Craig (*Slater, Zella's son*) - so how much older Julie was I don't know um - she could have been as much as five years but so it was in that time that it closed - just before we came here, we came back here - we came back when Matt was nine so um it um - there will be somewhere when we can find the dates but I haven't got them exact in my head - I don't know just when it was.

Carol: And did that have an impact on...?

Zella: No Mr Hall worked very hard for the children to go er to Cartmel instead of Victoria at Ulverston because he said Cartmel was connected because it was a school um a Church School. Not everybody thought that was a good thing - I was quite happy about it but I didn't realise well it wasn't when we were here but when it came it meant that the boys had a very long day because

they use to have to go very early in the morning and they were always latest back because the bus that took them got to school they had a change they the Sproat (*bus company*) took them to Haverthwaite and then they got on a bus that proceeded to dump them out and go to Grange and pick children up so they had to hang around for about half an hour whilst the bus went to get the others and unfortunately for them they had the same in reverse on the way home so they were first there and last back – and they didn't change that till Matt had left school er and gone to sixth form. it was quite a long day for them - so mine never wanted to stop at anything after school.

Carol: Not surprising they just wanted to come back and enjoy being here. Have you enjoyed living here?

Zella: Oh yes - I mean obviously we came back and we have never moved so apart from next door so thats not a very big move. I definitely like a small village - I am not a town person at all - by choice.

Roger: Was there much contact with other villages while you were here say with Rusland Show?  
Zella - Rusland - The Young Farmers I thought was fantastic - I loved the Young Farmers - and the Women's Institutes used to meet and organise different things. The Young Farmers we went to Rusland to them but then they er we went over to Cartmel and Lowick and places like that through the Young Farmers, which his the only thing I remember. There was quite a good choir and er choir practices but I wasn't a singer - my Dad was but I wasn't a singer - and the choir used to do the carol singing round the villages um so they would go from Colton round Rusland and things like that. They have always collected poppies for the Poppies and so that has always been spread around the area and people would meet - so the Churches definitely had communications with each other. The Women's Institute and the Mother's Union used to - I don't remember the men other than whist drives - whist drives they moved all round you see they all moved round the villages, so yes in that sort of way people did. School-wise we use to meet the others on the school bus - the school bus used to pick up when I was going to the Grammar School and even when I was going to Leven Valley used to pick up up the valley and bring them down - then once I had gone it would go onto Leven Valley. Once I was going to Ulverston I would get out at Greenodd and join another bus and go that way - so the Schools unified things as well um. There was just the Satterthwaite School - it served Rusland and Grizedale and Colton - er it was Bouth and Colton and Oxen Park - quite a scattered area um my Dad always said it was very fair cos it wasn't near anybody and he also said we had a High Church and High School which was right but for perhaps different reasons than most.

Carol: Thank you Zella, that's really great.