

Living in Hetton Square Part 2

At the top of Hetton Square, if I looked out of the window, I could see a row of cottages facing me. Directly behind them was a row of joined together ash closets (toilets). This was a no go area for playing because of the flies and smells, especially in the height of summer, which was overpowering. Towards the right hand corner about four doors along and approximately 30 yards behind the cottage stood the square chimney of Lamb's Brewery. Today it is the site of a children's nursery. The chimney was demolished around 1933/4. Barnes House was in the corner looking from the right hand side of our back yard and stuck out more than the cottages being bigger. In its location on Barnes Street it had an open plan porch on the front. The porch was half red brick with the rest being of wood. The floor of the porch was Italian Mosaic and when I was small I would pedal my three wheeler to see and admire it. Right next to the porch was the large gates leading into the brewery. Straight opposite my house was the garage used by Mr. Wakefield, the man with one arm the other being a hook. He kept his red flat-backed lorry in the garage. The only glass in the cab was the windscreen with a louvred window that opened when it was raining as windscreen wipers had not been invented when the lorry was built. It also had hard tyres. The garage was still in use during the 1950s.

Looking out of the back door again and up the street to my left there were eight houses built in 1911. There was no tarmac or quarry tiles for the path and no tarmac on the road either. It has been the same ever since. A few cottages before the opening, probably three from the top an elderly man and grandson left one morning to go to Eppleton pit heap to collect coal. Approximately an hour later the man returned carrying his grandson, who was not much older than myself, with a blanket wrapped round the boy's feet. It was later stated that 'Jackie' had slipped and fallen into the side of the spoil heap and burnt his legs. I have often wondered whether Jackie recovered. When times were bad, people had to go out and collect coal from the heap in order to keep warm.

Just as you left the top of the Square in one of the facing cottages lived a lady called Nancy Crosby who had a green parrot. As children we used to look through her window and see if we could induce the parrot to talk. Nancy would then come to the door and move us away.

The Big Chapel on Sunday evenings was always busy with many people passing our front door and up to this day the service was at 5 30p.m. and everyone was back home by 7 p.m. Straight opposite the opening at the top of the Square was the home of Mr and Mrs Hall. Both were caretakers at the chapel. In the front of their house which was in Caroline Street was a grand piano and the family would gather round it to sing after the service was over. This was domestic music making and I would sometimes sneak out of our house and

go and listen to some lovely singing by standing close to their front door. If someone came along the street I would move on and head back home. This sort of entertainment had been going on long before the gramophone, but then the radio came along, by listening to the radio not many singsongs around the piano took place, unless it was a special party.

The main attraction for our family was the Miner's Hall where live talent shows were held for charity. These shows also took place at the chapel and at Barton's picture house where they were known as the Three T's; Time Talent and Treasure. The treasure was assumed to be the family gathered together with very little money between them. The talent was for the people who were able to give something and the time was that we had for each other within our community.

The picture house above mentioned was built by Ralph Barton in 1909 and called the Pavilion. It was found at the top of Richard Street. It was built on land known as the Showfield and by 1920 Mr Barton had much bigger ideas of improving the theatre. The end part of his 'house of entertainment' was not high enough to raise the curtain on the stage. A clever workman raised part of the roof of the Pavilion without removing a slate using chokes and carpenter's wedges. It was lifted one side at a time until it was higher by three courses of brickwork until the job was done and Mr. Barton was pleased. The Pavilion was both a cinema and a theatre. By 1923 The Hetton and District Choral and Amateur Operatic Society performed the comic opera "Highwayman's Love" by Eric Mason. By popular request they gave a repeat performance of "The Dogs of Devon". The first manager was Mr. Linden Travers. I had gone with my father for the first time to see Al Jolson in the "Jazz Singer" singing and speaking a few words, as I thought! I had not seen that film but I had seen "The Singing Fool" in which he sang, I believe I'm right, the song "Sonny Boy".

Mr. Barton, the owner played a violin and was also the owner of a salt factory and along with his family ran soup kitchens during the 1926 strike. The Pavilion closed on 6th June 1959 and the last film shown was "Home Before Dark".

The Teddy Bear's Picnic was often played on our wireless mostly on Children's Hour with "Uncle Mac". The words were a little different but other favourites were easy to learn, like Leslie Sarony U.K. with the song "Wheezy Anna" which was written in 1932. It was a hit with all of the children at the time.

Back to films and animals, "The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin" , with a star dog was popular. There were more than 40 films made with the dog, some of which were silent films, all being shown in the 1930s. Cartoons and cowboys were the most popular types of film. Two stars who were made were in cowboy films, Gary Cooper in the "Virginian" and John Wayne with his curly hair in the "Big Trail". One of my favourites was "Sons of the Saddle" starring Ken Maynard which was made in 1931. The Cisco Kid was also seen a lot, I saw some of his films 3 or 4 times round. A film set and made in Oklahoma, a talkie called

“Destry Rides Again”, made a hero for a million boys, he was Tom Mix while Claudia Bell was the leading lady. I was able to see him on a Saturday afternoon matinee at Sunderland Empire on November 12th 1938 Billed as Tom Mix and his wonder horse Tony he starred with Jack Napp, Joe Bowers, Bud Carfell and Rosa. It was a half hour of rodeo frolics on the stage with Rosa the stooge when pistols were fired. The orchestra leader was Mr. Elliot Smith and seat prices were – stalls 9d, circle 9d, pit stalls 6d, upper circle 4d, balcony 3d.