

When the road bends ...

Herbert Allison, Carpenter and gypsy caravan maker

“Originally a gypsy caravan was made out of a four wheeled wagon and they put a top on it, and that was how I did it.”

Oral historian, Anna Greenwood, has been meeting and recording rural lives in the dales. Her interviews are being brought together for a collected work called Rural Voice to be published in the near future. The following transcript shares some of a conversation with gypsy caravan maker, Herbert Allison (89) from Patrick Brompton, as spoken in his own voice.

“I was born in Cocked Hat, just above Newton-le-Willows, mile and three quarters. I went t' school at Newton-le-Willows. I keep telling folk I went to a high school, but it was only one of them on top of a hill and they didn't learn y' very much. We 'ad t' walk a mile and three quarters t' school. There would be about fifty or sixty in the class I would say. Originally there was three school teachers and there was no drinking water; the only water was what wud come off roof. There were outside toilets, and the lads, it was open, they was only a flag across, that was all, for the lads.

“But y' left school at fourteen then. I went straight t' work and I had t' bike four mile and I got five shilling a week for five and a half days. I was a joiner, learning me trade - that was me apprenticeship. Agricultural stuff. As a matter of fact the bloke I worked for 'e was a undertaker as well so we did undertaking. We were delivrin a coffin - it allus had t' be dark at night and I had it on one shoulder and he had it on t' other shoulder - and we'd walk a mile with it. And there was some tar on road - there used t' be shiny bits where tar had com t' top - and I stood on that. I had hobnails, and I went backwards over and tried t' save the coffin, and it bounced down road. And he played little 'ell. He said "You've broke me shoulders! You've broke me shoulders!" and when we got there they only 'ad a candle, and we're going round with candle looking t' see what damage we'd done. I used t' look forward t' whiskey. Generally when ye boxed 'em you got whiskey. All she 'ad was orange juice.

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To view the full article, contact Anna Greenwood