

Meadow Memories

Hay time in words and pictures

The two most important things in the farming life... lambing time and hay time. And if you have good weather for both, if both goes well, you're lucky. But those are two important things, your lambs are going to be your income and your hay, feed for your animals.

Hannah Hauxwell

Oh, I dreaded hay times, I really did!

Des Collinson

Hay time, the process of winning hay, falls into three stages – mowing, haymaking and leading. But before it could begin there was much preparation to do. There was manuring and harrowing – and in some years spreading lime to sweeten the soil and basic slag to add more phosphorous:

Lime and slag seemed to go together. We wouldn't slag it every year, it'd be limed every year but it would be slagged maybe every five or six... and you could really tell where you'd been, you know, if you didn't put anything else on it, it grew a quite good sward...

Alan Scott

Then the meadows could be 'shut up':

The hay meadows would be shut up and allowed to grow... from mid-April to mid-May somewhere around there, about the end of April I would say on average. It depended on the season a lot, what the year was like, and the ewes and lambs were put back to the moor.

Alan Scott



John 'Ridley' Nevin shearing at Parkside Farm, Allendale, 1940s.

Often the start of hay time would immediately follow clipping time – one of the big social events in the farming year:

And all the old men used to come and they might clip two a day and they would sit and talk the rest of the time. It was a social occasion, aye, and there was probably 20 of them.

Alan Scott

And generally, on this farm, 21st June's the longest day and they would generally clip around that time, and as soon as they'd finish clipping they'd start to cut hay.

John Dodd

Clipping in the field, Baldersdale



'They had a hard life, had a horse.'

Then hay time could begin – but first you had to catch your horse! As a young lad Des Collinson recalls hay time could take all your summer holidays and...

Jim White's horse 'Bonnie' pulling an Albion grass cutter at The Rigg, Lunedale.



Before you went to school you probably had the horse to catch. Well, they're quite tall, and I wasn't big then.

And on a sunny day, it was always right at the top – on that steep pasture against the top wall. Now when it was a misty old day, when you weren't going to be haymaking, he was looking over the gate at the bottom. It seemed as if they knew. You used to take oats to catch them with. You had to get a head collar over it.

Well, they got to know. You would keep it lower down, so that when they bent their heads down you could pop it over their heads. But they could put their heads out and get a bite before you could – so you'd to be quite sharp to get them caught. Especially as time went on, because they'd get sick of haytining, what for clegs and midges, and one thing and another. Because they had

a hard time, had horses. Like first thing on the morning you used to start 'bout 5 o'clock, as you had to have the grass cut while the dew was still on. So, then they got a little bit of rest. And then once the sun got up and then they had to be turning and strewing. They were full days, they were.

Des Collinson

Why you got taken to your horses, I mean, they were like one of the family. I know when they went, when we did away with the horses, it was a sad day to see the horses going, it were.

Jack Addison



William Bell (Wilf Allinson's brother-in-law) leading hay to the shed.



'Dolly' with hay rake at West Briscoe Farm, Baldersdale, early 1950s. Farmer Wilf Allinson (in cap) stands with some relatives from Durham who had come to help out at hay time.

