

[Start of interview - 00:00:12]

WRM Let's see, roughly when were you born at Malham?

JG I was taken to Malham in 1919 when I was two months old.

WRM I see.

JG I wasn't actually born in Malham, but near enough.

WRM Yes, and what was Malham like as you grew up? It would be radically different from today, would it?

JG Oh yes, it was, because regarding these stone walls, the boundary of our farm was the river which runs from Malham Cove down through the village right down the dale, and our boundary wall was against that river: a good boundary wall. Whereas today you can't find it, it's all in the river.

WRM It's all lost is it? Where was this, between the village and the cove?

JG Yes, between the village and the cove. And I think there were three farms on the east side that had land adjoining that river, and we've all had to erect wire mesh fences to replace the stone walls which have been thrown into the river by visitors. That's what's happened in a lifetime.

WRM Amazing.

JG You know?

WRM But when you were growing up at Malham, did you get full-time wallers?

JG Not so much full-time wallers, no; that age had gone. You know, all the land was enclosed and it was a case of repairing walls rather than building new ones. But the maintenance of dry-stone walls, if it's done properly throughout the whole farm is quite a big job, you know, and so whilst it didn't justify having someone to do nothing else it nevertheless represented quite a portion of the farmer's time or his staff's time in maintaining these walls.

WRM And you were using limestone?

JG All the time.

WRM Now limestone is not as good as grit stone, is it?

JG No, it isn't, because the general description of limestone is that it's smooth and round rather than rough and 'beddy', what we call 'beddy', you know? But it has no, or very little grip. It's slippy, and whilst the rules of dry-stone walling are more or less the same in whatever type of stone it is - that means it's two on top of one, one on top of two, end in and end out, you know, to give grip - that's more difficult to obtain in limestone because there isn't that length and beddy. It tends to be shorter and rounder. That's generally speaking, of course. But nevertheless if it's handled properly and built properly it's amazing how long they can stand. But there is more maintenance involved in limestone than in the sandstone or the grit, you know?

WRM Malham is the classic example of where you can trace virtually every type of walling, can't you? And in the early days it was just a matter of clearing the land, wasn't it?

JG Oh yes, that's right. Yes, it was a two-fold benefit exercise, as you've just said it. There was clearing the land and also enclosing it, you know? And they do still say of course that... but it isn't obtained quite as much now as they used to do, that it is one of the... it has been one of the more economical means of fencing in that the materials were there. There's nothing to buy, it was just a matter of the time involved in re-building that wall. But now of course time is really expensive, and so that's why things are rather reversed in that it's cheaper now if a wall is really bad to erect a fence alongside it rather than pay a man to build them all up again.

WRM If you go up from Malham to the cove you pass through an area where they actually did walls just simply to make small enclosures, to heap up with some... what was the general process there, what was the technique of making a heap of stones, you know, other than clearing the land?

JG Well, there is an area on the east of Malham there, where there were several large heaps of stone; and it's funny that that particular area is noted for being an area of very small fields, which means that there must have been a great abundance of stones just in that area in that they managed to make so many fields and yet have some spare that they couldn't really do anything else with but just heap up.

WRM Do they tend to get some big stones just to hold a wall?

JG Oh yes, they do. These big heaps of stones are usually heaped up on a large banking. It would be in the days of the horse and cart of course, and they would back the horse and cart to the top of the bank and then tip the cart and they would roll down, and they'd continually roll until they'd built this up, you see. But across the bottom they would sort of pick a lot of big stones out to build up a retaining wall, if you like.

WRM It's a sort of pyramid. [Unclear 00:05:59 - Ray Street?] referred to it as a kind of pyramid, a flattened top pyramid.

JG Yes, that's right.

WRM And it was just the weight of the heap that kept it in position.

JG Yes, more or less; yes. But here again, vandalism has taken a hand in things and they've thrown these about. I've spent hours and hours picking stones up again, you know, and throwing them back on the heap, but people have just for fun thrown things about.

WRM Did you actually know any old wallers who had retired or anything?

JG Oh, yes.

WRM Did they tell you about the old techniques at all?

JG I remember when I was a very young boy talking to a man called Andrew Metcalfe, Andy Metcalfe, who was employed by the Council as a road man.

But in his early life he was I would think probably one of the last survivors of the wallers who did the enclosing in Malhamdale. Because I remember him telling my father about him having two contracts, one of which was to be completed on the 31st February and there isn't such a date so that was rather funny was that, and the other one was up on Pikedaw. That's nearly the top of that hill at Malham. Because, you know, enclosing would start in the valleys and then they'd spread up the hillside, and he had a contract to finish walling Pikedaw. So that'll be about 180 years ago now maybe, 170 or 180 years ago. Because I remember him telling about having an assistant and the assistant had to be left for a while because Mr Metcalfe, Andy, was poorly. And he carried on, did the assistant, but when Andy went back up after he'd recovered he said that he had to 'writhe' a lot off. You know, 'writhing', take a lot off because it wasn't done to his satisfaction. He was a very good waller was Andy, and he was known to be one of the wallers who would never put a stone back down. When he'd picked a stone up off the ground to wall he always found a place for it. Whereas if you see wallers, they'll put some back down, they can't fit it, can't find a place, but Andy could always. And that is what he used to, not exactly boast about, but say that was one of the qualifications of a good waller, in that the rack of the eye could ken a stone that would fit the place.

WRM What are the various terms used in walling? First of all the foundations, what are they generally referred to as?

JG Footings; footing stones or foundations.

WRM Footings; you see, Dales' terms are much better than these general things, aren't they?

JG Yes, footings, 'putting the footings in': that's the expression.

[Short digression about loudness of recording]

JG If you watch them at Agricultural Shows, I've watched them you know in these competitions, and I once remember Eric Hargreaves saying, 'That fella's got his footings wrong.' You know, that means he hasn't set his foundations properly. So 'footings' or foundations are the general terms for beginning. And then the second course is always inset two or three inches, you know, to get this 'batter'. A dry-stone wall hasn't to be built straight up it has to have a batter, you know; particularly if it's built on a hillside.

WRM You were talking about 'end in, end out', what does that mean?

JG Well, that means if a stone is that shape and this is the wall that we're building, well it's got to be built like that, end in and end out, not that way.

WRM Oh, I see; the width rather than the length.

JG The width rather than the length, you see, because that way it has a grip on the filling stones, you know? It's a three point landing; it's onto two stones underneath it, that's what's meant by one on top of two, and then another two comes on top of that one. It's like bricks, building with bricks; crossing the joints. But that's what's meant by end in and end out, to get a better grip of

the inside of the wall, because doing it this way they would very soon slither off.

WRM And the fillings are important, aren't they?

JG Oh, yes, the fillings are. There are five different types of stones. There are what we've just referred to as the footing stones. Then there are the walling stones that constitute the two sides. The filling stones are in the middle. The through stones [are] those which grip the two sides, of which there are very few in a limestone area. That's one of the things that makes it difficult to make a limestone wall stand as long as the other types, because of the scarcity of 'throughs'. Because throughs have a wonderful binding effect, in that they bind the two sides together, and the sort of real requirement of building a good wall is to have at least two rows of throughs. You know one about a third of the way up and another two-thirds of the way up, so that they've got two layers of throughs.

WRM What's the common type of through? You often use the Helwith Bridge blue flags, don't you, here and there?

JG Yes, they do.

WRM I noticed above Clapham there, they all use these throughs.

JG Yes, that's right, and those would be imported if you'd like to use that word.

WRM Yes, and it's worthwhile doing that is it?

JG Oh, definitely.

WRM To get a good grip?

JG Definitely yes, to make it last longer, to avoid this slipping and bellying.

WRM But you can make one without throughs, can you?

JG You can, but it won't stand as long.

WRM No.

JG No, it won't stand as long, because of this lack of binding; and what tends to do then is that the fillings tend to slip and drop with the snow, rain and frost until the walls sort of belly out because of the fillings dropping. And that's when a gap falls.

WRM So you've got five types of stone, you've got the footings...?

JG The footings, walling stones, filling stones, throughs and top stones: the capping ones.

WRM Yes.

JG You know, a wall comes up like so, and then there's a top one which grips the two sides of the top and protects that from anything that jumps it, sheep or anything, so it doesn't knock small stones off. Those are the five types of stones. That's for general walling. And then when you come to making gateways or divisions between, you know, what we were talking about before?

WRM Those are wall heads?

JG Those are wall heads, yes. Now they're a slightly different type of stone again in that you do select the very best and biggest and squarest if possible stones to make this wall head, which is a sort of sequence of tracers and headstones, you know?

WRM What term would you use to describe a headstone then, one that 'beats' up against another stretch of wall is it?

JG Yes, a headstone is one which, well naturally forms the wall head, but it's like a very good quality through, if you like. It spans both sides of the wall but if possible is a squarer type thing, you know, that's got a good bed and also a good bed for one to go on top of.

WRM So it is a neat...?

JG Or give a neat end to it, and one that looks well. Of course, very often they are dressed with a hammer to that sort of condition and stage, you see?

WRM Did you use a hammer much when you were walling?

JG Not a lot, but you always do have to have one, you know, because sometimes you can get on a bit quicker. I mean, if you end up with a space and you can't find one that's just like that then you can very often trim one and drop it in and that's it, rather than spend all the time looking all round, you know? But that's not supposed to be done - not in competition - but it is done. Yes, you'd always need a hammer, and a pick for re-bedding the footing

stones, you know, because very often they've tipped on the outside and that's what let the wall down. You know, the outside's sunk in, so you've got to sort of swing it up again and make a level bed underneath so that it's sitting level.

WRM You wouldn't normally use a lot of strings and frames and things, would you?

JG Not for re-building gaps, but you do when you're setting a new wall. Oh yes, you do.

WRM Have you used them?

JG Yes, aye.

WRM What do they call a frame actually?

JG A walling frame; yes, that's what it's called, setting a frame.

WRM And what are the strings called?

JG Lines.

WRM I thought of putting a little glossary together.

JG Yes.

WRM That would be rather fun, wouldn't it?

JG Yes, that's right.

WRM And I could put all these little terms in.

JG Oh yes, well, a frame and line [are used] because when you're walling a gap in a long wall you have each end there to wall to, but a frame is where you have no end to sort of guide to.

WRM What occasion have you had to make a new wall, a new stretch of wall? Have you done very much of that?

JG No, I haven't; but the occasions when I used a line is when I was learning, because your eye isn't as keen, it isn't as good, so just to make sure that you aren't making a wavy line, that's when I've used a line. I've not used a line much in walling. No, I've done hardly any erecting of new walls, it's always been repairing gaps.

WRM What are the chief threats to walls apart from the tourists, is it the weather mainly?

JG Oh yes, there are quite a lot of reasons. There is a wall across there, can you see behind Town Head houses there?

WRM Yes.

JG There's a field there with a horse in the top of it?

WRM Yes.

JG Well, the wall behind the horse is a wall which is stood on one leg. The ground's a lot higher on the high side of the wall, so they've got to build a wall half way up before they become level with the ground above. And then

there're two sides then. So it's stood on one leg. Now that's one of the main causes of gaps falling. There are a lot of gaps in that length of wall, you can see them falling, and that's because they aren't both sides starting at one level.

WRM Oh, I see. But that was the only way that they could do it, was it?

JG That was the only way they could do it and on my farm I had a lot like that, stood on one leg. And it means that the weight of stone isn't evenly balanced, you see, above. That's one reason.

WRM But you do get land as steep as that.

JG Oh, yes.

WRM I mean that's very common, isn't it?

JG Yes, it is. And it was rather silly up Malham, because a lot of the walls were built... As you'll know with Malham, there are lot of these [what] they call lynchets, don't they, which is a level patch then a bank and then another level patch. And instead of building the wall on the level patch, they built it on the banking. The reason for that being that in those days they did their own ploughing, didn't they, with oxen? And so they ploughed the level bit, and they couldn't plough the bank so they built the wall there. *[Laughs]* But it was bad to make it stand.

WRM And this is very common in Malham?

JG Oh, it is; yes, it is. Yes, a lot of the walls are built on the actual bank, and

stood on one leg. That's one reason why they fall. Another is because of the shortage of throughs in a limestone area so there isn't this binding effect. Another is because of the roundness of the stone, and the slippiness of it. They're very smooth, you know?

WRM Well, limestone is very slippery, isn't it?

JG Yes, it is.

WRM Dry or wet, it's still slippery.

JG That's right. And another is that a lot of the limestone walls weren't built to a big height, which means that active sheep could jump them, and they knock a lot down by jumping you know? And then you come on to the present day problems such as visitors climbing them.

WRM But the weather does affect them, does it?

JG Oh, the weather definitely affects it because the weather...

WRM Is it the freeze-thaw situation?

JG Yes, the weather lifts the ground, you know, raises it. Only a fraction of an inch perhaps, but when the thaw comes the sun shines on one side of the wall so that side softens, you see, whereas the other... so that side falls. You know, it maybe only drops half an inch or even less, but that's movement. And so you get this very little bit of movement, but over the years that results in the weakening of the wall and it'll fall.

WRM Norman Nicholson had a little poem about walls that walk and they do, don't they? They do move.

JG Oh yes, another thing is that very often you see trees beside a wall, and as they grow bigger and make stronger roots, you know, roots can lift a wall.

WRM Actually that wall up there is an incredible one, isn't it?

JG Oh, straight up?

WRM Straight up.

JG That will always stand better than the one that goes across.

WRM Yes, quite, I was just wondering about that.

JG Yes, it will, going straight up is...

WRM What's the particular technique of building on a steep site like that? I mean, you don't do them in normal courses then, do you?

JG Oh, no, the courses still have to be level.

WRM They have?

JG Oh, yes.

WRM Courses are always level?

JG Yes, they're always level, or they should be. I mean, if you're building up the hillside the courses would be like that. [*Demonstrates action*]

- WRM So that is really a particular technique, that sort of thing?
- JG Oh yes, yes it is. So... oh yes, weather. Frost and rain are bad, you know, for walls.
- WRM I was going on my morning walk the other day. You don't often hear a wall fall, do you?
- JG No.
- WRM Well, you might have done.
- JG Aye, I have done, yes.
- WRM But I was just up near Stackhouse and suddenly there was a terrific shuttering, and it was half way across between the road and that barn, crash, and the whole lot just came down and the sheep leapt up!
- JG Oh yes, very noisy, yes. There were interesting stories told about the farmers who over a hundred years ago trained young lads to wall. *[Interruption in tape]* I was talking to one of them, William Bolland, who worked for the farmer who farmed Prior Hall before we went to it. A man called John Walker. And it was only a small farm and he couldn't afford to pay a man's wage, so he always had a lad come in from school. And then when he got to be eighteen or twenty years of age he wanted too much wage so he had to go; and he'd get another lad. So he was involved in training these lads to wall, and he was a very, very tough taskmaster this old chap, you know? Because he would show him, he would go with him once or twice and show

him how to do it: but you can't learn that way, you've got to do it, to practice it. It isn't like an assembly kit where you follow instructions, you know? It's only by practicing and doing it that you get to know the technique and reach perfection as it were. So it came to the time when he had to go on his own, and when they'd finished this John Walker always went to inspect it, and he told about the instance where he once went and the lad had built the wall up. He'd actually got it the same height each side but he had some stones left. And so he said, 'Tha'll have to go back lad and pull it down, there's never ever any stones left. They should all go back, because they were all there before.' So of course this lad was rather heartbroken and would have to go back and pull it all down again. And next time when he went he was some short. He wanted to make sure that he hadn't any left but he couldn't get enough so there was a dip in it, you see? *[Laughs]* 'No,' he said, 'Tha'll have to pull it down again *[Laughs]* and start again.' And he said the third time he just managed it, you know, but what an experience.

WRM Of course stones do break up, don't they?

JG Oh, yes.

WRM And they have to be replaced periodically?

JG No, but principally they go back, you know? There are some areas with some types of stone, the 'shaley' type.

WRM Actually, Bill Lambert was telling me about one up the valley there and it kept getting knocked over regularly by flood water, until he eventually

put some tram lines in, you know, to let the water through, and he said eventually it was just like walling with coppers! *[Laughs]* Because some had got so small!

JG Yes, that's right, that shaley-type of wall, that's bad. I know there is one just outside Malham, it's when you get off the limestone down onto that clay land. There's a wall I can remember now and the farmer said, 'Wherever I went to wall a gap there I could never get it to t'same height.' And that was why, because there was so much rubbish that he couldn't put it back. It had sort of you know 'shaled' away and it wasn't stone anymore.

WRM What wildlife do you find in a wall? Rabbits?

JG Oh yes.

WRM They lie up in walls, do they?

JG They do spend quite a bit of time in walls, yes. Because that always used to be one of the sports when I was a lad; lots of farm dogs could 'set' a rabbit, you know by scent, in a wall. And if it did, oh, it was great fun. By pottering a stone out you know sometimes you could see it; pottering a stone out to get it out. That was a bad thing to do, it was naughty, because that was tending to let the wall down, you know? But yes rabbits do, and stoats and weasels. They know that rabbits are there of course and they're continually travelling on a wall side and inside the wall. Birds, of course.

WRM Have you ever come across a 'snoot hole', which was put in to let rabbits through at Clapham, at t'other side?

JG Yes.

WRM Did they call it a snoot hole?

JG Yes, they did.

WRM Rabbit catchers used them, did they?

JG Yes they did, and they wouldn't wall them up either. Because at one time farmers used to get quite a lot of revenue from rabbits and if they had a field joining up to a moor where there were a lot of rabbits and they were coming through these snoot holes down onto their land where they could snare them, if they'd walled the snoot holes up of course they wouldn't come. So they left them open so that the rabbits could come in, and they could get them, you know?

WRM These were put in especially for rabbits, were they?

JG Well, some were. And as you say, they were very often traps, you know, run through a box with a drop-in lid. Yes, snoot holes; we had some on our farm.

WRM What kinds of birds have you found nesting in walls?

JG Thrush; and the blackbirds as well...

WRM Wrens?

JG Wrens more often in the ground. Moss, you know? Mainly blackbird and thrush; sparrows of course we only saw round the house, and martins, but blackbird and thrush mainly.

WRM What have you found in walls? One of the Mason girls up in Hawes who is now a very, very old lady, she has told me about her father, and at hay time he always insisted on a hot meal with the best crockery being served in the hay field for him you know, and his wife did that for years. If anything broke he used to push it in the wall.

JG Oh, yes.

WRM You know bits of crockery and what not. I suppose there is all sorts turn up?

JG Oh, yes, there is. Gilbert Brown, I don't know if you'll remember Gilbert, you will do?

WRM I know the name.

JG Oh yes, well he was a road man and he used to ask me you know, 'When you're walling, is there is an interesting fossil'... You know, very often there are fossils in stones. And he said, 'Bring it.' Because he'd been asked to collect them for Malham Tarn Field Centre. And I rather think that they do ask one of the farmers 'If you see any interesting fossils...' because they have a collection of fossils up there. And that's where you find them, embedded in stones.

WRM You'll get a lot of mosses and lichens...

JG Oh yes, you do.

WRM In fact the mossiness helps when you're re-building doesn't it; you'll know which side it goes?

JG Oh, that's right, the weathered side, what they call the 'weathered' side. That's a good point. Yes, because very often when a lad's walling that hasn't got used to it...

WRM He'll know which way it goes. *[Laughs]*

JG Aye, yes, he'll know whether he knows his job or not, because the weathered side is the way it's been walled before. You know, the pale white has always been inside and the weathered outside, and sometimes you'll see it t'opposite way round, you know, and that indicates he hasn't been quite up to his job because the original way was probably the best bedding way that it could have 'ad it.

WRM Is it difficult...? Are you quite happy to sweat another few minutes?

JG Oh, yes.

WRM Is it difficult putting stiles in? I suppose getting the stones is difficult.

JG That's the most difficult part. It isn't difficult putting them in, if you've got a good selection of stones to choose from.

WRM Because they go right through, don't they?

JG Oh, yes they do, and that's where you really require a big length of stone, and to build a really good one is a two-handed job because one fella can't always cope with the weight of [a big stone].

WRM Are there any particular terms in connection with stiles? Dales' terms for the stones, or positions...?

JG Not that I know; no. In Malhamdale they're always referred to as a stile or a 'stee', you know?

WRM What about gates and gateways, is it a 'stoop'?

JG Well, the gate stoop is actually the wood post, you know?

WRM Well, what is the stone on either side?

JG That's the 'head', the gate head.

WRM The one that goes into the ground?

JG The gate stoop is... it's usually the stoop which carries the gate.

WRM Oh, I see.

JG The wood or the telegraph pole or whatever; but in recent years they've tended to dispense with gate stoops and build a cement wall head and cement a gudgeon into the wall for the gate to hang on, because doing that they gain a bit of width. And you know, as machinery's got wider and vehicles etc.

wanting more turning space, they've been able to widen them out. And they've done it by cementing the wall head up and then putting the gudgeon that carried the gate into that. So gate stoops...

WRM The old way was lead, wasn't it?

JG Oh yes, leading them in, into an actual stone.

WRM That was a blacksmith's job as well, wasn't it?

JG That was a blacksmith's job, yeah. Yes, I've seen that done.

WRM Have you? How was it done?

JG Well, they had to light a fire by the wall head and have the lead in a pan, you know, and when they'd got it melted to a pouring stage they'd built a little sort of clay... bored the hole into the stone first, and then built a little sort of clay nest round underneath and when this lead was really hot and pouring they positioned that gudgeon into the hole where they wanted it by little pebbles just holding that position, and then they poured the lead into this little nest and it ran in. And the system was to never stop pouring. They'd to pour in until it filled the hole, otherwise if they stopped it very soon set and that would mean that it wasn't getting to the back, you know, and then of course when it filled up and started to fill in this nest that indicated that it was full and then they could take the nest away and then trim it off. Aye, I've seen that done.
George Hayhurst at Malham.

WRM What about cripple ‘oils?

JG Oh, aye, ‘creep’ ‘oils or cripple ‘oils.

WRM What do you call it?

JG Aye, a cripple ‘ole. I don’t know why it should be called ‘cripple’. ‘Creep’ is a better description.

WRM Is it used, a ‘creep’?

JG Oh yes; very often.

WRM So cripple ‘oils...

JG Cripple ‘oil, that’s really made... the purpose of it, of course, is to allow sheep only to pass from one field to another and prevent cows doing it, because it means that if a human being wants to get through he’s got to creep, you know?

[End of interview - 00:34:27]