

MOORSLEY'S POPULATION GREW FROM 48 TO 748 IN TEN YEARS

Colliery Extensions Brought In New Blood

THE township of Moorsley possesses a long and interesting history. Its name first appears on documents written in the time of Henry II (1154-1189) and there the spelling varies between Moreslawe or Moreslav, and Moreslawe, all of which may be interpreted as Moor Hill, if you are at High Moorsley, or Moor Valley, if you are at Low Moorsley.

Surtees describes it simply as a "Village on a high bare brow overlooking the Vale of Houghton," but one has only to stand on this brow and enjoy the feast of some of the finest scenery in this county, to realize that such a brief and colourless description does scant justice to the sweeping panorama of chequered dales and verdant hills.

It is in the old documents that we find mention of the first known inhabitants of Moorsley. Adam de Moreslawe,

with the full consent of his heirs, forfeited all claim to his rights of possession in Moorsley and assigned all his lands to the Prior and Monks of Durham, who thereupon set apart six osgrangs of land and

father's gift and thereby abjured all right to his inheritance in Moorsley. As a result he, too, was admitted into the Prior's household to serve as a porter in the malt house and to perform whatever menial

every September at the Feast of St. Cuthbert. But for any dereliction of duty he would be excluded from the Monastery and in any case he no longer had any right or claim to his previous possessions in Moorsley.

By
C. A. SMITH
This is the ninth of a series of articles on personalities and villages of County Durham.

a tenement for his wife, Adam himself was to receive in exchange for his gift one monk's ration of food each day, namely a loaf of bread, two justicias of ale, two portions of peas or beans, and two commons of flesh or fish according to the supplies available in the kitchen, together with lodging in the Prior's household. His son Helvas (Elias) confirmed his

tasks the Prior might assign. His wife, being excluded by her sex, from entering the monastery, was granted a toft and two acres of land rent-free in Moorsley for life.

2s A YEAR

His menial office could continue as long as he was faithful to the Prior and, in addition to his daily rations, he would receive the sum of two shillings

Later on, Nicholas Scarff gave seven acres of arable land, a meadow, and one half of a toft and croft in the Vill of Moreslawe to the Convent of St. Cuthbert. Thus Moorsley passed into the possession of the Church and so much of it remained as leasehold land belonging to the Dean and Chapter.

In the year 1617 (James I)



The old Crown Inn, no longer in existence, at Moorsley. Jack Gibson was the landlord.

some waste land in Moorsley was assigned to the claimants John Humble, John Mitcheson, Nicholas Newby and Ralph Pendreth, residents therein. This land appears to have been bought earlier from Edward Musgrave, part-owner of Hetton, and promised to the above. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the Rector of Houghton received 20s in lieu of hay tithe from the Vill of Moorsley every September 29.

Such are some of the earliest records relating to Moorsley, and so the general condition of the Vill remained for several hundred years. Now I have before me the official Poor Law Book compiled by the overseers of Moorsley in the years 1821-1837. It contains much information about those early years.

It begins with a terse description of the township written in a fine flowing hand by William Shepherd, the overseer — "An account of the population in the township of Moorsley taken by me, William Shepherd, in

The Vestry Council included Wm. Westgarth, Thos. Green-shields, Matthew Stoker, John Appleby, John Scott, Matt. Burn, and John Eltringham, who was overseer of Hetton; and of course the Overseers of Moorsley and Moorhouse.

A charge of 2s was made for calling the meeting and a further 2s for the publication of the Poor Law rate which was exhibited in the porch at Houghton Church at first, and then in the local chapels as they appeared.

POPULATION 748

By 1831 the population had risen to 748, due to the extension of the local collieries, and 20 years later it reached the 1,000 mark.

The Marchioness of Londonderry, Thomas W. Robinson, and the North Hetton Coal Co. were the principal property owners.

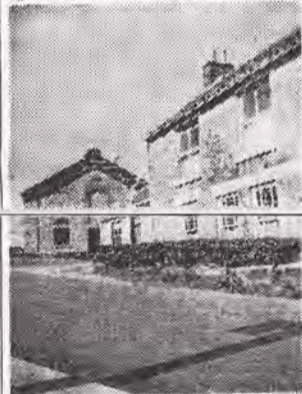
Little can be seen today of the old Moorsley pit or, as it used to be called, the North Hetton Colliery, because Moorsley and Coal Bank Terrace were then designated North Hetton in much the same way as South Hetton received its name after its entry into the Hetton coal trade.

Of course surface mining had existed in the Moorsley area for hundreds of years and in the old Dunwell workings discoveries were made of basket work corves which were in use long before the cage system was operated for the first time at South Hetton.

This old Dunwell shaft is still visible and in later years was used as the upcast shaft from the Hazard Colliery, its depth was 100 fathoms to the Hutton Seam.

The rise in population gave birth to the Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist Chapels and still later the Mission Church of St Oswald. I am reminded of the story of the

zealous curate who was in charge here and who was never tired of protesting in his sermons against the sins of rabbit coursing, then a very popular pastime. One day he decided to attend the local coursing meeting to declaim against this "cruel and inhuman pastime." When he arrived he found several miners loudly and blasphemously asserting their respective claims to a dead rabbit. "Don't you understand," thundered his reverence, that you may be called at any moment to give an account for the dreadful lies you are telling over this poor innocent victim of your dastardly behaviour?" Dee ye nivor tell ony lies?" asked one of the contending parties. "God forbid, never" replied the curate. "Gie him the rabbit lads" said the pitman, "and lets away yarm. Lies? He's won. Ye cannot beat that un. So they gave him the rabbit and left him wondering.



Above: The Wesleyan Chapel and the old colliery offices at Moorsley.

the year 1821 (George IV). There are seven inhabited houses with ten families occupying them, eight chiefly employed in agriculture, one in handicraft, and one independent. These contain 28 males and 20 females—in the whole 48. No house is building nor is any house unoccupied. This is written down to show the increase or diminution for the time to come as is always required."

OVERSEERS

In addition there is a description of all property in Moorsley on May 29, 1820, "for the equalization of the County Poor Law rates, and as an assessment for the necessary relief of the poor according to the several Acts of Parliament."

During those years the successive Overseers of the Poor were William Shepherd, Isaac Moses, John Waugh, John Shipley, and others, who were all property owners in the township. Many of the entries they made relating to necessary expenditure over and above the ordinary demands of the poor make interesting reading.

	£	s	d
For swearing in a constable	2	0	
For the relief of three stranded sailors	1	0	
For payment one a letter from Lowick	1	4	
For one pair of handcuffs	10	6	
For repair of one pair of handcuffs	1	0	
For a journey to Leamingside	2	0	
For a journey to Washington	7	0	
For taking a vagrant to Ye Kitty	2	0	
For Dr Leonard's bill	3	3	0
For the Constable's year's salary	1	0	0
For a journey by rail-road to Hartlepool	5	0	

There is also an amusing one. "For the removal of a widow from the township, five shillings." (Her name shall remain a secret).

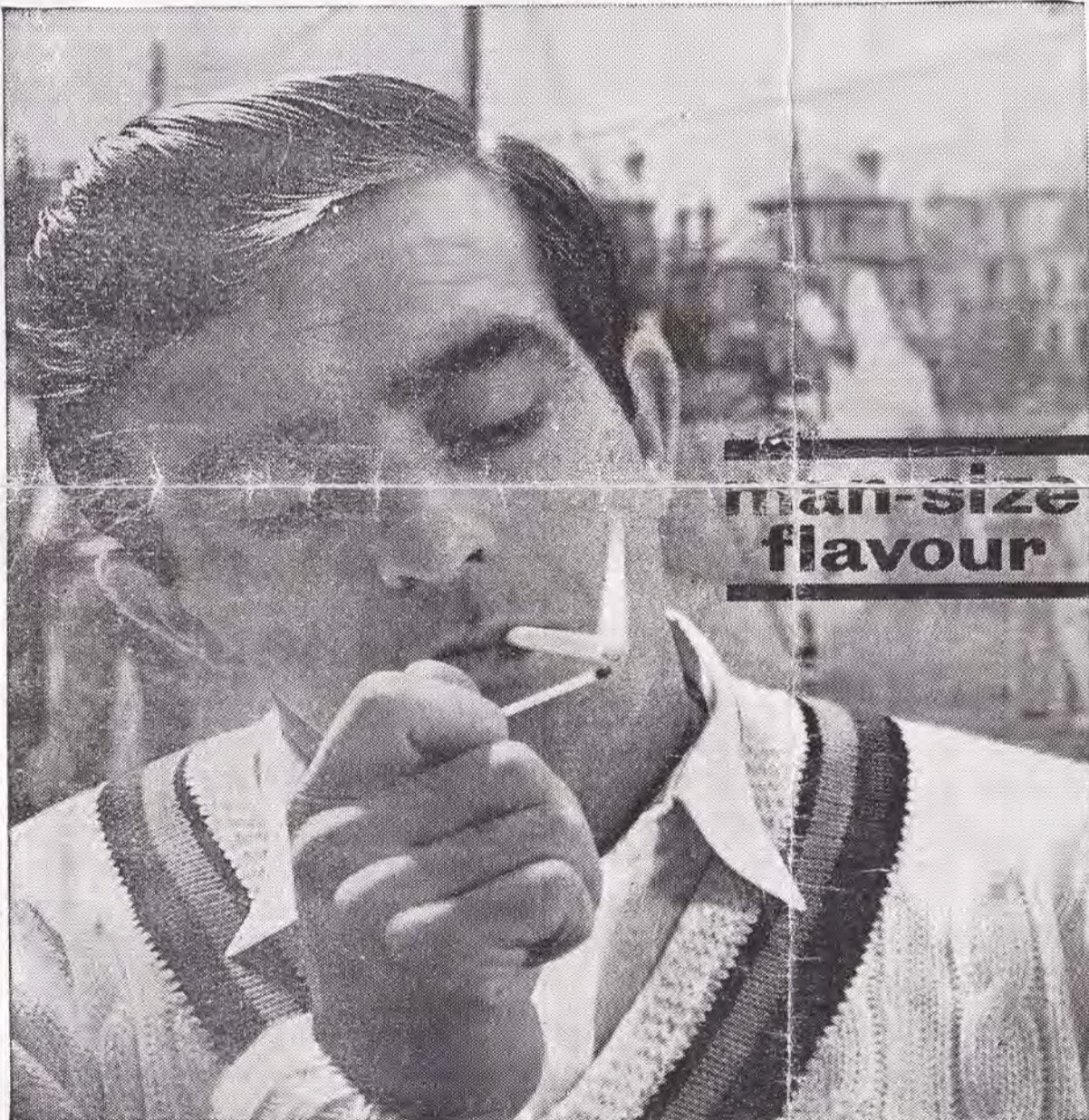
The accounts were audited and passed each year by two County Justices of the Peace and among their signatures was noted such famous names as:

Rowland Burdon, of Castle Eden; John Pemberton, of Barnes; Edward Shipperdson, Landowners; Thomas Greenwell, of Durham; the Rev. E. S. Thurlow, of Houghton-le-Spring; George and Thomas Hopper, ironfounders of "Big Ben" fame; R. H. Brandling of railway renown; and others.

Signatures of the Parish Council included those of the Marquess of Londonderry, William Russell (who sank the colliery at Moorsley), Thomas and Edward Day (who owned the quarry), and members of the Robinson family.



Above: The Lamb Inn, at Moorsley. Below: A glimpse of the village.



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IN THE BROWN PACK—4/1 for 20

Moorsley. Below: A glimpse of the village.

