

Easington Lane  
in  
the  
Shadow  
of the  
Pit  
Heaps

by  
J.R. SANDERSON

Poverty, that had always stalked Easington Lane. Except for a brief period in the 1870's, and again just after the First World War was again evident as the village moved into the 1920's. Local collieries were only working on a part time basis. Soup kitchens were the order of the day. Watson's Pawn Shop in Smith Terrace at the bottom of Pemberton's Bank, was doing a "roaring trade".

With little money available it was a make do and mend existence. Clothes were handed down from child to child. New clothes were rare, and were only bought on credit. All shops had tick books. Cash payments were almost unheard of. Payments were like wages paid every fortnight, and great pride was taken in being able to pay your bills. Having a good name was important to most people.

The Cooperative, or the Store, as it was called locally, along with Pringles, Holmes, and Stewards were the main shops. Later Walter Wilsons, Red Stamp Stores, Moores and Metcalfs started trading. These shops provided a service second to none. Order boys would take your requirements and goods would be delivered to your door by horse and cart. Walter Wilsons would deliver with a basket fronted bicycle, usually pedalled by a woolly jumpered schoolboy in short trousers earning a few "coppers" to help out the family budget.

The Cooperative Store in Brickgarth was the largest shop in the village with its five departments. Grocery, green grocery, hardware, clothes and butchery. It also paid dividends on goods bought. Usually dividends were around two shillings in the pound. Paid out on a quarterly basis. This dividend system was simplicity in itself. Each member of the store had what it called a check number. When goods were purchased you were given a small duplicate paper ticket with your number and amount spent written on.

At the end of each quarter these small tickets were added up and the amount of dividend due was calculated. All outstanding bills had to be paid before the end of each quarter. Dividend days were eagerly awaited. Queues would form on the Monday of the new quarter, that was when dividends were paid out. Most would take cash. A few would leave it in their store book as a saving against a "rainy day". Whatever, that Monday was always a happy day.

Moore's and Red Stamp Stores would as a bid to attract custom, give out stamps with goods bought. These could be traded in against goods, usually at Christmas time. Many street traders would ply their wares around the village streets. Fruit carts and butcher carts were an everyday sight, along with knife grinders, barrel coopers, and hardware and paraffin oil vendors. Black shawled fish wives from Sunderland would walk the streets all day selling fish and crabs from baskets carried on their heads. Their piercing cry of "fresh fish", could be heard many streets away. If by the end of the day there was any left, they would practically give it away.



**A 1920's view of High Street, Easington Lane.**  
*Note the large house standing well into the road*

**THE LONDONDERRY COLLIERIES Ltd**  
**VANE-TEMPEST COLLIERY.**

Pay order No. *6* Pay order No. *23 MAY 1931*  
 Name *O'Donnell*

	2	1	4	4
Certs @				
Shiftwork				
Double				
Money				
Cons.				
Nobs				
Driving				
S. Gear				
H. Up				
Band				
Wet				
Yards				
Earnings		10	6	
Percentage		6	6	
Minimum				
Subsistence				19/4
Rent				
<b>OFFTAKES:</b>				
Infirmary			7	
Eye Infirmary				
Water			9	
Permanent Fund				
Advances				
Priest				
Fire Coal				
Picksharper				
Weighman				
Laid out			9	
Explosives				
Health Insurance				
Unemployed Insurance				
Aged Miners' Homes				
Lamp Glasses				
Hasington Guardians				
Sunderland				
Housing Scheme				
<b>TOTAL</b>				1/4
No. of Note				185

A miner's pay note of long ago for six day's work.



**Soup Kitchen Workers of the 1920's**



**One of the many delivery carts of long ago 1930's**



**Walter Wilson's shop on the left with delivery bicycle at the kerb  
1930's**

In the homes, the women had the hardest of "jobs". Miners' homes of the twenties and thirties, could only be described as hovels. Most would have two rooms with stone floors. These two rooms would have to act as bedrooms, sitting room, dining room and kitchen. Each had a large black fireplace, with a large round coal oven. Each dwelling also had a stone yard with earth midden toilet known as the "netty". Each had a coal house, a large pantry with slatted window would make up the rest of the house.

Most dwellings were beetle infested. A white powder, known as blacklock powder, could be bought at local shops and placed alongside the skirting boards it usually kept the infestation at bay.

Monday was usually washing day. Washing tubs would be filled early and soon poss sticks could be heard thumping the washing snow white. In a short time the streets would be festooned with clothes lines full of washing drying in the breeze.

Women of the period did not go out to work if they were married with families to rear and look after. There was always plenty of work in the home. Everything was home cooked on the fire or in the coal oven. Home made bread, stotty cakes and tea cakes all had an aroma and taste that lingered for hours. With little money in the purse, the womenfolk could make appertising meals out of practically nothing. Broth with bacon bones, leek puddings and pot pies were their speciality.

To keep the homes clean and tidy, fireplaces were blacklead polished, fire irons and fenders were Mepo polished, floors had to be scrubbed, yards swilled and steps pumice stoned. Home made clippy mats would cover the floors and these had to be broomed daily.

With the menfolk working shifts at all different times cooking had to be done at all hours of the day and night. Hot water also had to be available for bathing at all hours. It was no wonder that these women looked older than their years.



**Miners' homes of long ago  
Brickgarth, Easington Lane, 1920's**



**Local working girls at the Old Hetton Brickworks  
1920**



**Leisure time with the Boys' Brigade at the  
Independent Methodist Chapel  
1922**





**Washing day in the 1930's**  
**Mrs Sanderson**



**Washing day 1920's**  
**Women unknown**

For the children of the twenties and thirties, there was always something to do. Collecting jam jars was one of the favourites. When washed these could be sold at collecting sheds for a halfpenny each.

Weddings were another source where a few pennies could be gleaned. It was always the custom to throw a few "coppers" out of wedding cars. Word would soon get around of an impending wedding, and crowds of children would appear like magic. As the cars moved off the scramble began. The lucky ones picked up a few pennies. All finished up with bruises and scraped knees.

Putting loads of coal in was another source. You were usually paid threepence a load. If the load had to be carried up the path you sometimes got fourpence. Sixpence if it was a Colliery Official's house.

With a few pennies in your pocket it was time for treats, lucky bags, lucky dips, cocoa candy potatoes, "liquorish" root and toffee apples. But the treat of the week was always the Saturday morning film show at the local cinema.

This was known as the "Penny Rush". One penny would transport you into the magical world of film fantasy. For the next two hours you would ride the range with Tex Ritter. Clean up the Wild West with Wild Bill Hicock, watch Charlie Chan and Number One Son solve another horrific crime, or ride into the sunset with Roy Rodgers and his Wonder Horse Trigger, after another few cattle hustlers had "bitten the dust".

After the show, scenes would be re-enacted on the way home. Colliery pit heaps would become the rocky mountains. Coal trucks, barricades. Fingers would become guns and time was forgotten until hunger pangs told you it was tea time. The unforgettable taste of warm stotty cake,

the smell of home made bread. Then in front of a roaring coal fire, oblivious to noise, comic strip characters would spring into life as you turned over pages of Wizard, Rover or Adventure. With a swap system in operation amongst friends, comics were always available. Games were an important part of growing up, and seasons of the year often determined the games played. Spring would see tops and whips, marbles, skipping ropes and hitchey dabbers. In Summer it was building camps, camping in the fields with home made tents made with clothes horse and a clippy mat. Girls would play shops, selling "Spanish Water", this was made by putting "liquorish" into a bottle of water. No money changed hands in these door step shops. The currency was always broken pottery known as "boody". Autumn with the nights closing in it was Leap Frog, Mouny Kitty, Jack Shine the Maggy played with a candle in a jar.



**Colwills Yard.  
One of the jam jar collecting sheds.**

If you were lucky it was a torch. Winter would see the sledge irons polished ready for the first snow. Sledging in the Store Field, snow balling, skating on frozen ponds and playing guessing games in shop windows. Shops stayed open late so that it was usually the last game of the night.

Outings were rare. A trip to Sunderland by train was a real treat. There was the excitement of the station, locally there was the choice of two, South Hetton and Hetton. The "telltale" plume of smoke would herald the arrival of the train. Then in a flurry of activity, porters would pull iron wheeled trolleys loaded with parcels to the goods van. A porter would ensure that carriage doors slammed shut. A sharp blast on the whistle and a wave of the flag, and the train moved off.

Telegraph poles, and billowing clouds of smoke flashed by the windows as the train sped towards Murton at 30 miles per hour. A repeat by the porters at Murton, then off to Seaton. Day dreaming as we looked at pictures of Whitby and Tynemouth on the carriage walls and wondering if the hot, warm or cold heating handle on the wall worked.

Seaton behind us, the train "click clacked" its way to Kyhope with the vastness of the North Sea in sight. Leaving Ryhope we amused ourselves counting ships on the horizon and watching the white waves rush towards the shore. Suddenly, pitch darkness. The smell of burnt soot and smoke filled the dark compartment, after what seemed eternity, a glimmer of light, then with a roar we were in the vastness of Sunderland station. Our 25 minute magical steam train journey was over.

Sunderland Station of our childhood was a place full of hustle and bustle and trains belching smoke. The hiss and whistle of steam, baskets of cooing pigeons awaiting despatch, porters pulling trolleys, and fixed in our minds the station hoardings, advertising Palethorpe's

sausages and Waterman's ink. Move with the crowds up the ramp, passed the ticket collectors and you were in the imposing North end of the station with its Victorian toilets, and large waiting rooms. Then it was out into the town with its rattle and clank of trams that seemed to run in endless processions whichever way you way you looked.

After hours of wandering around Jackie White's Market, Binns, Kennedys, Blacketts, Liverpool House, and Palmer's Arcade. It was down the hill to the unforgettable gas lit Old Market full of black shawled women, where you could buy anything from a pin to a pet. But the real treat was a bag of those mouth watering potatoes from the "Hot Potato Man" who stood with his steaming barrow near the Royal cinema in Bedford Street. Every tasty morsel enjoyed, as you made your way to the station and home.



**One of the little stations where our steam train journey began.  
The cost to Sunderland ninepence return for adults. Half for  
children.**

Another outing that was eagerly awaited, was the annual Easter Monday picnic to the Big Hill, locally called Pig Hill. This hill lay between Elemore Wood and High Haswell, and hundreds would wend their way to this spot from Easington Lane and surrounding villages for a never to be forgotten day of simple fun that cost nothing, except for a few sandwiches and a bottle of water. If you were lucky a bottle of lemonade.

The journey to "Pig" Hill was in itself a walk of scenic beauty. Through Elemore Vale, past the long gone Elemore Colliery, turn left at the house called Elm Side that was the residence of colliery managers at Elemore Colliery. Up the road to Thomson's Farm. Turn left over the stile, and past the big black water tank that stood high on a wooden frame just off the path.

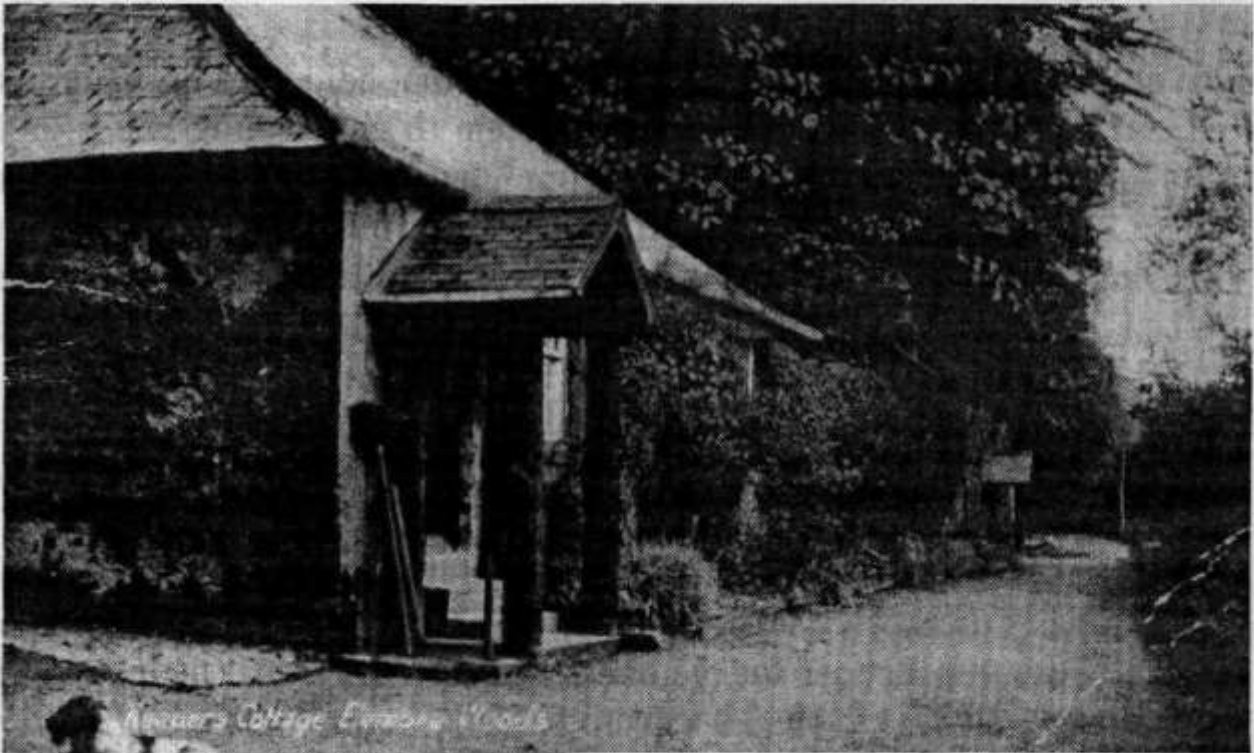
To us children this tank was just something that held a lot of water. But in actual fact, it was a unique water system to get running water to the Colliery Manager's house. Water from Elemore Colliery was pumped some 900 yards through underground pipes to this tank. As this was above the height of the house, gravity would pull the water to the taps. When the level in the tank dropped, it would set off a bell in the colliery pump house, thus starting the pump to fill up the tank.

Moving on we follow the path over the fields, skirt Elemore Wood, over the little bridge and the Big Hill fanned out before your eyes.

Occasionally there were other outings. The Coop would annually have a seaside outing to Redcar for members' children only. All the chapels in the village would have chapel trips to Roker, South Shields or Hart (now called Crimdon). These chapel trips were always exciting affairs.

The coaches would leave around 9am with the children, "egged on" by the adults, singing the likes of, Old MacDonald Had A Farm, and "The Drivers Got The Wind Up". On arrival, part of the beach would be picked for the whole party, with orders not to stray given to the children. Then would begin a day of fun and games, with the elders keeping an eye on the very young, the clothes, and the sandwiches.

Around 6 pm coaches would be boarded for the journey home, with the children not in such a boisterous mood for singing as the sea air and tiredness began to take over.



**Keeper's Cottages, Elemore Wood,  
close to the picnic area of the Big Hill**



**Elm Side the house that was home to the  
Colliery Managers of Elemore Colliery**



**Elemore Colliery  
Water was pumped from the colliery to the Manager's House via  
the Big Black tank .**



As the Autumn nights began to chill, another date in the childhood calendar loomed. Bonfire night, the fifth of November. Shops such as Pringles, Holmes, Stewards, and the Coop would be visited for empty boxes.

Hedgerows, rubbish tips, overgrown gardens. All would be scoured for anything that would burn. Guards would be posted to make sure that it was not stolen or set alight before the big day. The villains would usually be the "Brickgarthers", or the "Elemore Laners". Those at the top of the village had to be watchful of the South Hettoners, as they would send in raiding parties, all in good childhood fun of course.

The few "coppers" we had would be spent on fireworks, Jumping Jacks, Little Demons, or the odd rocket. The more adventurous would make their own with sulphur gathered from the pit heaps.

On the day a red glow would descend over the village as the fires were lit. Whoops and bangs would fill the night air. As the fires died down the roasting of potatoes began. Who can forget the taste of those coal black burnt potatoes that were raked from the burning embers of the fire with bits of stick. Jumper sleeves would usually be used for a round the mouth clean up, as a parents' shout reminded you it was time for bed. And so ended a night of unforgettable fun and childhood pleasure.

With the year moving into December, signs of the festive season began to appear. Carts would be trundling the streets delivering last minute orders. Oil lamps flickering in the frosty night air. Holmes, Pringles, Metcalfes, Stewards and the Red Stamp Stores would be all decked out for Christmas, with windows full of Christmas puddings, tins of biscuits, always with the crinoline lady on the lid and bottle after bottle of ginger wine essence filling the windows. The Coop would be selling chocolate Selection Boxes at one shilling and sixpence and their department in the High Street would have a grotto and Santa Claus.

Hairdressers, Moore, Elgy, and Davidson would be busy, cutting short back and sides and giving quick shaves. Whyllie would be selling hardware and oil for lighting. Walker, bicycles, fairy cycles for the kids, battery wireless sets, gramophones, and the latest in 78 records.

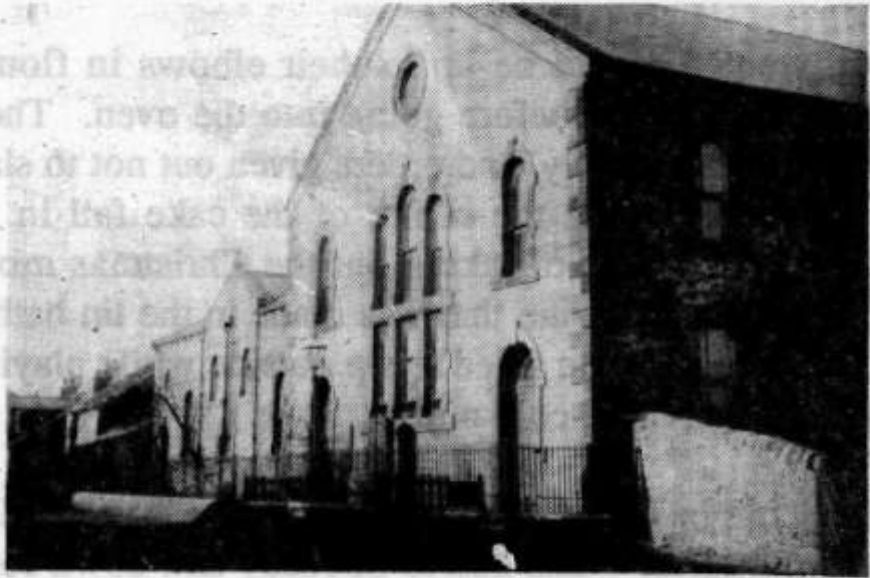
In the home, women would be up to their elbows in flour. Teacakes would line the steel fender before going into the oven. The Christmas cake would be baking slowly, and orders given out not to slam the door in case the vibration made the centre of the cake fall in. Who can forget the aroma and taste of raking out the Christmas mixing dish or the warmth of the ginger wine that was made in the tin bath? Children always got the essence bottle filled to sip outside while playing and how it warmed you up on those cold nights.

Clippie mats would be on the mat frames with the womenfolk going full pelt with their progers. Mats had to be ready and down for Christmas Eve. Any mats finished weeks before would be laid on the bottom of the bed until ready to go down. Lovely for keeping your feet warm!

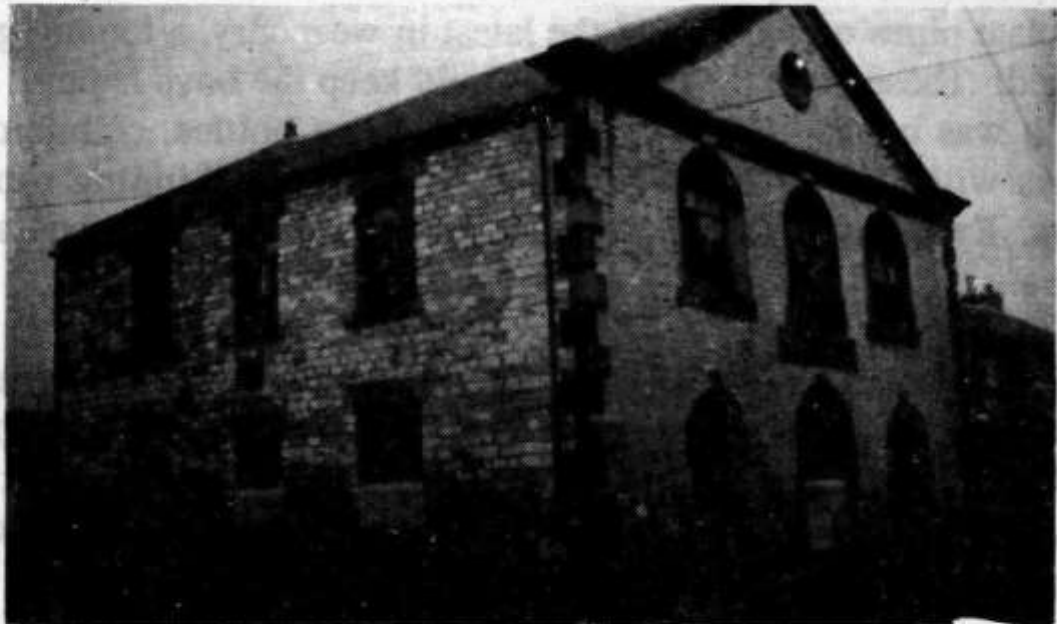
Blow football, forts, lead soldiers, farm animals, bus conductor sets, chocolate pipes or cigars, and the latest in weaponry, a tommy gun that sparked. These were the toys that would keep the boys happy. For the girls it was cardboard shops with little sweet bottles, celluloid dolls, always with the little red dummy. Nurses sets, skipping ropes and chalks. Everyone got a pillar box money box, this was to encourage you to save.

As Christmas Eve arrived, yards would have been swilled, fireplaces blackleaded, steps scoured, mats broomed, and everything would be shining, ready for the magic of Christmas Day. As the clock struck twelve, the sound of carols could be heard in the distance as the chapels in song made their way around the village.

**Chapels in song, would walk the village streets on  
Christmas Eve**



**The Primitive Methodist Chapel as it was.**



**Wesleyan Chapel of long ago.**

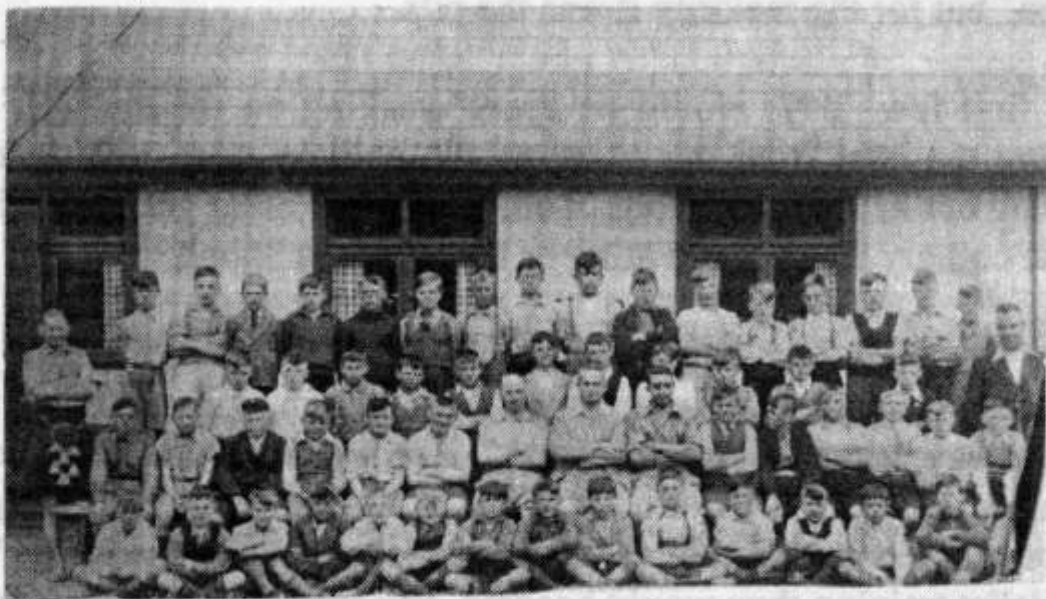
In the schools, education was basic for most, but the teachers did a good job. As soon as you entered the school gate they were in charge and you quickly learned to respect them. For most, school days were happy days. For the not so well off, there were school camps in the Dales, free milk, and the occasional footwear handout. The girls played netball, and the boys football. Needlework and cookery stood the girls in good stead for later life. While woodwork and basic chemistry helped the boys.

Then suddenly childhood was over, you had reached the magical age of fourteen. You were an adult in the world of adults. For the girls, some helped out in the home, others started work in local shops or factories. A few started work in service. This job entailed working in the houses of the more well off, sometimes living in, doing the more menial of jobs, at a wage of about five shillings a week. For most of the boys the local collieries beckoned. A few did get jobs in the local shops, but for the majority it was the pits.

The first few days would be spent working on the surface, usually sorting the coal from the stone on the colliery coal picking belts, or helping out in the lamp cabin. Some would go on to get apprenticeships in the colliery Electrical, Fitting or Blacksmiths Shops.

After the first few days on the surface, it was down below for the majority. Some would work at the shaft bottom. Others would work in Bye, away from the shaft bottom. But whatever the job, lads soon became skilled in their allotted work. After a few weeks they would become competent in the many various jobs done by the lads. Without specialist training they would become, belt lads, dish lads, set lads, and token lads. Most would become experts at driving, dredging up, filling the dish, twining, and cocking the rapper. Minds would be full of new

words and things such as, flat sheets, limbers, cat ends, bulls, cows, and monkeys. There would be tuggers, water tubs, choppy cribs, lamp shieldies, and chumings. They would learn to yoke a galloway. Words like worms, hedge hogs, donkeys and dogs took on a totally new meaning. As the "Works Ladder" was climbed, new words and jobs would emerge the likes of, putting, filling, rolloffs, scallopers and strip packers. There were gummars, scufflers, backover turns, and double turns. It was a world of strange words and jobs, that with the decline of the mining industry are disappearing forever.



**Easington Lane schoolboys at the  
School Camp in Yorkshire 1938.**



**J T Boggon  
High Street Butcher.**

**Left to right.  
14 year old Albert.  
Sarah Mary Boggon.  
J T Boggon.**

**Early 1930's.**



**14 year old boy miners at Elemore Colliery**

By the time the lads in the mines had reached the age of 16, they were "old hands" at their jobs. What social life there was, was greatly restricted by the awkwardness of shift times, 1.00am, 2.00am, and 3.00am were common. As were 2.00pm, 4.00pm, 5.00pm and 10.00 pm this meant that a lot of day light hours were spent sleeping.

Walking was a great pastime in the twenties and thirties. Places like the Bull Wells, the Ten Fields, Car House and Elemore Wood were amongst the favourites. Snooker and billiards was another. The Welfare Hall in



**Maddison's Billiard Hall, Station Road, Hetton, 1920's.**

the Brickgarth, and Maddison's Billiard Hall on Station Road, Hetton, were considered the best locally.

Saturday nights, dances would be held in Easington Lane Church Hall and Hetton Miners' Hall. These would be well attended. Dancing became so popular that a weekly dance was held every Thursday in Hetton Miners' Hall 7.30pm till 11.00pm, admission sixpence.

The Valdo Band would strike up the music with a quickstep, followed by foxtrots and waltzes. The early part of the night's entertainment would be mostly girls dancing in pairs. The hall would start filling up around 9 o'clock, the budding "Fred Astaires" having been "fortified" in the King's Head, Number 9 or Colliery Inn, would arrive for the Barn Dance. Then with the words "getting up?" or sometimes just a nod of the head, they would take their partners to the floor. The next 15 minutes or so, was a mass of swirling happy changing and inter changing partners. After the Barn Dance, the interval would be announced. Thirsts would be quenched with a lemonade at tuppence a glass, sold from a small table at the bottom of the hall.

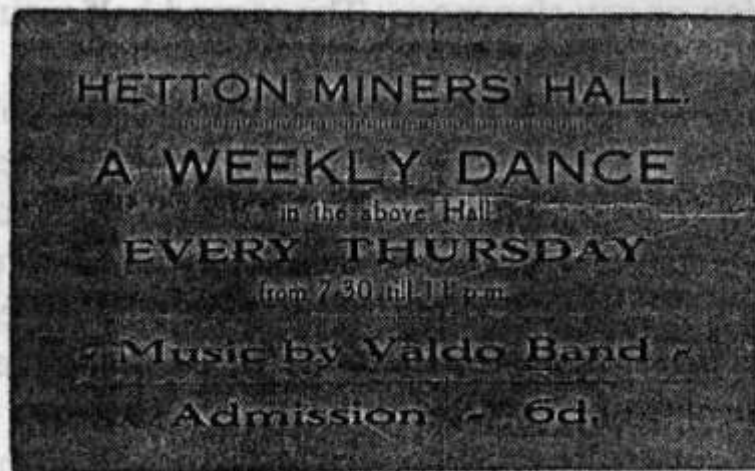
Those requiring fresh air or a "quick half", would, before leaving the hall, have their wrists stamped with indelible ink. This had to be shown for re-admission or pay sixpence. The second half would start with an excuse me quick step locally known as the "buzz off". A waltz, tango and foxtrot, saw the good dancers on the floor. The polly glide would see the start of the boisterous part of the evening. Then would follow the Boston Two Step, the Lambeth Walk, and the Hokey Kokey. The highlight of the evening would be the Conga. Even the non dancers would be on the floor for this one. They would be pulled onto the floor as the "snake" of the Conga weaved its way around the hall. Then the last dance, a waltz to the tune of "Whose taking you home tonight?" and many a partner was asked that question. Lots of happy marriages started off with the last dance at one of these little local sixpenny dances.





CHURCH HALL AND MEMORIAL, EASINGTON LANE

**Easington Lane Church Hall, sixpenny dances were held weekly.**



**An invitation to Hetton Miners' Hall.**

The Durham Miners' Gala, or the "Big Meeting" as it was called by the miners, was, as in most colliery villages an eagerly waited event. This was always held around the 20th of July on the Saturday.

Excitement would mount as the names were drawn for the honour of carrying the colliery banner. Only financial union member's names would be drawn. At approximately 7.30am on the big day, the banner party would assemble, along with the brass band. Then with the union officials at the fore and families falling in behind, off they would march enroute to the station for the half hour ride to Durham. At Durham, the banner would be assembled and proudly marched through the city onto the Race Course and so would begin a day of fun, speech making and drinking.

Around 4.00pm the boom of the drum would herald the return to the village as they staggered up Pembertons Bank. At the top of the bank they would form into a sort of military formation, then after three bangs on the drum off the party would go, with the tailenders doing a hitch and a jump to get into step. The bandmaster would "wheel" them into the Brickgarth to the tune "Sons of the Brave" and the crowds would cheer. At the Welfare Hall the band would form a circle and play a hymn, with the crowd standing silent with bowed heads. The crowd would soon disperse, as the band along with union officials disappeared into the Welfare Hall for a tea of cooked ham and pease pudding and so would end another annual Gala Day. They had been to Durham for their rights and no one could deny them that.

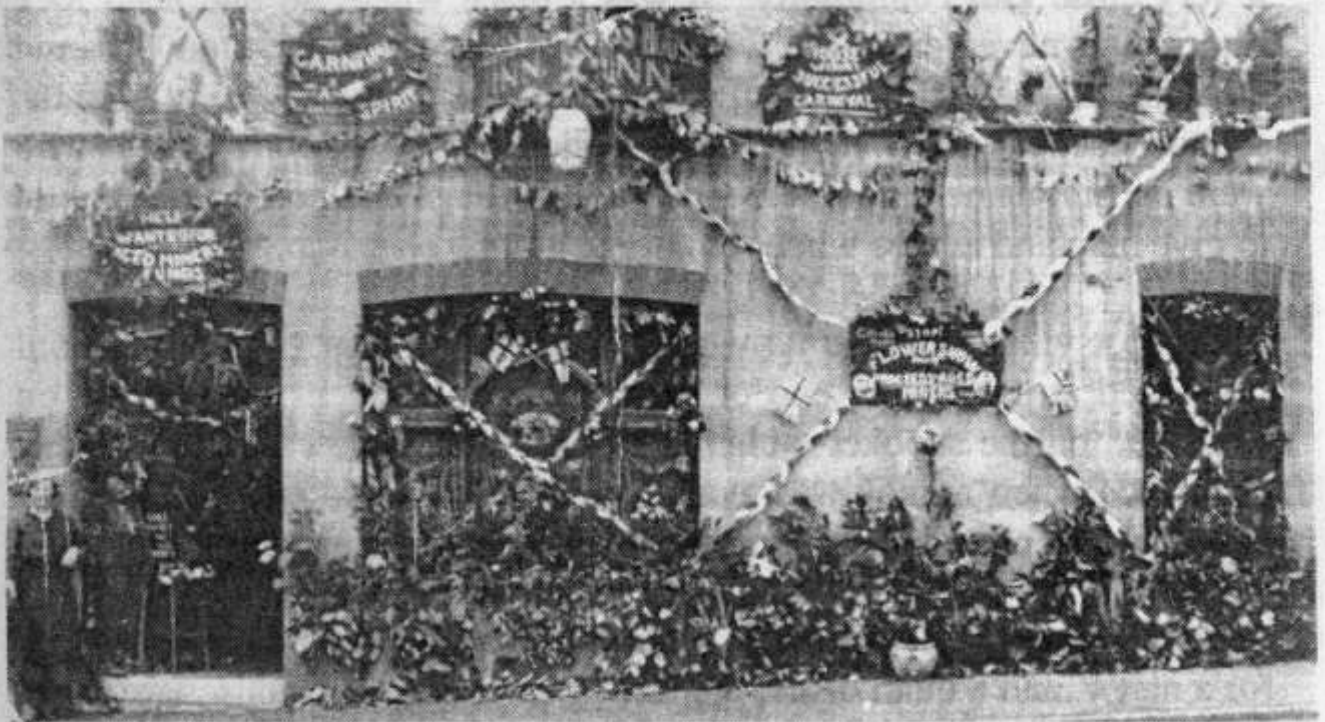
Towards to end of August and early September saw the start of the local carnivals and flower shows. Easington Lane's would be held in Codger's Field at the top end of the village. Miners were masters in the art of growing leeks and beautiful flowers. Great pride was shown in growing the best.



**The banner was paraded around the village before going to Durham for the Gala**

After the show the carnivals would begin and parade through the village with jazz bands and fancy dress. Public houses would compete against each other with "Tug of War" teams, darts and quoits.

Carnival celebrations would last two days. Religion played a big part in village life, and most children were sent to Sunday School. The church and all the chapels had clubs going for the youth, along with the Lyons Boys' Club. These clubs helped to keep children off the streets. The Salvation Army would have magic lantern shows and penny pie and pea suppers which were all well attended.



**The Cross House Public House dressed up  
for the Flower Show, 1928.**



**Carnival Day, Easington Lane 1934  
King: Pat Hardy. Queen: John George Walton.  
Jester: Anti Johnson.**

Easington Lane of the 1920's and 30's was, like most colliery villages, a very close knit community. It was a place where no one need lock doors, and never did. The elderly were respected for their age and wisdom. In the main, law and order prevailed with the help of parents, school teachers and well respected police constables on the beat who were on first name terms with most in the village and could be relied on to give help and advice when required.

Like most villages it had its vices. A pitch and toss gambling school flourished at the bottom end of the Brickgarth Gardens. Gambling on cards and on the snooker tables in the Welfare Hall, was an every day occurrence when money was available. For the horse racing fraternity, bets could be placed at well known houses in the village. The 13 public houses all had their regulars, mostly male, women were not expected to frequent these places. A few would go into a side room called the Snug for a natter and a quiet drink, but on the whole public houses were not for women.

Most streets had women you could turn to in times of need. These women, for some unknown reason were always called by their marriage title of "Mrs". Without specialised training they would lay out the deceased, comfort the bereaved, give advice to the sick, help with births, and if necessary chastise an unruly child with just a wag of the finger. These women were an important part of village life and were well respected by adults and children alike. Payment for their services was never asked for it was all part of being neighbourly.

Then as the decade of the thirties was nearing its close the war clouds were gathering over Europe and with the start of the Second World War a way of life as we knew it was to disappear forever.



**With the close of the 1930's  
a way of life was to change**

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