

## Interview with Jim Johnson, Bandrake Head, 2018

CM - Here I am in Bandrake Head and talking to Jim Johnson. My name is Carol McNeil and the recorder is Roger Layfield.

CM - Good morning Jim

JJ – Morning.

CM – I'm really looking forward to hearing about the old days and how things were in Rusland. I guess you must have been here the longest and can you tell about how you came, how old you were and how things were?

JJ – Well, the family came to Rusland Hall Farm in 1942. We had a fire in Dalton in Furness and that's why we ended up in Rusland valley. Going to school, I was 9 years old and my sister was 6, and we went to school at Satterthwaite and Rusland School. We walked two and three quarter miles, taking our dinner boxes. I went for about fourteen months to Satterthwaite and I never missed a day's school through Winter. They started having dinners, making dinners at Satterthwaite and Rusland School, and the price of them was 5 old pence a day so we took two (shillings) and a penny a week to pay for dinners. We walked over Stricely to school, out at Force Forge and up to the school. We were lined up outside, and our shoes were inspected to see if they were clean, and our finger nails, before we went into school. Miss Fox was the headmistress. We had a third of a pint each of milk and in the cold weather we would pour them all into an aluminium kettle on the big stove and it was warmed up. We poured it out into cups and drunk it like that.

We come on to the searchlight battery that was in the Rusland valley. It was the biggest searchlight battery in the North of England and in the field below Tanyard buildings. The camp was in the next field over the beck, Scowbarrow Beck and they used to pump water out of the beck for their use into a big tank on some scaffolding. There was a generator in the next field along the road and the concrete plinth that it was set on will still be there. We didn't do anything about that.

CM – They were your fields?

JJ – Yes, and that generator was changed every Monday morning. It was a big thing towed by a wagon and it ran the lights electricity for the camp and for the searchlight battery. They used to practice with them and the searchlight battery was lit by two graphite stems that were taken so far apart. When it worked it burnt them together but it was a very strong light. When they practicing it lit everything up just like daylight. There was also an Ack-Ack emplacement and a range finder. They built a surround round every one of sandbags. That was moved, if I can remember, somewhere around the end of 1943 when conscientious objectors were moved into the camp. They were made to clean the ditches out and pleach hedges and stuff like that. They were made to work. Obviously they couldn't stop at home you see and the locals wouldn't accept them. They were very much on their own. They used to get milk every day from our farm.

In Rusland Hall was a school from Newcastle and they moved in two days before war started. A lot of schools all around Newcastle were moved and were all over Cumbria. Well it wasn't called Cumbria then, it was Westmorland and Cumberland and Lancashire. They moved all over by rail. My friend lives near Newcastle and he's been looking it up on the computer and he's quite amazed by the amount of children that were moved into this area.

CM – Were you in Lancashire?

JJ – Yes, we were in Lancashire. There is a place up Windermere Lake called Gandys Meet and they all met there, Cumberland, Westmorland and Lancashire. There was ten farms in the Rusland valley all producing milk when we first came. The school was run by a headmistress called Miss Pybus. There was two teachers billeted with us at Hall Farm. After the war, well just before the finish of the war, we had whist drives and dances for the lads coming home from the war in the Parish Room, in the marquee. At the end of the war we had a big bonfire up past Windy Hall on the higher piece of ground past Windy Hall.

CM – How old were you then?

JJ – Twelve

CM – So you must have seen a lot of things happening with the people then and the changes going on?

JJ – Yes, you can say that but with land girls as well during the war. We had land girls and some got married to local lads. One or two did. We had a woman came round and inspected them every so often to see if they were satisfied with what they were doing, and what we were doing to them.

CM – Can you tell us a bit more about the ten farms? Many have gone.

JJ – Well, it's all right saying that but it wasn't viable was it? Things have moved on so fast in these last years. Some of those farms were only producing milk off 12 up to 20. We only had 24 cows at Hall Farm and we were one of the bigger farms, so ... No, we had 34. We altered a building to take more cows. When we came to Rusland, those fields

in bottom, some of them you couldn't walk a horse on them, they were just bog. We did a lot of draining on that bottom. There's a place at the southern end of the valley, some time, a long time ago, the river, Rusland Pool was dug out and straightened. It meandered round the lower part of the valley and there are places where you can see it went round, it didn't go straight down the valley. They dug it from Rusland Pool bridge down to the lime kiln. There was a lime kiln in Rusland Pool, a big round place where they had dug the river out. The dredger used to clean out Rusland Pool every five years. When we first went there they cleaned it out right full length but after that they just used to clean out where the gravel settled because below Pool bridge, near Rusland Hall, it levelled out a lot there and left gravel heaps in the river. On high tide we used to get the tide up to Pool bridge and it affected us right up to there, so that's where the gravel settled. They dug a big hole in Strands where they caught gravel, and when we first went to Rusland, at Strands where you go over the footbridge, it was a lot lower. They filled all that in, they dug this hole out and it filled in and they used to come there and empty it every so often. That's all gone by the board now. CM – What about the Moss down there? Has that changed?

JJ. Well, not really. If you go down to Pool bridge you will see that there is a great big pile of gravel that they used to take out. They used to go to the dredger for gravel and fill the holes in, if we were draining, we put gravel on top of the drains so that they worked properly. We never, ever, saw any wildlife dug out with the dredger. Never, ever! We used to go as children onto the heap where they had dug out to see if there was any fish or eels or anything like that. It's a fallacy that cleaning dredges and ditches and rivers out, and in my opinion that's where they want to start. They want to clean the rivers out, keep the water in the river and not do flood defences. Spending money on flood defences, it's wrong, but English Nature will stand by what they think is best. Wildlife in Rusland valley was much much better than what it is today. The river was full of fish. You got spawning fish coming up little streams. Big fish, I'm talking about 10 or 12 pounders, now there's nothing like that. Wild flowers and that sort of thing, stopping children picking wild flowers. My two girls used to press flowers, learn about flowers – there's none of that today because English Nature has stopped them picking them. The more you pick plants the more they grow. I don't know, I just can't get round the situation of what's happening. I always said that if you have a good home in Rusland valley, and a good vegetable garden, and a gun and a fishing rod, you could live very happily.

CM – What about the other wildlife?

JJ – There was deer then but in my time we were allowed to shoot them because they were vermin. We had to keep them down in my time. We used to have shooting parties on a Sunday. My dad used to go shooting with shooting parties. We used to go all over the Lake District. Us children used to do the beating for foxes and deer. They used to shoot deer.

CM – Did they do hound trailing?

JJ – Not in the wartime but hound trailing started after the war.

CM – Did you do any other sports like that?

JJ – Well I did a bit of fell running. When I was 19, I went to do my National Service. I was one of the first farm lads to be called up for National Service because my birthday is on the 12<sup>th</sup> January and all those born after 1933 and worked on a farm were eligible to go to do their National Service. I went to do my National Service and it did me a lot of good actually. I think I went in '52 and came back in '54. I was 19 when I went.

CM – What did you do in your spare time when you were at Rusland Hall Farm, when you were 16 or 17?

JJ – We used to do a bit of fishing. We used to go footballing, I played football for a while for Hawkshead.

CM. How did you travel around?

JJ – On a push bike. I once met Brian Armitstead at Rusland Vicarage. We went to Hawkshead to a dance, and we weren't satisfied with what was at Hawkshead so we went to Coniston. There was a hunt ball and there was nothing there so we came down to Greenodd and at about half past nine, ten o'clock, Brian said to me we could do with something to eat so we then set off to Ulverston for fish and chips. Came back to Greenodd, spent the night at Greenodd dance and then came home.

CM – Did you find what you wanted?

JJ – No, not really. We used to go to Young Farmers. It was a good Young Farmers club at Rusland in them days, and we used to, you know, go to dances with a taxi. There was Bob Bell's taxi, and Jimmy Coward's taxi. We once went to a dance at Hawkshead and I think, there 6 or 7 of us in the car and it come to the bottom of Esthwaite to come up over Dale Park and it wouldn't come up. So we had to push it up. We all got out and pushed it up and we got home that way.

CM – Did you see the change between the use of horses and cars and tractors?

JJ – When we first came to Rusland we have three or four horses. We had one that had a foal every year, so we used to have that foal and break it in. Then we got a tractor in 1948 and talking about the search light campsite, when after the war they sold all the billets off, the huts off, everything, they left the foundations in the ground which were

built up at one side so that they were on a slope and we had all that to straighten up. I can remember, we must have done it after we got the tractor because we used to put a chain round the foundation and pull it out in lengths. We took it up the wood, up Scowbarrow Lane into the wood. Then we took a hedge out. Those two fields where the camp was, there was two fields and we took a big hedge out there. Where the searchlight battery was two fields and we took a fence out. It was a slab fence, a slate fence. They were thick but they were intertwined. They were broken off to fit together and those slates are now in the front garden of Rusland Hall Farm. We took them away and laid them out at Rusland Hall Farm.

CM. Up Scowbarrow Lane is a lovely wood. What was that like?

JJ – You could go up there with a tractor easily enough but now it's derelict more or less, that lane. Last time I was up, it's terrible. It seems as if waters run down it. Well there is a beck that crosses it just as you get into the wood – well, that must have been blocked up. You see they made these streams to water each field. They took them into fields and out again. There is another river that comes from the other side of the valley down from where Wilkinson's used to farm, through the fields that belong to Lands End when Gardners were there, and then through into our fields. These streams were made to water different fields.

CM Were they working in the woods? Charcoal burning?

JJ Not in my time, no. They used to take coppice wood out but not on that side of the valley, in Yewbarrow, above the beeches. There is Scowburrow, and Brockbank wood. There's a field called Brockbank and a field called Honeyptot. There's Scowbarrow field and one we called Campfield, and there's one in the bottom called the Wallets. It's where the children from the Hall, when they were billeted there from Newcastle, used to play hockey in one of our fields. There was a tennis court in one of the fields just below the hall orchard.

CM Did the Newcastle school own the Hall?

JJ No, no, I think the Archibalds had the Hall, then they went to live in Cinder Hill across the road. I guess the Government commandeered it and put the school in there. They had a uniform, brown with yellow braiding on and pork pie hats with a yellow band round. They were junior children, not that old, and just a girls school, no boys.

CM Did you talk to them or keep in touch with any?

JJ No we didn't seem to attach ourselves to them at all like. We used to talk to the searchlight battery chaps. These other people come, conscientious objectors, we didn't bother with them at all. No, it was the state of the world then.

CM You've done a lot of breeding of birds haven't you?

JJ Yes. We used to go bird nesting. I had a collection but I got rid of it. We knew where all the birds nested. We used to go up to the heron nests at the top of the mosses. In wartime we used to go there to pick bilberries, make pies, and bilberry jam. We used to go up onto the fell to pick bilberries but that was more or less in wartime when things were scarce. You didn't get oranges or things like that, bananas. We used to go and pick bilberries. All the family went, mam and dad, we all went. There are some good bilberries on the top the moss opposite where Whitestock is, what you see from Whitestock, under those big fir trees, there was a lot of bilberries there. We used to kill pigs in wartime as well. We had an allowance to kill pigs. We had a system where all the farms could kill a pig, and there was no freezers or fridges in them days. We used to monitor, like a calendar, when we would kill the pig and when we killed a pig, we shared it out. Like all the farms got a bit of pork every time one pig was killed. That's how we did it through the war. When we killed a pig, the cheeks were in salt for a week, the flitches were in salt for a fortnight, the shoulders were in three week and the hams were in a month. The hams, we had to cut round the knuckle of the ham and put saltpetre in, stuff saltpetre in, and we had a big cellar at Hall Farm, a big slate slab cellar and it was all laid out there and covered with salt.

CM Did your mother do most of that?

JJ Yes, my mother and dad but we had a uncle who used to come to kill a pig for us, he used to kill pigs for the Archibalds when they moved and started farming. Roger Archibald started farming and I can't just tell you when, but Mrs Archibald wanted to kill a pig, so my uncle came and killed it for them. Talking about the Tanyard, we used to have hay in there. We used to put stock underneath. I once went in looking for bird's nests. On the wall plate inside the barn I put my hand on a book. It was like a little red note book and inside it there was the costs, orders for the hides that they had done, that they were doing and there was the price of them. I can always remember they were about one and six to two shillings. That book, I took it to school at Leven Valley (I went to the senior school ) and they said they were going to send it to Barrow Museum. But I've been to Barrow Museum and they have no recollection of it, so where it went I don't know. I wish now I'd kept it.

CM Did they do any tanning then?

JJ No. Where they used to do the tanning was the big square tanks near the Beck. There was a beck ran across the road and I think they diverted it to these tanks because they just had rubble in when I was a boy. Wrens used to nest

in there and swallows. Some things have changed. I can remember, I wasn't so old, when they started Rusland Show again after the war but I have been told that Rusland showfield was nearer to the old vicarage. It was on that flat field next to the old vicarage at one time, but we never saw it there like.

CM At the back of the Hall where they keep all the marquees was like an old theatre.

JJ You are talking about Whitestock now. Yes, Miss Dobson used to take us for drama but I wasn't that keen to be honest. I don't whether anyone else has mentioned it. Gordon, Donald, or Elsie Wilkinson, but Margaret Wilkinson is the one that will know about, out of what I call Satterthwaite area. We used to get those prisoners of war that were at Grizedale Hall coming round. They used to walk around the valley and back again, home. The army blokes with them like, three or four army chaps and they used to talk to us a little bit like. I think that someone should go with a metal detector where the searchlight battery was and see if they can find any relics because they used to have mock battles in Rusland valley did the army. They used to come late afternoon and set up. Where the other force was, I don't know but they used to fire blanks and practice in the woods up Yewbarrow and up Scowbarrow. There they used to practice. But they never fetched any heavy infantry or anything like that, but they used to have mock battles. There were blank cartridges all over the place. We used to pick up. We used to do that sort of thing like. It was very interesting because how the searchlight was lit was like a graphite stick. It would be like five eighths to three quarters thick and it had a centre core that was harder than the outside part. It was like graphite on the outside, and what was inside was probably like an electric cable. It used to burn and hold it so far apart. The light was terrific. They used to throw these graphite sticks away as they couldn't use them full length. There were pieces that were thrown away and we used to pick them up. I'd been to have a look in the walls to see if I could find any. I've been down there and asked Raymond if I could go with my metal detector but all I got was a piece of muck spreader chain and pieces of old metal. We cleaned the river out. We did a lot of draining down there. In one place the drain is six foot deep. I could take you to all the outlets. We drained all that at the bottom and we used to have to give five loads of hay to Tommy Graveston that lived at Light Hall, where the Adams's are now. He had what they call a stint on Souters, I don't know whether it's Sorters or Souters, seven acre field. There was Little Souters and Big Souters, and he had a stint on there when we first went to Rusland and he could claim five loads of hay. But we didn't get it off there because it was useless. We got it from somewhere else and we used to give him five loads of hay where we wanted to give it him from. We ploughed it all, drained it all, and reseeded it all and now it was a good field. We made a good field out of it. We used to grow crops but now there's no crops grown. We used to grow kale, turnips, mangolds, potatoes, cabbages. We had more or less a market garden in the fields, but now today there isn't anything of that done. It was a good life. Children were different to what they are today. They entertained themselves, we entertained ourselves. There was no television. It was 1957 before they got electricity into the valley. We had storm lamps when we first went in 1942 and then we changed them to Tilley Lamps. Then we had Calor gas in the house but all the lighting in the buildings, we used to carry about and hang up. So was the Parish Room had Calor Gas in it. There is a big map in Rusland Parish Room, I don't know if you've ever seen it, an old map and I'm wondering if it shows where the river used to run in the bottom of the valley because it meandered all over the place. It went towards where the camp was and down and round. It went all over the place and then they straightened it. I don't know when they straightened it would probably be in the eighteen hundreds.

RL You said there was no electricity. What did you use for a cooker?

JJ Well, we had a big fire, a big range in the kitchen. There was a boiler next to it and we used to cook on the fire. We used to boil a kettle on the fire on an arm. You could fetch the arm out and take kettle off and put it back on again. Next to it was the boiler and actually, we had a tap on it to fill it with cold water and then we used to take it out of the bottom. When we first went to Rusland, I can remember, we as children we went up between the house and the barn, and there was this piece of wood sticking out of the window, a long piece of wood, and the other end went into the fire. So instead of cutting logs, they were shoving it on. I should know the name of the farmer that was there. He went up Dent way and he had two sons who went up there. He was a good waller that chap, I think his name was Middleton, I think. Yes, that's how they used to stoke fire up. There was a trestle between. It was a big kitchen, oh about three times as big as this. A big kitchen was farmhouse kitchen. It was a fair way from the window to the fire, and they had a trestle half way across where they used to put it when it left the window, they used to put it on trestle. Then they would move trestle.

RL So when did telephones come?

JJ Well telephones were there. We had a telephone, the number was 204. Satterthwaite 204, there was no dialing code then like there is here 01229. There was nothing like that, it was just Satterthwaite 204, and there was only us and the Archibalds at Cinder Hill, that had a phone. When they wanted the vet or anything, the other farmers used to come and use our phone. There was hardly any phones in the Rusland valley then. The farmers used to go to the auction on a Thursday and Mr Shuttleworth, who lived at Crosslands before the Wilkinsons, (they had five or six

children who used to go to Satterthwaite School with us) used to pick them up at the bottom of Windy Hall Lane. Mr Shuttleworth had a car, and we had a car, and my mother and dad used to go and get groceries. My dad used to go to the auction on a Thursday, and Mr Park and Mr Bob Proctor from Roger Ridding used to come down on bike and go with them. The car was full, both cars were full when they went to the auction in Ulverston. They used to get the groceries from King Street or Queen Street. It was Dickinsons then, and then it changed. The auction was in Ulverston itself but it wasn't where it is now. It was where, I think there's a laundry, a laundrette on the end of a street. You know where the bus station is, well it was past the bus station, on the left. You turned in by that church. It's a Roman Catholic Church isn't it? It was the opposite side of the road to there. The cafe for it was on the other block. Then there was Hadwins buses further down there, it's a mechanics place now down that street. Hadwins used to take us to school, when we went to the secondary modern school at Backbarrow. It used to come up in a morning, go to Satterthwaite, Grizedale and come back and pick us up. We used to go thirteen mile to school and the school from Hall Farm where I lived was four mile away. When I used to go footballing on a Wednesday afternoon, I used to bike down to Leven Valley, which is where you have Outback (Hall) now. That was the school and we used to go Rusland, Oxen Park, Colton, down here to Greenodd, drop the grammar school lot off at Greenodd, then go round on the main road, which was round Leckbarrow Point in them days. You can still see some of the old road, anyway and turn up at Tollbar, round to Bouth and out at Causeway end and out onto the main road. The road we used to go on was up past the other side of Dickinson's farm, down over the railway and past Anglers Arms and then to Backbarrow school. There's bits of it still there. Where you go to the church at Haverthwaite, it goes down that hill, well that was the main road then. That was called Creep Hill. Yes, it was thirteen mile we used to go to school and it was only four mile away. It was football on a Wednesday down at Haverthwaite playing pitch, as we hadn't a big enough pitch at Backbarrow, so we used to walk down to Haverthwaite after our dinner on a Wednesday to play football. I used to bike down you see and go home from Haverthwaite playing field. I'd cross Haverthwaite road ends and up the Beeches. Walking two and three quarter mile at nine year old, and my sister, six year old – it's unbelievable like now! It seemed as if we liked doing it you know. We took our Tommy boxes for our dinner and then Miss Fox's sister started making school dinners.

CM Lots of good memories?

JJ Yes, it's nice really

CM Thank you Jimmy