

Living in Hetton Square Part 3

I mentioned the Pavilion Theatre and cinema earlier well there was another theatre in the village. This was the Standard Theatre situated down at the Quay. It was sometimes referred to as "Mount Pleasant". The theatre was built in 1874 and could seat 800 people. It closed in 1916 after which the gable end was demolished and it was used as a garage for a bus company. It was taken over by Mr. Hall and Mr. Summerbell. Years later it was handed over to Mr. G. Wright, a corn merchant in 1920 and has carried on that trade to the present day. I don't know much about the theatre as it was before my time. I do know that Mr. Hall also had another job as a road and quarry man. He worked with Tom Gorman and they laid new kerbs, gutters and flagstones for Lambton and Hetton Collieries in the colliery owned streets of Hetton. All the work was done with hand tools before World War II, the flagstones etc. being delivered on site by horse and cart. The flags and kerbs were a pinkish colour.

There were other cinemas in both Hetton and Easington Lane. Building the Imperial cinema was started in 1922 but finally completed in 1926. It was situated next to what was the Conservative Club later the Hetton Social Club at the top of Station Bank. It was completed by the time of the general strike and opened with a production by the Hetton Opera Company. It was built as a cinema but also put on live shows. A sponsor was Mr. A Share of Fawcett Street, Sunderland who had the clock installed on the right hand side of the stage. The first talkie film was shown on March 4th 1930 and entitled the "Isle of Lost Ships". The doorman for many years was Mr Tom Hall who had been duty doorman at the Standard Theatre. Following Mr. Hall, Mr. Kirtley took over his duties. The Tuesday matinees were very popular being attended by many pensioners of the time. The Imperial closed on October 10th 1962 and was demolished the following year.

The Cosy cinema at Easington Lane opened in 1938. The first film was George Formby starring in "Feather in Your Nest". It became a bingo hall in 1959. Some years after, it closed, and was then demolished.

I attended the infants school before going on to the Barrington School further along Front Street. The main bus stop was opposite the infants school and outside Mr Grey's business next to Mr. Davison's cycle shop now taken over by the bank. On Sunday mornings between 8.30 and 9 a.m. about twenty riders would turn up outside the cycle shop for a spin to distant places. Mr Stan Lewins would be there with his tandem and was with Mr. Stokoe, the manager of Palmer's Cycle Shop in the Arcade in Sunderland. Both held a record time for a tandem starting from Houghton Church to York. From the bus stop many people travelled down to Houghton on the buses which started running at 10 a.m. on a Sunday using either the Northern buses or the Sunderland District Omnibus (SDO). It cost 3 and a half pence for a return ticket or 2 pence for a single.

In Durham Cathedral you may walk down the right-hand side aisle, past the miners' memorial to the corner of the south transept where you will find the Barrington Statue. Bishop Barrington was a friend of the Evangelicals, a great philanthropist and interested in farming. He was also a worried man concerned about the education of his flock who were unable to read and write. His favourite subjects were the 7 to 11 year olds. His statue was made by a very skilled man called Chantrey. It looks the same as when it was first made. The Barringtons were established in Northumberland and in Durham in the Hetton area. The National and Barrington School, a stone school made of local limestone was erected in 1834 at a cost of £350.00 and it was attended by 200 scholars. I first went there in September 1935. Having spent ten minutes in the playground and waving to my mother, who had safely guided me over the road I went inside after being lined up then marched through a big door into the porch. The Headmaster was H.B. Brittan and his room was opposite to the porch. In the corner were about 30 or 40 slate boards with wooden frames, no longer in use in addition to an abacus which we never used. We continued marching through the first classroom with its large blackboard and easel then through a partition with glass above the wood frame into another classroom, for the first year. Mr. Robson, our teacher, checked our names and asked a few questions about where we lived. We were in an assembly from ten past nine until half past nine each morning. There were 29 pupils in our class, all boys. One boy had moved from Hetton during the holidays, so there should have been 30 in total.

In assembly we stood at the front with the older boys behind us, four classes in all, altogether about 120 boys. We started off by singing a hymn from the A and M Hymnbook followed by a short prayer, then the Lord's Prayer and finally another hymn. The Headmaster always stood behind a wooden lectern. There was an upright piano in the hall, the only one in the school and this was played at all assemblies by Mr. Wood. He also took us for music lessons and at the end of the school day he played Country Gardens when we were going home. We then returned to our classrooms. The second lesson of the day was given by the Headmaster on writing in pen and ink. This lesson went on for about six weeks, until everyone was able to read and write.

In the assembly hall behind and above where Mr Brittan stood there were three boards, with all the names of scholars who had achieved success at 11+ and in sport. Harry Potts had his name on the board but this was for attending Houghton Grammar School which had opened in 1926. Another name not to forget was "Ginger" Jack Hill who did play for Newcastle in 1923. The Board was the inspiration for Bob Paisley, Harry Potts and many others to achieve in their sports or go to Houghton Grammar School. H.B. Brittan was the Chairman of Lambton and Hetton Boys Football team.

Can you imagine 120-130 boys singing not only hymns but also country songs of the day then no wonder we had a small following always listening as they stood outside the

schoolyard. One man who lived alone walked two miles many a day to listen before he went about his shopping.

At the beginning of 1935 our exercise books were supplied by the County of Durham Education Committee and we were proud of that fact. As for the boys who had a hard time using slates all that was gone along with the charge of 2d per week. Some of us had free milk. I was off school with many colds. I also had influenza, measles, whooping cough, all near the time for exams. In spite of all the ailments I still managed to come tenth out of twenty nine. My brother was more unfortunate for at the age of four and a half he had pneumonia and lay almost in a coma for a fortnight in a bed downstairs in the corner of the room. In order to keep him warm the coal fire plate from out of oven was covered in cloth was placed in his bed. He regularly was given hot lemonade and a Kaydene poultice. I recall that at 11 30 p.m. one Saturday night we ran out of lemonade and fortunately Wakefield and Hindmarsh the butchers near where the supermarket in Hetton is now, was open, selling pork dips etc. Father and I went there and bought two bottles while mother and my uncle looked after my brother. The doctor would call every day and advise my mother what to do. The Sunday passed OK but Monday was the crisis day, the 10th day of his illness. I was awakened about 2 30. In the morning, my father, mother, uncle and myself stood around his bed. My uncle said "He's gone", then put his hand on his brow and his lips moved. We all sighed with relief, the crisis was over. From then on he started to recover, slowly at first. Thanks to the men who worked long hours. You see, he would not drink water but the lemonade did the trick.

We all came out of school one day to a proper crossing over the road, an invention by Hoar Belisha; they later were called zebra crossings. The first traffic lights were at the Board Inn at the crossroads with the rubber pad set in the tarmac. When a horse and cart, a bicycle or bus ran over the pad the lights would work the lights. In June 1935 we all received the King George V silver jubilee mug. The D.L.I. paraded through Hetton and a recruitment drive took place with light guns and armoured cars. There was held a sports day in Barnard Park on the ground of Hetton Football Club. All that took part enjoyed it. We did not know at the time that King George V was a very ill man. He did spend time in a chalet at Eastbourne next to the sea. They built a splendid band stand for open air concerts during his stay, along with the chalet and both are still there today.

As in all walks of life, some people are easily taken for granted. In 1931 our doctors were mainly worried about our drinking water and sanitation. Washing of hands was very important as typhoid and paratyphoid was common and in some places rife. We had a number of fever hospitals around Hetton, one was near the Sunderland Echo Bridge and the Mill, another near the old Lecht pit near Middle Rainton. People who caught infectious diseases such as Scarlet Fever, Diptheria, Pneumonia, Erysipelas and others were often sent there. Infant deaths, less than one year old were sometimes common if these diseases were

in the community. We had a hard-working health staff, a laboratory facility, ambulance service all at the back of Station Road. Nursing took place in the home more than in hospitals. At the time milk supply was changing from large cans on milk carts to bottles and public health inspectors were assisting doctors to keep down illnesses.

It what is now the Memorial garden in the centre of Hetton, there was a building there around 1932 in a poor state. This was a Sunday School and it stood alongside two stone cottages. The cottages were built and opened in 1840 as a reading room. They contained well over 300 books and were well supplied with the newspapers of the day as well as periodicals (John Bull etc.) Built by the Hetton Coal Company their president was J.S. Nicholl M.A.

I used to go to the Sunday School here and I remember it was in a poor state, you could always feel the dampness in that building wherever you were sitting. An insurance man lived in one of the two cottages right up until 1946 when they were demolished. The road which led down to Hetton Park close to the infants school was not tarmaced and was next to the garden of Woodlea. There was a 20 foot high wooden fence and a single turnstile which was the entrance to Hetton United Football Ground. One of the first matches I attended I stood behind the goal and watched Dr. Watson playing in goal. He let two goals in while I watched but Hetton still won 3 goals to 2. Dr. Monty Watson when not playing football was often seen leaning on his garden wall looking over from his cottage garden. He was a football fan of Sunderland F.C. he would take his wife along with him to watch matches even though she supported Derby County.

Raich Carter was the star at Roker Park in those days of 1936 and my father promised to take me to see him play. It happened to be April of that year and the talking point at school was about Carter and Gurney. My father and I travelled by train from Hetton station and were in the Roker end before 2 30 p.m. The opposition was Huddersfield. A colliery band entertained the crowd. The kick-off at 3 p.m. went off alright but it started to rain about ten past, sometimes in heavy showers. The goals came thick and fast. Disappointingly Carter didn't score, but the rest of the forward line scored one each, five forwards in those days. Huddersfield scored three in reply. After the match we were going to meet my mother and younger brother at Lockharts for tea then go on to the first house of the Empire Theatre. As we were soaking wet we all went home to dry out. Raich Carter also played cricket for Hendon and he could always swing a bat. A very good friend and follower of Mr. Carter was Mr. Harry Bergson who was a glazier. He plied his trade on the Saturday afternoons when six hits went through the windows of the residents of a row of terraced houses outside the cricket ground. Of course the club paid for the breakages. I got to know this fact when I worked with Mr. Bergson's nephew on the Hylton Castle estate fitting transom lights on the new council houses. He was a good worker and a few years older than me.