

I'm speaking to Admiral Pirnie, Ian and Sally in their home in at High Nibthwaite at the foot of Coniston Water. It's Monday afternoon, 10<sup>th</sup> April 2017 and it's Victor Middleton doing the interview.

V. So, if we could start please, tell us what was your first connection with this lovely house? What it was and how you came to live here?

S. Well, my father lived in Rochdale and Mary Cowsell, who lived up at Laurel House (in Nibthwaite), had a sister who was a magistrate with my father on the Bench in Rochdale. He mentioned to Mary's sister that we were looking for a house to rent up here because Ian was coming up with the Navy to work in the shipyard (at Barrow in Furness). She then told her sister and there was a house in High Nibthwaite that she thought was going to be let. So I came up here with my father, Ian was away in America or at sea, and fell immediately in love with the house ... and told Ian, we've really got to have it. So that's how it all started. We then started renting it.

I. We rented initially.

V. What year was that?

S. It must have been about 1966 when we first came.

V. But you knew of the house before that?

S. Yes for about 6 months or so.

V. You didn't come as a family?

S. No

V. At the time, in the sixties, what aspects of the area attracted you?

S. That it was in amongst a farming community. There were at least two working farms. One was cows and sheep, and one was a purely sheep farm. We had opposite a couple whose husband worked in the shipyard, a Mr Wraite (?), and further down the road, towards Low Nibthwaite, there was somebody called Mr Armstrong who was a joiner and an undertaker.

V. I guess at that time most of the houses were lived in by people who were resident?

S. Yes, pretty well all of them. When we first came, Lake End (a large house near the Pirnies) was already let in different bits.

V. What was it that appealed to you Ian?

I. I actually had no choice (laughter). Back from being in the United States for six months, Sally said 'I've found us a house'. And she was right! The setting, the proximity to the Lake, the beautiful hills immediately behind us, the mountains to the North, it's just an idyllic site.

V. And the farms, are they still there?

S. No, not farmed now. There is one farmer who lives where the undertaker used to live but no, they've all moved on to something different.

V. Were you here when Donald Campbell did his record attempt....? Do you remember that?

S. Yes, I do. I was here in the house with a friend and we knew he was going to make his last run up the Lake. We went straight up the valley and stopped where we saw everyone watching him to break the speed limit. There was a deathly hush, no sound at all. I said what's happening, somebody said to me 'he's at the bottom'. We said this isn't for us so we turned round and came back here. Very, very sad occasion.

V. Do you remember that or were you away?

I. I wasn't here.

V. If we think about Nibthwaite, it was really a hamlet. Between Ransome's time, say 1900 and when you came, do you think there had been much change in the local landscape?

I. Overall it's the transition from being a national park to being a national playground. From being quiet and still, beautiful to look at, to what it has now become, full of activities. It's all very enjoyable and great fun for people, but it does alter the complete tenor of the place. If you translate it to here, when we first came there was hardly any traffic at all. It's now quite substantial the amount of traffic, not just people travelling around, but cyclists and motorbikes, and cars. It's a national playground now.

v. Is that a good thing or a bad thing, or just inevitable?

I. I suppose it's just inevitable, the passage of time, a greater amount that people move around now, A lot more sporting activities.

S. Yes, I see it the same. I came here because I wanted the peace and quiet, the countryside and the farms all around me. The cows used to go past every morning, we used to go and get jugs of milk. To me its spoiled with all the noise and cars.

V. You could fill a can with milk at that time?

S. Yes, just take a jug up and have it at breakfast.

I. And that was the farm in the village

V. Am I right in thinking you had horses, and did you ride?

S. Yes, I had horses

V. Since the 1960`s?

S. Yes, we had ponies. We used to drive a pony and trap as well around the lanes. It`s got too busy so never now.

V. Where would you take the pony and trap?

S. Round all the roads. I think I went right round the Lake once.

V. You are regulars at church. How was it then and now?

S. The attendance has slowly dropped. I used to take Mary Cowsell. I started to go to Colton Church and the attendance has definitely dropped since the old days. It`s quite an elderly community that goes to Church now.

V. Was it then?

S. The young ones used to come more often. I`m not sure it isn`t the farming community now don`t come because they work, they have second jobs now. They don`t work on the farm during the week, so they use Sundays to do the farm work. We get a lot of tractor work on Sundays.

I. To my mind, when we first came here, the field immediately to the South was a haystack, which we don`t have any more. It`s all been taken over by mechanisation. .... they are able to harvest it quickly but it`s a change of culture in farming.

V. Presumably quite a number of people would gather at haymaking.

I. Yes to help

S. In the little field, we used to make our own bales of hay.. for the horses

V. What about local trades people?

S. Now we have nobody. We used to have a butcher, a general grocer and a fishmonger who came come round in three different vans each week. It stopped. I think there are too many holiday cottages. I don`t think it`s worth their while and of course supermarkets haven`t helped.

I. It`s comparatively recent to suddenly see a Tesco van come past right to this village for somebody who is coming up for two weeks. They just ring up Tesco who deliver it all to the door for them.

V. Looking back and now, what are the best aspects of living here?

S. It`s the friends we`ve made. We remain friends with nearly all the local farmers and we also make friends with the people who come for holidays. So we`ve made a lot of friends living here, perhaps more than one would do in a city. That`s a real bonus.

V. Is that people you see on the lane or you visit?

S. I walk around the village quite a lot and drop in to see people, delivering Parish magazines and things. I used to collect for lifeboats and things like that. I got to know a lot of people doing that.

V. Do you think that`s an attribute of local life that is being lost.

S. No, it still goes on to a certain extent. A lot of people in other villages do the same.

I. I don`t think we could claim this to being a village, a hamlet I think.

V. Ian, the best aspects from your point of view?

I. The same, yes, and the landscape. You couldn`t have a more beautiful landscape than here. And we are very fortunate.

S. We are also lucky to have had boats on the Lake.

V. Wind farms, do they concern you at all?

I. When they were initially planned and being talked about, we thought it would be extremely intrusive. As it`s turned out, from our house, from Nibthwaite, although you can see them on the horizon, we`ve got used to them.

V. Do you think, if it happens, they make The National Park it a World Heritage Site, it will make any difference to the landscape, the environment?

S. I don't know what it would entail

V. What about visitor impact?

S. If it got much worse, people coming, it would really crowd the Lake District out.

V. If you had the proverbial magic wand, what would you change?

I. I wouldn't be campaigning for that much change. One gets used to living in a place after fifty years. One comes to accept the strengths and weaknesses of a small community and I wouldn't change them really.

S. It would just be the traffic coming up the road. Otherwise we are happy with the different people we meet.

V. When you came to live here in the sixties, particularly coming from a professional background, it was relatively unusual to come to places like this. It's now very common but do you think of yourself as early adaptors.

S. I never thought of it like that. It was all to do with BAE (?) and the shipyard and my job and this being a convenient place.

V. Ian, when you came here and rented, what happened then?

I. We rented for about a year, the owner contacted me and said 'would I like to buy it?' The problem was I had a five bedroom house in Fareham Farnham so I couldn't afford to get a second mortgage. He said 'I'll give you a mortgage' which I took on, although it was unusual way of doing things, it suited me very well. A year or two after that, I heard that the owner had been killed in a car crash. That's how we came to buy this house. It was providential!

V. What age were you then?

I. Thirty one

V. Sally, I know you've had three children, not necessarily born here but they were very young when you came. How did you bring them up and deal with schooling etc.?

S. The youngest was two when the first came here, and I remember carrying here across the bridge and sleeping down that end of the house that night. We then decided they would go to school at Lowick, the eldest one to Lowick first, after a couple of years, the middle one also started school. I found they were going to be in the same class which I didn't think suited the two girls as they tended to fight each other a lot. So I moved both of them down to Penny Bridge for the rest of their junior school. That was until they were eleven years old, which is when we sent them away to school so I could be free to see Ian, wherever he was working. I wanted to give the children a family base at home and we kept this house, so I could always have them back here for the holidays. This was absolutely wonderful because they ran wild round the woods and up the fellside, and boating on the Lake. I think no child could have had a better start in life from a countryside point of view.

V. A touch of the Arthur Ransomes...

S. Absolutely!

V. Did they read the books?

S. Yes, of course, and picnics on the island.

V. Lovely, and thank you very much.