

### Chapter III

Primary School 1947 – 1954



View of Hepple Village from East Hepple Farm

The farm cottages and walled gardens are on the immediate left. The blacksmiths shop and forge were housed in the single story stone building on the right. The church is just behind. The school is hidden by the luxuriant foliage of the beech tree on the left. The school house is just in view. The Rogerson's and Charlie Beattie's cottages are last on the left.

I only attended two schools in my life. Hepple Church of England Primary School was the first. There was no such thing as pre-school or kindergarten. I began at age 5 and left at 11, rising 12. The school was actually surrounded by land belonging to East Hepple Farm. We almost claimed it as our own. It was a very short walk from home to school; even in winter. We passed the farm cottages on the way where the Foggon and Haddon families lived. You didn't even have to walk along the road. There was small risk only with minimal traffic. Jimmy Waddell returning home to Alwinton from Rothbury Mart in his super-charged Ford V8 Pilot was the most dangerous. He was greatly admired 'for being able to drive when having taken so much drink'! The United Bus Service twice a day served the Coquet Valley between Newcastle and Alwinton and return. They maintained a very stately pace with frequent passenger stops while occupying much of the road.

Hepple Church of England School c. 1946



Back Row: Unknown; Shirley Dennis; Anne Hart; Teacher Mrs Strafford; Robin Stephens; Unknown  
Middle Row: Unknown; Unknown; Margaret Foggon; Joan Locker; Diana Howey  
Front Row: Raymond Wilkinson; Joan Foggon; Unknown; Unknown; Michael Oliver

This was the class I was to join the following year in 1947. The two 'unknown' blond boys and elder blonde girl in the middle row may be the White brothers and sister from West Hepple? The dark 'unknown' elder girl first left in the back row may be someone called Miller and the girl on the far right possibly Anne Dunwoody? Robin ('Robbie') Stephens was from Holystone where his parents ran the Salmon Inn much to my mother's disgust but father's approbation! Robbie left very soon after to take up a position as an Apprentice Electrician in Gateshead which we thought was extremely daring and glamorous in the far reaches of Empire! The fact that he was also burgled added cachet to the legend. I never saw him again. Diana remembers pulling Raymond Wilkinson around the school yard by his tie when he became too 'assertive' as in bullying? Mickey Oliver was a 'wild child' from Whitefield. Shirley Dennis' father was the chauffeur for the Renwick Family at Holystone Grange. Mrs Foggon was the 'cook' at the school and prepared the hot lunch enjoyed by everyone. This would have been the main meal of any day for quite a few such as the White Family of West Hepple. Bread and dripping might have been their staple at home? I'm not sure who paid for this but it was a wonderful service.

Hepple School c. 1951



- Back Row: Miss Cummings (Teacher); Andrew Milburn; Raymond Wilkinson; Margaret Brown; Jimmy Stewart.
- Second Row: Thomas Foggon; Monica Doring; Joan Foggon; Maureen Morton; Margaret Foggon; Winifred 'Winnie' White; Diana Howey; Charles Dagg.
- Third Row: Rosie Beattie; Marjorie Welton; Esther White; Catherine White; Pattie Buglass; Dorothy Stewart; Lorraine Buglass.
- Front Row: Johnny White; John Howey; George Rogerson; William Howey; Stewart Whitfield; John Rochford.

This is the class I remember best. We were very far removed from any madding crowd!

The first objective was to achieve success in the so-called 11+ examination aged 11. This was an academic selection process for those who would progress to Local Government Grammar School or equivalent. The only other alternative for those who could afford it were private fee paying so-called Public Schools in the English system. The remainder stayed at the local school until the legal leaving age of 15. Diana sailed through the 11+ in 1952. I had to have a second chance in 1954 but prevailed. Johnny missed out at the second attempt in 1956 but excelled in the 13+ in 1958. As far as I am aware we three Howey children were the only ones to progress to Senior Secondary and Tertiary Education. Previously Norah Beattie had achieved the same success in the 11+ and had gone to Ackworth. She was the pioneer. We were fortunate. Many did very well in trade and service although opportunities were limited. Several found work on farms as indentured labour.



The children came from Caistron, Hepple Village, West Hepple Farm, Hepple Whitefield, Harehaugh or Holystone Grange (Dueshill Farm). Margaret Foggon was the undoubted leader of the pack and the best at Rounders in the school yard! Monica Doring (or Doering) was a lovely German girl who we bullied unmercifully at times as we did to Margaret Brown. There is no defence. I remember one episode in Miss Cummings Class. I stuck a chisel into my leg! I was taken to Rothbury to be stitched up by Dr Rex Armstrong. The local anaesthetic 'stung like the devil' on administration. To mollify the sprawling brat Dr Armstrong placed his England Rugby Cap on my head. I still bear the scar today above my right knee. It was the end of woodwork classes at Hepple School! Dr Armstrong's grandson Alexander Armstrong is a current international star on BBC TV hosting the quiz program 'Pointless' replayed on ABC TV in Australia.

The teaching was standard fare with emphasis on the basic '3 Rs': reading, writing and arithmetic. Classes were composite for all ages in a single teacher school. General knowledge, religious knowledge, history and geography were additional subjects with some singing and music. I can't remember ever doing any homework? There was light punishment administered for failure at reading. Miss McKenna would hold a wooden ruler behind your bare leg and administer a sharp smack for any mistake. Fear of failure became an overriding emotion. I think progress was slow? Occasionally the teaching staff was bolstered by a young trainee teacher on work experience. This usually allowed division into senior and junior classes. Miss Askew was such an example.

The big event of the year was the annual school summer trip by 'bus to the seaside! This was either to Spittal (near Berwick) or Whitley Bay. The latter was favoured by the pupils because of the fun park known as 'The Spanish City'. Parents preferred the former. This one day would be the only opportunity many children had to 'see the sea' in any one year. In summary I can claim we were a generally happy bunch in a very protected if restricted environment. Chronic rural poverty was a factor especially in post-World War II ravaged Britain.

Religious instruction was augmented by occasional Sunday school. This might depend on the energy and commitment of the local vicar or minister. Rev Bernard Garman who turned blind was such a person. We did not make things any easier for him. Sadly his eldest son Andrew died at a very young age from a congenital 'hole-in-the heart'. Today this would be fixed by routine surgery. Sadly Isobel Beattie also died at a very young age. She was a contemporary of Johnny. Mother thought Johnny was worst affected by this loss. Occasional enthused acolytes such as Miss Anne Riddell and mother would supervise Sunday school classes.

Out-of-school activities: 'Playtime'. This was extension stuff at home; and there was a lot of it. Much of it was seasonal determined by the vicissitudes of weather associated with change. We had a lot of fun together and with village friends. At times we were committed to helping on the farm for work activities. This included lambing, chopping turnips in winter, hay making, carting hay, stooking corn, carting and stacking corn, corn threshing, sheep shearing, sheep dipping, feeding sheep and cattle, preparing sheep for sale, milking cows and dairy milk activities. Picking potatoes was my forte. It also served to turn me off farming for the rest of my life! Collecting eggs and plucking feathers at Christmas were sometimes rewarded. Pig killing was exciting; sheep killing less so. Thomas Foggon and I once infamously wagged school to watch the pig killing; morbid little monsters! There was a lot of noise and blood! The making of bacon, sausages, puddings and their stacking on hooks in the kitchen were on the agenda. I think we were more of a nuisance than as little helpmates?

Much of the farm routine has endured for centuries with very little fundamental change until the mechanisation of agriculture. The latter was slow to penetrate at East Hepple Farm. Whenever there was available labour and shared resources the 'old ways' were sustainable. I think the advent of World War II may have forced some adjustments to long established routines?

The sharing of resources wasn't confined only to labour. The temporary loan of equipment and animals such as heavy draft horses were *de rigueur*. This was also the time when women came to the fore as labourers. The Women's Land Army established in 1914 – 1918 demonstrated the expert utility of the fairer sex in farm work. Their gender had until then been eschewed as an available resource,



Sheep Dipping



Hay stacking in earlier times; little had changed



Johnny & Nana (Eliza) during temporary work respite. Johnny learned very early the industrial power of a sit-down strike!

We most looked forward to fun! This could be had in many ways. Diana was early addicted to ponies and hunting. I was expected to follow suit; and obediently did for a while. Johnny rebelled!





Johnny

Diana & 'Crumb'

William & 'Nelson'

There were several iterations of ponies over the years. I usually inherited Diana's cast-offs. Nelson was case in point. He had a unique proclivity and ability to fart at every step; much to the chagrin of the upper crust hierarchy in the West Percy Hunt Pony Club. We all thought it was hilarious. It was impossible to stay sombre. Nelson was oblivious.



Bathing in the River Coquet.

Johnny

Norah Beattie (in charge)

Diana

William

Rosie Beattie

The only one of the quintet not to attend Ackworth was Rosie Beattie. The rest of us were the lucky pioneers and beneficiaries of this trend.

The river Coquet was a first class trout stream which provided opportunities. Johnny and I loved fishing. Johnny was either luckier or more adept than I was. We were poaching of course. Fishing rights were privately owned and policed by water bailiffs. It was a matter of some pride for Dad that he had never been caught poaching salmon. The salmon runs occurred in autumn following rain and flooding of the river. For many decades from 1788 convicted and transported poaching recidivists provided much of the early genotype for the emerging white Australian nation. It's a lucky chance I did not arrive earlier than I did! Dad was adept with the use of an illegal 'clique'. This was a gaff with a large barb. Poaching took place at night by torchlight when the 'Gibb' (male) salmon were constructing the spawning 'Redds' in the ripples or shallows. Alternatively salmon could be spiked while gently wallowing under an embankment ostensibly protected from view. On one occasion Dad successfully snared a salmon in mid-stream in the river above Alwinton with a 'snatch'. This was a three-pronged and barbed hook on a long string. It was a magic moment later celebrated by Dad with the water bailiff in the Rose & Crown in Alwinton! Little did he know? Dad was inordinately proud. Johnny and I were delighted; if a little scared. We had the compensation of a still alive salmon in a hessian sack under the back seat plus lemonade and Smiths Crisps liberally sprinkled with salt.





Diana William Johnny

This was another posed photograph. Mother was insistent and persistent!



The Workers of the World ('Three Crows')

William Diana Johnny



William

Johnny

Diana



William

Diana

Johnny





Boxing Day meet of the West Percy Hounds in Thropton: Diana on 'Unity'

#### Farm Life Goes On



Quadruplets were a problem





Every lamb saved was worth many pounds! They were in short supply.



Could 'Niggy' (Border Legend ex Tall Story) have been a champion?