

Recollections of Farming the Area*

(Please refer to accompanying map)

Adrian Gifford lived at Abraham Heights farm from 1945 to 1976; he farmed land that was part of the Dawson Estate and is now owned and managed by the Fairfield Association (West Field, Lower Sowerholme and Flora Field), as his father did before him.

My father, Roger Gifford, was brought up at Abraham Heights farm and my mother was housekeeper there. They left the area in 1941 when my father joined the RAF. Then when Jim Huntington, the tenant of Abraham Heights, who my father had helped to farm before he left, was in his '70's, he asked him, my father, to come back and take over the farm; that was in 1945. After Jim died, in 1951, my father was given the tenancy, in 1952, by the Trustees' of the Dawson Estate. In those days, a farm tenancy only changed on a set day, for example Lady Day, 25th March, the hiring and firing days.

Asked about: the name of the path

We called it *the Kendal Pads* – I was always told it was a pack horse track from Preston to Kendal. How true that is I don't know but it's always been called to my knowledge 'the Kendal Pads'.

Asked about: the fields

We called them *the Kendal Pad fields*.

We called this field *Brookfield* for obvious reasons; because it is bounded by Lucy Brook. [Field no. 286, called Lower Sowerholme by the Fairfield Association]. Brookfield is on a slope, it was pasture land and runs from the Pads to a small triangular field [283, Upper Sowerholme] farmed from Carr House farm; there is a gate [G¹] in the corner which was never used and allowed to grow over. The gates diagonally across the Pads [G²], led from one part of the farm to the other and cattle and machinery crossed through.

Lucy Brook goes under the pads from the gates to the corner. Just inside the gate of Brookfield, somewhere about where the letter 'R' is, is an old concrete manhole (CM), never had a lid on it as long as I remember and water used to go through there, it's within 5 yards of Lucy Brook, parallel to the brook, and goes into *Flat Meadow* which we also had.

Flat Meadow [107] is what the Fairfield Association call *West Field*. It was a little bit of pasture and meadow. The original fence across this field, that the Fairfield Association have reinstated, would have been an iron railing fence, like a park; it would have been a park for Aldcliffe Hall.

Then this field: the narrow strip [285], why, how or what; it isn't even a straight line, belonged to the Prisoners Aid Society.** We used to pay a separate rent of about £12 a year for it to the organisation. It was a meadow. We had a fence and a gate G³ and it wasn't all meadow because we had to have access through it to get into this field that Fairfield calls Flora.

There was also a gate [G⁴] from the Prisoners Aid field, to the track [behind the houses on Aldcliffe Road] adjacent to the gate in Brookfield [G¹] so that you could get round to get in.

We didn't have a name for what's now called Flora field, it was divided into two. 206 was not ploughed; it was pasture. 211 was meadow; behind the last house on Aldcliffe Road going up to the wood there was a gateway [G⁵] through into the field. An area of it was a playing field [PF], at one

time the Lancaster Lads' Club used to play football on it on a Sunday, it wasn't level it was a on a bit of a slope. After they stopped using it we ploughed both and reseeded into a meadow in the 1960's.

There are double gates side by side [G⁵ and G⁶] because the field on the left, 208 was rented to a cattle dealer; he over-nighted animals there. I believe he would bring them in from Ireland; over on the ferry and then from Heysham on the train to Lancaster; there were big sidings at Wheatfield Street where the new houses are. He would walk them down Dallas Road to overnight them in that field before walking them through town to the auction at the top of Penny Street. When he gave his notice in, in the early 1970's, we got that field extra from the Dawson Estate. Now it was always marshy, there was a concrete trough in, it had mains water in it 'cause there is no water in that field as such. I feel there is a spring towards the end of where it was all a bit marshy and soft, at one end. But this concrete trough [CT], it was quite large; I think it had four sections in it and I wondered whether, I don't know if they'd done away with it then because it was still there when we were farming. I don't know whether it had a mains supply to it or, I couldn't see it being spring water personally, but that's my opinion.

So I know that when we took the field over we did drain the bottom and put a clay pipe through but it was very difficult to drain because it's very low lying and you couldn't get any fall. Now one of our neighbours, Bob Watson, was a building inspector and he could use diving rods and he found a stone drain which, I don't know where it came from but it ran closer to the wall and alongside the hedge. But there was also a mains pipe that must have been put in at a later date, he sort of found it was running somewhere down this way [parallel to the wall] a lot of water going through it. But from the concrete structure there was sort of a clay pipe drain running through because I lost the diving rods down them and Bob came and he was right on top of it, about 3 or 4 feet down, and he was right on top of it when he found it and I got my rods out. Now the water then ran down here into a trough [T] here. Then it went through the Prisoners Aid field, turned left into another trough [T]; there was a junction there, close the fence, because one of the houses on Aldcliffe Rd had a well and if the well filled, it overflowed into the field or into that drain. It would over flow into the Prisoners Aid field. It then travelled a little bit along the hedge and went down the hill towards Lucy brook. This clay pipe fed into this first trough [T] here, these troughs never dried up, ran into the Prisoner's Aid field, and then turned to a trough [T] under the hedge which should still be there. How far it travelled along I don't know, before going down to the field, down towards Lucy brook, but it did not go into Lucy Brook. We put a dye down, it seems as though, if you go through the double gates by the Pads, which is where the housing estate is now and you'll find a concrete manhole.

I didn't know that this Flat Meadow, which you now call West Field, was boggy. I know the year I left school I couldn't understand why it was getting worse, my father couldn't either, but I happened to spot water coming up and there was a broken pipe and it had this clay pipe going through towards Aldcliffe Hall where there was a farm here which is now converted, Home Farm, and it went towards there but Mark and Jim Airey of Bank Farm said they'd no reason to believe there was water going in there but it was certainly going in that direction and we actually in, what's now West Field, put a manhole in to divert it back into the field drain and back into the brook and that dried it all out. We put a dye down in the Prisoners Aid field at it came out of the manhole at the bottom of Brookfield so it wasn't going into Lucy brook.

Asked about: Pasture and Hay Meadow

A pasture is a field for cattle to graze full time; grass, thistles and wild flowers grow around the cow pat. Hay Meadow was closed off to animals until after hay time; we were producing hay for winter feed. We were self-sufficient with animal feed apart from concentrates, that you had to feed them, we bought that in. A meadow would have had fertilizer put on it; the fields for hay had manure spread on them in February/ March. When I was growing up we still had horse and carts and we'd go out with a cart load of muck; we had a grab and we'd pull it off into a heap to be spread with a fork, and it had to be in straight line as well, you didn't wobble, because you would get told off. This was before tractors and spreaders; tractors were expensive; it was 1952 when we bought one.

Periodically we'd put lime on; they used to come with a waggon, they go out with the waggon and just spread it and you had lime going everywhere.

We'd only got 40 odd acres, there was only so much you could set aside for hay because after muck spreading it had to be closed off until we hay timed which originally was July. And then you'd leave it for another few weeks for the fresh grass to grow so you were limited to what you could do.

Hay meadows were full of all kinds of wild flowers, but you didn't hay time until July and August, because then the hay would be nice, it would be thick, it would be dead in the bottom, the grass had died off at the bottom to some extent so the wildlife came through and wild plants and flowers and such like. Way back in the '60's or 70's I remember going to a Young Farmers meeting and there was a guy from Reading University. Now Reading, because it's in the Gulf Stream, warmer current, they did a lot of experimenting agriculture wise and this guy said 'the best day to start hay time is the 27th April' and one farmer said '*Aye up we're still sweeping snow off the top of Quernmore in April*' because the proteins in the grass and it was encouraged to get the most protein out so hay time was moved suddenly to June, middle of June was a good time to start because you've got all the protein in the grass and then you had to, because then they came out with, we didn't have one, hay driers and bale the hay and make a tunnel put the dryer in at one end and set it off, it made a hell of a row, and it would force all the moisture out without losing any of the protein and so that is one of the reasons why, because hay time was earlier, the wild life, wild grasses and such like never came through because they hadn't had time to grow. So when we were doing it in August and into September yes it was full of all these wild plants.

The original balers were standing balers, put them in the middle of the field, you brought the hay to them and we had a sweep on the front which might have been 5 feet or 6 feet long, wooden with metal tips and got the hay up, took it to the baler and my father would fork it in and guy who had the baler and he and my mother would put a clamp in and wire, my mother would feed the wires through and we had a pair of plyers to twist them at the end that was what I did when I was a child.

The trailers had to be loaded with loose hay properly; the corners, the middle, otherwise it would fall off, and then when you got it into the barn it had to be, you did the front and then just threw it behind, and I'd come home from school with friends and we used to play on it to pack it down. When you came in winter to cut it we had a big spade like a heart shaped and you cut it and it should peel off if you'd done it right. It reminded me of rich tobacco.

Asked about: grazing animals

Dairy cattle, we didn't have any sheep. There were too many dogs; the sheep worrying was a major problem. So we were only dairy but we weren't that big; we had 27 milking cows and the cow's calves. When you realise that whilst it was about 47 acres part of the year you weren't using that because it was meadows for hay for feeding them over the winter, so you are restricting yourself down to about 27 cows. Ours were all Friesian, they were milk producers.

We'd milk into like buckets then go through into the dairy and pour it into a tank, at head level, and it would filter through the cooler: there was a little trough at the top, and then at the back there was, it was like an old fashioned laundry wash board, cold water ran through inside it to cool it, the milk trickled down over it. Then the milk went through a sieve, two metal sieves with a cloth in between and it would sieve out all the hay seeds that were in there, and then out into the churn underneath, which held 12 gallons at one time. Then they brought in the 10 gallon aluminium churns.

Then we would bottle it, by hand, and put the caps on, cardboard before they were silver foil, and we had a squeezer, and it hurt your hand. We did eventually get a crate bottler; you could put 20 pints in a crate and pull a lever down.

I delivered the milk around the top of the hill [Westbourne Road] for the Bishop and a few others, before I went to school when I was at junior school when I was 6, 7, 8 years of age, I used to do that; I had one lady, Mrs Picard, she lived down the road I would take her milk on the way to, Dallas Rd, school and pick up the empties on the way back, in those days you walked to school when you were 6.

The cows were sold after calving; we took them to the auction and sold them with the new calf.

The dairy herd was sold in 1971 when we came to an agreement with Harries. We then ran beef cattle; we used to buy them in and fatten them up until it became unworkable in 1977 because the houses were encroaching [the building of Abraham Heights housing estate].

Asked about: bird life & wild life

No particular memories of wildlife; I think I once saw a stoat. But it was very close to the city, people walked down the Pads, walked through the fields, exercised their dogs, but there was wildlife, a lot of frogs,

As an older child I would go with friends and dam Lucy brook and picnic, pick mushrooms.

Asked about: hedge laying

The Pads now, it was our responsibility to maintain, to cut the grass and the hedges. And in those days, we had the most to do because of the hedge and banking on both sides, you cut the grass with a sickle and then you had to cut the hedge with a slash hook and woe betide you, people would complain, you'd get the Council ringing up saying 'we've had people complaining you haven't cut the grass'; of course we'd not cut the grass; we'd been hay timing or we'd been doing something else, but it was all done by hand.

I did some hedge laying, my father was great at it; it isn't just a case of cutting them down and letting them continue to grow you can only do it in winter or March time, because the sap's out, probably better early on in the year when sap's beginning to run because then you've got a bit of

leverage with it, but it depends on the thickness, you can cut so far through or you can chop it and bring it down and the next one over the top of it. But you've got to go round afterwards, over the next few years, as its growing, and feed in new growth, wind in the new shoots and tuck it in so that it makes it more solid, no gaps in it 'cause obviously you don't want small animals running through, you don't want dogs coming through, you don't want cows getting out 'cause they can get out of anything. My father laid the section of hedge from the end of where the orchard is now to the bend in the path [H¹] and the stretch from the Prisoners Aid field right round eventually [H²] in the 1960's; I remember my father doing it.

Then along came Work Experience in the late 1970's. The Council said they would do it, they'd got Work Experience, and they did it for about 3 years. We had to do our side [inside the fields] and the top, but they did the path side. Then I got a letter one day it said 'you haven't cut the grass' so I rang them up and said 'well first of all it's not our responsibility any more', we'd given up the tenancy 'and secondly you took it over so now it's your responsibility' and they did it for a while. The Work Experience also put a lot of hard-core down on the path, did the Council, like a cinder; they put the solid base down.

Asked about: Pony Wood

We didn't do anything in Pony Wood, the cows went in; shelter when it was raining.

At some time there has been a building at the north end of Pony Wood, according to the map. If you look [on the map] there has obviously been a building there. Because I'd forgotten until I saw that but when I was younger there was a stone foundation, quite a lot of rough stones there and it's obviously been a shelter of some sort that has fallen down. Or they may have used the stones for something else. But I always remember there being stones there. But there was certainly no building there.

Asked about: the stretch of concrete wall

I've no idea, none whatsoever. Westbourne House which E B Dawson built for one of his daughters, Philadelphia, but she wouldn't live in it, is solid concrete whether that was a test. There was a tree next to the wall, which is long since burnt out, it had died but then it was burnt out.

Asked about: the History of the Aldcliffe area

I have a copy of the Will of Edward Bousfield Dawson, who died in 1916, and I believe that the estate ran from Stodday farm through to Willow Lane behind Demark Street. It all went into a Trust for his daughters. He'd 4 daughters; 1 died before 1916. The land was put in Trust. The last of the Dawson's died in 1961: Lucy Evelyn Leader, she died in London and was about 90. Then the Trust was broken and it went to, I believe, the only surviving relative which was a great nephew called Geoffrey Curzon Harries. He immediately wanted to sell off the land; possibly death duties to pay for. He lived in Kent. He was very badly advised, in my opinion, by his agent, because without consultation they decided they would come and do a survey on the land and, this was before Christmas 1960 or '61, but farmers didn't get any compensation and it was the discretion of the landlord, not like a householder who would probably lose his house, it didn't apply to farmers, two years rent was offered. A friend of my parents had a great knowledge of local laws and he fought it for 11 years, got two public enquiries until eventually the landlord came and said 'you've got to go'. I was told that it was going through the planning committees the night before and it failed again. I

said: 'you can't throw me out of the house and my job with no compensation' and he came back with a compensation package.

But during that time there was no major development of housing within the city [of Lancaster]

Accompanying this [copy of Dawson's Will] is a plan of part of the [Aldcliffe] estate, certainly the part that affects Abraham Heights. That's the Aldcliffe Hall. Dawson lived at Aldcliffe Hall which is no longer there, it has been pulled down. This is obviously his park and that's Aldcliffe Road, the Lodge and you've got down to Williamson's linoleum factory. Edenbreck and Carr house farms somewhere around here. This will be Cromwell Rd.

The Pads of course comes from here, down here, across there and down there coming round here. Now it says the 'Municipal Border' or 'boundary'. In this field here you may have noticed a stone,*** I don't know whether it's a boundary marker or what. There used to be a ceremony of walking the boundaries, I recall the proprietor of Atkinson's coffee on a horse walking the boundary.

After the war, in the early '50's, the City Council put in to develop the whole of Abraham Heights right through Aldcliffe; it was shaded in on to the Town Plan and the Dawson estate at that time fought it, or the Trustees of the Dawson estate, they fought it. Rationing was still on because they used the amount of produce produced on the land as evidence that they couldn't afford to lose the land to produce food. That was the original plan and it never got off the ground. ****

Adrian Gifford

***Accounts by the Loxam family** who also farmed the area for several generations can be found on the Fairfield Association website at: <http://www.fairfieldassociation.org/flora/education.html>, under the title 'Growing up at Carr House Farm' and 'A Virtual Walk around Fairfield' (completed as part of the *Green Path Project*).

****History of the Prisoner's taken from the Lancaster Observer 18th October 1901 by Helen Hicks**
Mr. Salterthwaite and Mr. J. Lancaster appeared to give information respecting what are known as the Lancaster Prison Charities, which were combined in one scheme on the 21st March 1890. The first were combined in one scheme on the 21st March 1890. The first charity dealt with was that of Abigail Rigbye of 1716, one portion being a rent charge of £2 and another £2 being raised upon the investment of £100, £78 of which was spent in the purchase of the Orange Wood. This charity is applicable to poor widows not in receipt of parish relief, and is distributed at Christmas and is supplemented by gifts of 1s. each from Lord Ashton, the Mayor, the Vicar and others. The remaining part of the charity is devoted to the payment of a minister for preaching and administering Holy Communion to prisoners at the Castle. Other charities mentioned were Rogerson's, £3 17s 4d; Peter Latham's derived from land at Scotforth in the occupation of Mr. Joseph Kelsall, at £10 a year, and used originally for the provision of bread for prisoners at Lancaster and Preston, a charge of £8 on the Garwood Estate of Sir Thomas Gerrard; Henrietta Rigbyes, now paid by the corporation of Lancaster; and £234 railway stock purchased with gifts from visitors. It turned out that a number of gifts were now made from the proceeds of these charities to homes of the Church Army, The Salvation Army, and Dr. Baarnardo. Apart from this the

trustees delegated their duties to the Discharged Prisoners' Aid Society. The balance in hand at the end of last year was £236.

*** The Aldcliffe/Lancaster boundary stone was found in the area below Pony Wood. It has now been restored and re-sited in the place where it was found.

**** More information about the history of the area can be found on the Fairfield Association website at <http://www.fairfieldassociation.org/ourprojects/history.html> on the *History of the Area* page, and slides and podcasts in the *Flora Educational Programme* page: <http://www.fairfieldassociation.org/flora/education.html>

There is also useful and interesting account of recollections about Aldcliffe by Nick Webster, which is available online at: <http://www.lancaster.ac.uk/users/rhc/Aldcliffe/Aldcliffe%20Recollection.pdf>