

Living in Hetton Square Part 1

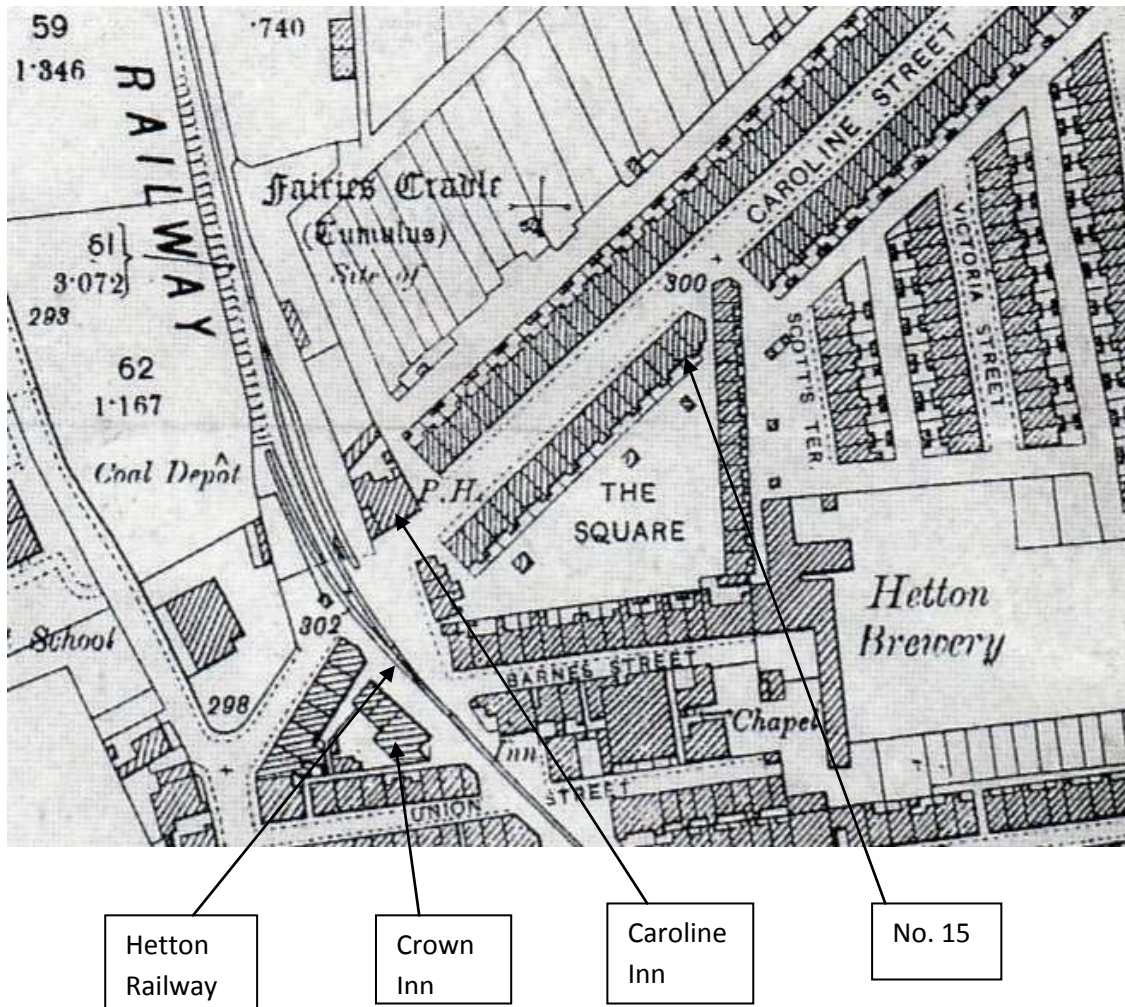
by Martin Lewins

At the time when I was very young, I would climb on to a wooden chair and lean over to the very wide window sill from which I was able to look out of the window. There were three cottages built together all different sizes Nos. 15, 16 and 17 Hetton Square, not a perfect square but misshapen. There were three squares in Hetton, High Downs was more perfect but the houses in Low Downs and Hetton had upstairs. High Downs only had a ground floor. These squares had been built during the days of "Manor Law". The more modern type of house had two rooms downstairs, one with a wooden floor and the other with red or yellow 9" x 9" x 3" thick brick tile. The backyards were all the same with each household having a rainwater barrel that continued to exist well into the 1950s. Water from the taps was lime bearing so rainwater was clearer. When washing your hair with tap water it made your hair dull and lifeless when dry. Concrete floors instead of the tiles became the ' mod ' in 1930 to 1939 when nearly all the miners' houses were changed, and had water taps fitted inside. The original cottage lower floor consisted of two major rooms and a pantry, with a cold slab fitted. Number 15 where I lived also had a large cupboard above the stairs. The attic above was long and low. Many cottages had slate roofs whereas the older cottages had pantiles that were draughty if they weren't "torched" from inside and sometimes outside. The tile edges were sealed when they were torched. The mason would climb through the loft opening with his board of lime and "duck" foot trowel and fill all the gaps. Sometimes it would take two or more days to complete. Loft spaces were cold in the winter and too hot in the summer.

We had "Yorkshire Light" windows on both the ground and first floors at the front. They had sash bars and mullions with sliding sashes that rattled whenever a train on the nearby Hetton line went past. The roof sloped sharply and there was a fitted skylight. There was a notched steel bar to lift the skylight. There was a teefall at the front over the small window. It was just like being inside a tent with two collar beams and purlings to carry the rafters. The rafters were covered with lathe and plaster. The beams and purlings also were partly covered with plaster. The doors back and front were batten doors fitted with a Suffolk latch and two 8 inch tower bolts one top and one bottom. There was an extra deadlock to fit a smaller key fitted to the front door. Number 15 had a backyard plus coalhouse and water toilet. In the toilet, water ran continuously along a 9 inch drain. The toilet seat was about 4 feet above the water which moved left, I presume towards the main drain in Caroline street. Thus the waste was carried away. (A modern 1911 style of a cesspool).

In 1931 we had two oil lamps. Also we had plenty of candles which were not used unless we were short of paraffin oil. Oil was easily obtained as there was a shop next door separated by a narrow passage between us for public access in or out of the square. No 1

Barnes Street, which was the corner house next to the shop, was occupied by two families. A flight of wood stairs outside for those living upstairs and a shared closet and two coalhouses within the small backyard, privately owned.



Number 15 The Square Hetton-le-Hole

The fireplace in our home had a round oven and a set pot for hot water. Fire bars in the centre of the grange were set over 5 course of bricks. Then to keep the bars in place 24 or 26 bull-nose bricks formed the opening for the fire. Apparently the square bricks if used were a menace to the lady of the house when baking or cleaning etc. The bottom of the round oven was filled with sand to the level of the oven door brackets. The mason when fixing used his short spirit level so when shelves were slid into position the Yorkshire pudding tin and contents did not spill. A passage around the oven allowed the hot air from the fire to circulate. Over the top was a damper which was fixed sometimes with a brass

handle to operate the amount of heat required. If the oven was not in use a metal firedog plate with a small hole at the top to lift it with the poker, would be lowered between the flue opening and the red hot coals.

In the book about the life of Bob Paisley, on page 13 it describes how the men sat round the fire with their caps on, discussing football while Bob's mam would be making the Yorkshire puddings in a big old-fashioned oven in the wall.

One of my favourite pastimes was to see the man with his red flag come out of the cabin to stop the traffic crossing the line when the train came. Also I took the number of the engine, always at the front going down Dene bank and always at the back pushing the empty trucks back to the Lyons and Elemore collieries.

Number 15 was my best engine, as it was the same number as my house. It was a small black "saddle" tanker, with number plate painted red and many other parts bronze and copper shining in the sun. At the time some of the old black waggons were used when short of the 12-ton Lambton and Hetton trucks, with the name painted on the sides of the red waggons. Days were much the same as I watched out of our window. On one day, however, the man came out with his flag and number 15 was on the front of 25 trucks, all 12 tonners. The engine passed the man with the flag and about 30 yards further down the line the engine and four trucks came off the line. Everything remained upright but there was plenty of coal scattered about. The driver and guard were badly shaken, but no-one was hurt and the man with the red flag diverted the traffic to the Richard Street crossing. The crane from the "yard" and another engine came and with the help of the "track gang" cleared the mess within 4 to 6 hours. The number 15 proved to be too small for the work and was taken out of service in 1931. The incline from Lyons was all right for the engine when guiding full black wagons of 4ton – 7cwt, but the coal owners were wanting too much. The driver and the fireman were lucky to escape. The matter like many others was forgotten in a few days. Mr Evans with the red flag had served in the trenches during the World War 1, and had lost a leg. This was the reason for him being a cabin man.

In the first shop over the railway line was Mr. Ritson, a cobbler who's only window faced towards Caroline Street. It was only 12 inches from the ground. There was a nine inch step down into his shop, and very little headroom because a staircase for the flat above ran through the shop. The only door to the outside was next to the corner of the gable end and just four feet from the railway line. Therefore no horse or cart could manoeuvre past, neither could a brewery wagon find it easy to visit the Crown Inn next door. The access to the inn was on the other side of the building. Mr Ritson was a small man who always wore a bowler hat and a warehouse jacket. He used to stand in a tiny space behind his counter, mending shoes. Another man who had been in the war and had been injured having lost part of his jaw also worked there. Apparently he had been hit by shrapnel. Mr. Ritson's good wife also helped out. Above the shop widow Mrs. Luke and her daughter lived there until

the 1940s. Her husband died about 1928/9. As a family they went to the seaside at Roker for a day out in the train from Hetton. Mr Luke was drowned trying to save a person in distress. Daughter Mamie married and went to live in Australia. At the age of 70 Mrs Luke followed. Mr. Ritson's shop was connected to next door and the stairs were taken out and fixed indoors. The wall on the corner was eventually demolished so cars could have access to the Crown public house. The railway line was taken up in 1962.

The shop next door to Mr. Ritson was a toy shop selling toys mainly made in England but sometimes toys from Germany. I had a model tramcar "Bettox" made in Germany. Although money was tight, it was a wind-up with lights on front and rear. The toyshop closed in 1934. A Mr. Tremble then opened the shop as a watchmakers. Next in line was the home of Mr. and Mrs. Hedley, bakers. At the back was a small bake house, part of which was attached to the Crown at the back and on the side of a cottage also connected to the public house. The next shop was Fletcher's, wholesale butchers and the manager "Harold" Twinn was a very nice man indeed. Later on in 1938, he moved and opened his own shop.

Mr. Knaggs another cobbler had the next shop, but had much more room to work in, including two display windows, with the door in the centre. Mr George Irwin, one of the greengrocers also had a larger shop. He started off with a tarpaulin sheet wall in the middle of the shop. The stock was kept behind the tarpaulin and shelves and counters were in the front. I remember my father saying that Mr. Irwin had a fire, but it was extinguished by Mr. George Defty, a joiner employed by Mr. William Sparrow a builder. When I started school Irwins sold sweets. He had many customers from the infants school across the road. Later the tarpaulin sheet was removed and replaced with a wooden partition with shelves for the sweet jars.

Next door was a tiny wool shop which was taken over in 1937 by Jim and Jack Barrass, newsagents. The little shop was given over to their sister Peggy to sell Carrick's bread and cakes. Barrass who had the corner shop also owned the shop next to number 15 where I lived in the Square. His shop was at Number 1 Railway Street. John Robinson, grocer and his wife lived above the shop and he later took over a family business. In 1912 the family lived in part of Woodlea, Houghton Road of which Mr. Lamb, the brewer owned. Next door Dowson's Drapery business, then Durham County Chemists, then the Red Lion. Next to the pub in Front Street Miss McBride had a newsagent's shop and next was Mr. Gardinel's wine merchant's shop. Then there was Tyler's shoe shop, Richardsons the gents' barbers and Bianco's Ice Cream shop. Mr Bianco was interned during the Second World War and never came back to Hetton. His relations had an Ice Cream business at the bottom of York Road, Hartlepool. Beside the ice cream shop was a marvellous Gas Shop with large showrooms. It had four gas lights lit at night above and outside. It belonged to the Hetton and Houghton Gas Company. The Brewers Arms was alongside and on the corner Place's Bakery, with the little window advertising wedding cakes.