## Documentary sources of information

Whilst some illuminating and occasionally fascinating documentary sources were brought together as a result of the study, the general picture that emerged was that on the whole, haymaking is an area of human activity about which not much has been written.

Many incidental references to hay making can be found in a range of publications. What often emerges from these is the crucial importance of hay making as a central part of the livelihood and indeed survival of earlier communities.

In the past, even significant battles were delayed for hay time as the men couldn't be called to arms until their hay was harvested to ensure their livestock had food for the winter.

> "It fell about the Lammas tide
> When the muir-men win their hay…"
> *(from the **Ballad of Otterburn, 1388**)*

In more recent times, hay time could even be said to have affected not just the future career of certain politicians, but helped secure the future of an entire political party! In a crucial bye-election of 1903, the Barnard Castle constituency returned not only its first Labour MP – the later Nobel peace prize winner Arthur Henderson – but the result was the first bye-election victory in a three-cornered fight with the Conservatives and Liberals for the youngest of the three political parties. Henderson won by a very narrow majority. In a brief news report in **The Times** dated **Monday 27th July 1903**, it was noted that Polling Day was a very fine one for hay making. In seeking to explain the reasons for the Conservative's defeat, it was stated that "many farmers and farm hands would not give up the time to vote, (and) as many as 30 voters in one district stayed away." If they, and no doubt others like them, had turned out to vote, the result would certainly have gone the other way!

**Upper Teesdale: the Archaeology of a North Pennines Valley (Coggins 1985)** suggests on the evidence of fieldwork and excavations, including pollen analysis, that '*mixed farming continued without a break in Upper Teesdale after the Roman withdrawal.*' (unlike other parts of the north east of England which reverted to woodland for the next thousand years or so). It continues that while there is '*no evidence for hay making in the pre-Roman period…it is difficult to believe that it did not take place'*. The practice of hay making by its very nature leaves little direct evidence in the landscape. We are therefore left to infer from a few surviving prehistoric field systems and boundaries, together with the sporadic results of pollen analysis, that it was probably taking place in Teesdale in the Bronze Age and possibly even from the times of the earliest clearances, some 5000 years ago.

**Weardale: Clearing the Forest (Bowes)** covers the establishment in c.1100 of the first Anglo-Saxon villages at Wolsingham and Stanhope. In both communities the meadow land occupied the lower lying and flatter land between village and river, so the higher arable land was not subject to the risk of flooding. The fields were on the north of the river on warmer south-facing slopes. The meadows would have been

ring fenced and divided into open strips which were shared out and worked together by the village households:

> 'How was a communal meadow actually shared? Originally, the common hay area was seen as a certain number of days' summer scything to be carried out among appropriate households. So that each farmer might have a sufficient portion of the hay, the meadows was divided into open strips or 'dales' ('doles' or 'dails') and their widths probably marked at both ends by mere-stones. In this way, work was not slowed down or land used up by a succession of boundary walls. The size of the shares or dales could easily be altered by moving the stones.as demand changed. Each dale's crop belonged to a particular individual. The method was more satisfactory than a division of the total crop. Of course, care had to be taken in 'doling' out the 'dales' fairly. Land quality varied and a certain amount of give and take must have been necessary.
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> 'Dales, and indeed the whole meadow, were also described as so many days' work which was contributed by a combined work force when hay time arrived. For instance, a meadow might be known as fifteen days' work which probably meant that the labour of one farmer spread over fifteen days was required to cut the grass. More realistically, the efforts of, say, three men would be expected to take five days. Some surviving upper Weardale farm and field names serve as a reminder of these old medieval methods of managing meadowland: Dale Head, Margery Dale, Parkin Dales, Scrabtree Dale, Twelve Days' Work, Six Dargue (Six Days' Work), Longdale, Barrass Dale, Burtree Dale, Broad Dale. In Stanhope, the 1965 Bondisle housing estate occupies the low, flat 'bond dales' of medieval times.'

R.A. Butlin, in his chapter on **Field Systems of Northumberland and Durham** discusses farming in the two counties mainly from the mid-16$^{th}$ century from the time of common fields, through enclosure to the mid 19$^{th}$ century. He mainly concentrates on the arable lands, devoting relatively little to meadows and hay making or the upland area of the counties. There is an interesting reference though to how the meadows were divided up at Denwick, near Alnwick in Northumberland:

> 'At Denwick in 1618, the Gynsen meadow was divided into 40 dales, each dale being 1 acre, 1 rood and 31 & 9/16$^{th}$ of a perch in area. Each tenant had three dales in this meadow. The meadows in the common fields there were also divided into dales. A different method of utilisation was the allocation to the tenants of a certain number of swathes or cocks of hay after it had been mown. The 'Broad Meadows' of Denwick were divided into 444 swathes, allocated to tenants as groups of two swathes per tenant.'

**A Preliminary study of key issues in relation to Northern Hay Meadows (Couch & Rodwell 1996)** notes that:

> 'Traditional management of northern hay meadows probably differs very little from early agricultural practice in its combination of freedom from grazing in late spring and early summer, a mid-summer hay cut and manuring by dung as a spring dressing and from grazing stock. Such a style of treatment may have continued in

some localities for close on a millennium as part of a wider complex of inherited tradition of land-use.'

In a scientific paper, **Smith and Jones (1991)** analysed the pattern of hay making on farms all but one of which are in the Yorkshire Dales rather than the North Pennines but the same results would in all probability hold true in the AONB. They studied farm diaries kept during the period 1947-86 and found that start dates for hay cutting were relatively constant throughout that period but that finish dates were earlier towards the end of the period. The decreased frequency of late finishes since the 1960s, coupled with the time it takes to make hay, was attributed to improvements in agricultural technology.

**The First Year's Report of the Northumbrian Agricultural Society** was read at the AGM held in the Town Hall in Alnwick on 21st January 1837 and offers a detailed account of how the hay meadows were managed in the uplands of that county in the early Victorian period:

'Meadows here are such old grasslands as are employed for growing hay almost every year, the greatest part of which are uplands. To enable them to stand this severe cropping, they are, or ought to be, manured on the surface every third or fourth year; if this operation is be neglected, they impoverish very fast. Where they cannot be conveniently dunged as above, they are depastured one year, and mown the other; or, what is better, depastured two years, and mown the third: the produce, from one to a ton and a half per acre, a fair crop. The aftermath (or 'fog') is frequently lett from ten to fifteen shillings per acre, and is mostly consumed in fattening oxen and cows.

Lands that are intended for meadows, are 'freed' (from being depastured with any kind of stock) at different times in the spring, from the beginning of April to the middle of May, as best suits the convenience of the occupier: particular attention is paid to mole-hills, dung, etc, being 'scaled' (i.e. spread about), and the stones and other matters that might obstruct the operations of the scythe, are carefully gathered off.

The hay harvest is seldom begun before the middle of June. The mowers cut from half an acre to three quarters a day, and that very ill; the hay-makers are equally indolent and inactive. After the grass is cut, it is by some tedded, strewed, or spread abroad, and repeatedly turned till dry; others, the day after it has been tedded or strewed, put it into foot-cocks (wappings), which can scarcely be too small (if the weather keeps dry, it is, in two days more, put into large cocks); if the weather proves wet, we know no mode by which it will save better, or waste less, as the rain passes through them, and a small quantity of air or sun dries them again, or they are easily turned over.

In either mode, when sufficiently dry, it is put into ricklets (provincially 'pikes'), of about half a ton each, in the field; which stand there for two, three, or more weeks, until a convenient opportunity offers for leading them home, to be put into one large stack. In these ricklets the hay takes a first sweating, which prevents its heating when put into larger masses.

For the purpose of drawing it together to be put into pikes, or ricklets, it is either cocked or put into large heaps, which are trailed in by one horse, yoked to the ends of a large rope put round the bottoms of those cocks or heaps; upon the hind part of which a boy gets with his feet, to keep it down, and prevent its slipping over the top of the hay; when arrived at the place wanted, one end of the rope is taken off the hook at the horse's shoulder, and being thus loosened at one end, the horse moves forward, when the rope draws though under the hay, and leaves it.

When the hay is neither put into cocks nor large heaps, but remains in a thick row, it is then necessary to use to horses, viz. one yoked to each end of a strong sweeping rope, and two persons to get upon the rope with their feet, one on each side the row, who rest with their arms upon the hay, and step forward on the rope as the hay gathers. To prevent the hay from slipping off behind, a small cord is fastened to the hind part of the sweeping rope, and extended to each person's hand, which they let out as they step forward, or find otherwise necessary. By either of the above modes, that hay grown upon a field of eight or ten acres may be drawn together in a few hours, and is much more expeditious than either sledges or carts.

When the large stack is made in the field, the 'pikes' are drawn to it, by putting a strong rope round their bottom, the two ends of which are fastened to the hind part of a cart, in which are yoked three or four horses, this saves the trouble of forking and loading them in carts, and is done in much less time.

**Life and Traditions in the Yorkshire Dales (Hartley & Ingilby 1968)** is one of the best accounts of haymaking in the first half of the 20th century although covering the Yorkshire Dales rather than the North Pennines. A whole chapter is devoted to hay time accompanied by a series of black and white photographs showing the complete process of haymaking from setting up a scythe, mowing, strewing, turning the hay in rows and using hay rakes to haymaking machines from the period, including swathe turners, horse-drawn hayrake, sweeps and leading hay with a sledge.

The chapter principally records the days when most of the work was still being done by hand, including mowing by teams of scythesmen. There is a wonderful description of the lore and custom that surrounded the importance of the scythe, e.g. '*it was an unwritten law that a man's scythe was his own and that no one else should use it.' Many hired men, both Irishman and others, brought their scythes with them. An acre was regarded as equivalent to a day's mowing for one individual. In a field full of mowers, the leadsman, the best mower, 'led the others in an echelon formation across a field… They mowed one way across the field and then walked back to begin again in order that the swathes fell in the same direction*.'

The authors quote individuals who can recall the first mowing machines in the Dales even before 1900. '*The sequence of the processes of haymaking was always followed and held good up to the gradual introduction of hay-time machinery drawn by horses towards the end of the last and the beginning of the present century. They have only faded out since tractors replaced horses in the last twenty years. In some cases they are still practised*.'

It is interesting to note, too, the prejudices or preferences of earlier generations of farmers. For example, in places the use of rakes was not approved. At the turn of

the century, '*straw girls or straw boys about four to a mower followed the scytheman across the field strewing the grass by bending low and tossing it alternatively with each hand over the opposite shoulder. In this way the hay was not trodden underfoot and lay as light as possible*.'

The authors summarise a typical farm pre-mechanisation thus:

'Before the Second World War many a Dales' farmer managed his hay-time with one or two horses and a staff of four or five depending on the size of the farm, a mowing machine, hay rake, strewer, and sometimes a swathe turner, all pulled by a horse and the latter two driven by the wheels of the machine as they rode along the ground'.

As they were recording the scenes in the 1960s, the old methods '*with their exacting endeavour were further eroded by the tractors which both power and pull the new haymaking machinery. The baler, introduced during the early 1960s, and more recent elevators to carry the bales up to the forking-holes, have largely done away with sweeps, sledges, windrowing, and forking up'*. And yet they write, '*A great deal of the fun has gone out of haymaking.'* While acknowledging that, *'in wet weather work still has to be done over and over again',* in a fine year *'the meadows with a good staff of workers were cheerful places.'*

An almost forgotten art was making a hay rope to throw over the pike to protect it in winds.
'A thraw-crook or a rake was used to make ropes. Either implement required two people – hay was drawn out of the bottom of the pike, and a loop made to fasten round the thraw-crook or round the teeth of the rake. Then a lad winding his thraw-crook or rapidly twisting a rake moved backwards as the rope lengthened and as the other worker fed the rope with hay from the pike. When finished it was either tied in a loop or with string, and was weighted down with stones at the other side of the pike.'

**Weardale Farming Survey (Peart 1941)**
This is an analysis of Weardale farms at the beginning of the Second World War derived from the National Farm Survey data held at Kew Records Office in London. The survey shows every farm, ownership of land, number of livestock, acreage and labour employed. Such surveys were undertaken throughout the country between 1941 and 1943 and determined how land was being used at the time. Among the sorts of statistics that emerged in Weardale is the fact that at the time there were 400 holdings and amongst them just a handful of tractors. In fact there were more converted cars, like the old Morris Cowley, being used for farm use than tractors at that time. The acreage figures shown include the total for 'in bye mown' (i.e. cut for hay). Upwards from Frosterley in the dale there were c.50,000 sheep, about 5000 cattle and 360 horses. The total acreage was just under 30,000, of which 5,405 were hay meadows.

**The Last Horsemen (Bowden 2001)**
This was a series of six half-hour television programmes and accompanying book which showed life on Sillywrea farm, Allendale, Britain's last and only horse-powered farm.

The book contains two short chapters relevant to hay meadows, one on 'grass cutting', the other on 'haymaking'. The former includes a lovely description of the work undertaken on the farm with horses, as well as some interesting insights into the merits and weaknesses of some of the haymaking equipment used on the farm.

'The horse mowers used are drawn by two horses harnessed either side of a long draught pole. The driver rides on the machine on a sprung seat, from which he controls the horses through the reins and adjusts the height of the mower with a lever. A foot pedal puts the machine in and out of gear. The machine is carried on two large iron travelling wheels which are slatted for a better grip. These wheels drive the cutting blade via a hub gearbox and connecting rod. Most cutter bars in Britain were mounted to the right of the driving wheels so that the field could be cut in a clockwise direction.

In the hayfield … it makes a wondrous sight as they cut one after the other, two pairs of horses pulling mowing machines from the 1940s. Both are Albions… regarded as among the most reliable of horse mowing machines, and while these have lasted far longer than anyone would have imagined, John has found that they also have their flaws.'

*from 'The Last Horsemen', by Charles Bowden, p.120-1*

**Hannah Hauxwell – Baldersdale**

Hannah Hauxwell, who farmed at Low Birk Hatt in Baldersdale, became the unlikely subject of an award-winning Yorkshire TV documentary 'Too Long a Winter' first shown in 1973. Barry Cockcroft, the producer of that film and two subsequent documentaries about this remarkable lady, also wrote several books about her including **'Hannah – The Complete Story'**, an omnibus edition containing 'Seasons of My Life' and 'Daughter of the Dale'. Much of the content is purely Hannah's words, some taken directly from the documentaries themselves and she talks with great clarity about life in the 'dale as she remembers it and farming on her own for many years until she retired in 1988.

There is though surprisingly little about haymaking in the book even though she acknowledges that haymaking '*was an important event in the life of the 'dale – still is for me – because that's when you harvest the fodder for the animals when winter comes and there is no grazing to be had'*. She does recall however that, '*Haymaking meant long days and tough work, all by hand. At one time we would have to hire a man in for a month, eating with us but sleeping in the barn. Everything depended on the weather and if your luck was out the hired man's time could be up and not much hay in'*.

'In those days we would start the hay-making at Hury, a parcel of land we owned two miles down the road… Just the three of us, my parents and me, would go down to Hury and stay there for two or three weeks, or until the work was done. We left the older ones in the family to look after Low Birk Hatt, do the milking and other chores, and we went down with the horses. We must have made quite a sight trailing along the road with scythes, rakes, forks, the sledge and the sweep, mowing machine, and our food in a basket. And a bed!'

*Hannah Hauxwell, from 'Seasons of My Life'*

Hannah stopped applying any lime or basic slag to her land after her uncle died in 1961, so '*that means the land has had nothing on it but cow manure for twenty-five years.*' On top of that she '*didn't usually cut her grass until well into August so that gave the plants plenty of time to bloom and seed*.'

**The Weardale Mueseum, Ireshopeburn**

School log books on view in the museum offer interesting evidence for the central importance of haytime in local people's lives in days gone by – and the effects that had on children's attendance at school. Come September, many children would be off school to help if the hay had still not been gathered in.

'The attendance has been greatly improved this week. The season has been extremely wet and a great quantity of hay is still lying about.'

*Entry for Friday, August 22nd 1890*
*from St John's Chapel Board School log book (August 1890 – July 1892)*