

## Haymaking at Crag Top Farm – 1940s and '50s

I was probably 13 when I first went haymaking at Crag Top Farm (that would be 1945). There were four meadows near the farm and another one, about  $\frac{3}{4}$  of a mile away – a long way uphill. I used to put my bike on the empty hay-wagon and ride up. I rode the bike coming down, and opened and shut the various gates on the way.

At that time there were tractors loaned by the “War-Ag”, the West Riding War Agricultural Executive Committee, but presumably just for those farmers who had ploughing to do. Upland farmers couldn't grow oats or other food crops, except possibly mangolds and turnips for the stock, and haymaking was done using horse- and people-power.

At Crag Top Farm, the farmer, John Holmes, had a home-made “tractor”, which was made out of an old Humber car chassis with the top and all the seats (apart from the driver's) removed. It was fitted with an extra gearbox and the back-end weighted down with what looked like half of a stone gate-post. The tyres on the back wheels had chains wrapped around them. A wonderful machine it was, but it took turn-about with the horse.

The horse pulled the mower clockwise round the field, cutting just one swathe at a time. The grass was then left until it was drying nicely, usually two days in decent weather, then came the time when a large number of “staff” were required, all armed with hay-rakes. The swathes were turned by hand, with each person on one swathe. I found it difficult at first, as to turn the swathe the “butt” end had to be turned onto the thinner top end, which necessitated the use of the rake left-handed – a good method of raising blisters !

The next job was shaking the hay out with a “strower” machine; then it had to be rowed-up with a “samming” machine, when it was dry enough to “lead”. The hay was forked onto a cart and the farmer piled it neatly. Then, with a rope or two holding it in place, it was back to the barn where it was forked off onto the “moo” (cf. barley mow; moo is the local dialect equivalent), spread out and “treaded” down.

Crag Top had part of its barn partitioned-off for over-wintering cattle. Above this area were the “baulks”, which were filled with hay first before the rest was stacked on the floor.

If the weather was poor, the hay would be stacked into piles in the field to help keep it dry. If it was from a swathe, small amounts were raked up and given a kick, these were called “footcocks” or “rickling”. If the hay had already been through the “samming” machine, it was made into stacks about three feet high using a short-handled pitch-fork; these were called “hubs”. If the weather was threatening worse, “pikes” would be made – about 7 feet high.

When the weather mended, the pikes or hubs were “shacked” out and “sammed” up again before loading – all extra work, and poorer-quality hay. The true saying was “Good hay is the cheapest”, as it had been made in good weather with no rain.

Sometimes the weather really took its toll. My father told of haymaking in his Wellingtons on “plot night”, but they were glad of even the poor stuff in the winter of 1947.

As the years went, the horse and “tractor” disappeared as the farm changed hands and the new tenant, Miles Parker (originally from Pateley Bridge), had a Fordson tractor which I drove on some occasions.

The Fordson was started with a starting handle. It used petrol at first, but once the engine was warmed-up a bit it was necessary to switch over to paraffin. This was achieved by knocking the change-over valve with a stone. The controls of the tractor were simple: a hand throttle, a 2-forward and one reverse gear gearbox, and a single pedal. When the pedal was depressed it was in gear and when released the brake was on. There was no clutch – you had to stop to change gear !

Later the haymaking got a bit more mechanised but, apart from swathe-turning, it followed much the same pattern.