

Hetton-le-Hole Herald

The Newsletter for Hetton Local History Group

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Summary

Hetton's development relied upon coal but prior to the opening of Hetton Colliery in 1822 there were a number of pits working in the vicinity of the village, particularly around Rainton. There were also a number of waggonways in existence and these laid the foundation for the Hetton Railway. Pits and Railways had, one may say a symbiotic arrangement.

The Railways & Waggonways of Hetton, Rainton & Pitlington

Part 1. Early Developments

Without doubt the most noteworthy railway in Hetton was the Hetton Railway itself - the line which ran from the village, north and east across Warden Law and down to the staithes on the River Wear.

Built in 1822 under the direction of Robert Stephenson to serve the Hetton Coal Company it was the world's first steam locomotive railway.

Prior to this event a network of waggonways crisscrossed the landscape of the Northern coalfield, allowing the transport of huge amounts of coal to be shipped from the Great Northern Coalfield. For centuries coal reserves had been exploited away from the coast simply because access to the coal seams was so much easier. However by 1820 the first deep mine at Hetton pierced the overburden of the magnesian limestone and yielded great reserves of coal which had good marketable quality. This primary success paved the way for the

-opment of further mining operations along the eastern coast and lessened the transport difficulties associated with waggonways.

Waggonway and railway developments depended upon access to the coastal points as well as the major rivers of the region since much of the coal was destined for foreign and national markets outside of the northern region. It was also necessary for the correct leases to be obtained for the waggonways etc. to be built and proper "wayleaves" to be given to allow coal to pass through land owned by others, not associated with the winning of the coal. What makes the

Hetton Colliery line so important was that not only was it the longest railway line in the world at 8 miles but it was also the first in the world to be specifically designed to use locomotives on various stretches throughout its length. It used a combination of standing steam engines, self acting inclines and locomotives to shift the coal down to Sunderland. Opened on September 18th 1822 thousands of people came to see the first Puffing Billies operating at speeds of just four miles an hour.

Within seven years the speed had been increased to twenty nine miles an hour and the railway was moving 2880 tons of coal in an eight hour shift. This increase in the movement of coal and its efficiency meant that within a few years of its opening, successful coal management and handling on this innovative railway set the scene for other collieries in other areas to adopt



the same successful operating conditions. Close by, other collieries such as Elemore Colliery and North Hetton Colliery had by 1825 used the line to carry the coal down to the waiting colliers at the coast. So much was the chaos at the staithes due to the arrival of huge volumes of coal from the areas around Hetton as well as coal transported from Lambton collieries a few miles to the north that the River Wear Commissioners were forced to impose strict controls on who used the River Wear.

More and more staithes were built and enlarged up river from Sunderland as far away as Chester-le-Street to take account of the huge amounts of coal being moved. For the first time, by the mid 1830s dredging was taking place throughout the river length to accommodate larger colliers and boats with a deeper draft. Eventually this led to the development of the massive harbour and dock developments which transformed the scene on the river banks as well as the building of the

South Docks within the next 30 years.

Part 2 Village Growth

The period between 1820 and 1870 saw the greatest development of the collieries in the area clustered around Hetton. The dependence of the villages upon coal mining as a means of livelihood for the villagers in the early part of the 19th century showed a large inward migration of people from both other parts of the region and farther afield nationally. Intense competition relating to the economic development of the coalfield by the individual coal owners meant that much of the population was not static and housing and village facilities were dependent upon the success of the individual collieries. Many smaller collieries in the area closed during this period as production concentrated on the larger mines. These larger mines produced in excess of 70% of

all the coal produced in the region by the 1870s and many of them continued well into the 20th century.

The villages of Hetton and Easington Lane owed their existence to the opening of the pits at Hetton and Elemore, but what of the surrounding area. By 1800 colliery undertakings were well underway to the west of the Magnesian Limestone outcrops. Around Houghton-le-Spring and Lumley coal production was in evidence, in fact there are references to the fact that a number of these collieries had been in operation since the 16th century. Other collieries were operating at West Rainton and Chilton Moor. Linking many of these pits was a sophisticated network of waggonways which ran down to staithes on the river at Painsher (Penshaw). Some of these waggonways served collieries operated under the Earl of Durham (Lambton) while others served the pits belonging to the Londonderry family and another important family called Neasham (Nesham). Archaeo-

logical evidence during the 1990s has shown that the waggonways were not only more extensive as previously thought, but also more technologically advanced in their construction.



This drawing by Hair 1844 shows the Lecht or Alexandrina Colliery close to Moorsley opened in 1824 on the site of an earlier colliery.

It is singularly difficult to suggest dates for the opening and closing of collieries or indeed who owned them throughout their lifetime. Changes of ownership took place on a regular basis and quite often the changes went unrecorded. Additionally pits were known by a variety of names or the same name appeared in differing locations. The development of pits in the location to the

west of Hetton continued well before the opening of Hetton Colliery known later as Lyons Colliery and represented new investments by the notable land owning families, mainly Lambton and Londonderry.

The list below is by no means exhaustive but serves to indicate how important this area was in laying the foundation of the mid Durham coalfield.

<u>Name</u>	<u>Opened</u>	<u>Closed</u>	<u>Owner</u>
Bourne Moor A pit	1785	?	Lambton
Bourne Moor C Pit	1791	?	Lambton
Bourne Moor D Pit	1820	1965	Lambton
Old Painsher(Penshaw)	1792	?	Londonderry
Herrington Mill Pit	?	After	Londonderry
1815			

Newbottle Jane
? 1799
Nesham

Newbottle Dorothea
1816 1956
Nesham

Success
before 1810 ?
Lambton

Lumley 1st Pit
before 1780 ?
Stobart & Bell

Adventure Pit (W Rainton)
1753 1978
Londonderry

Hunters House(W Rainton)
1817 ?
Londonderry

Plain Pit (W Rainton)
1817 ?
Londonderry

North Pit (East Rainton)
1822 ?
Lambton

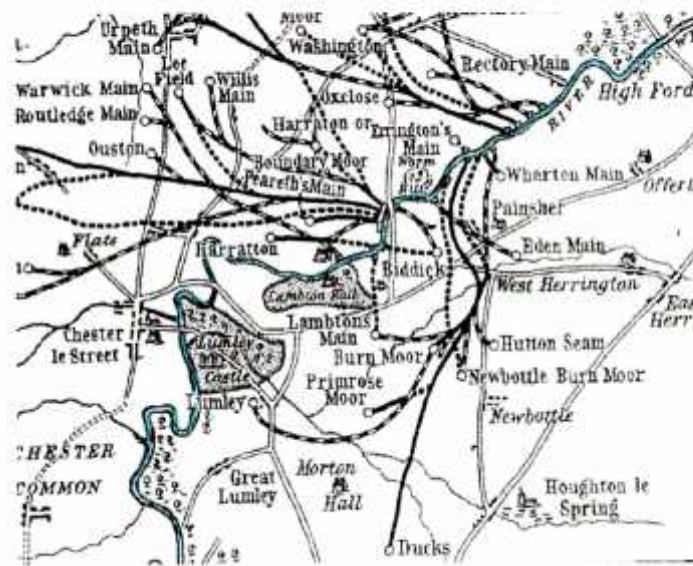
Nicholsons Pit (E Rainton)
1817 ?
Lambton

Dunwell Pit (E Rainton)
Before 1812 ?
Lambton

Hazard Pit (E Rainton)
1815 1935
Hetton Coal Co.

There were other pits in existence before 1800 and these too would have been connected to a waggonway system prior to the coming of the railways. The

map below produced by Gibson in 1778 and updated in 1812 shows the waggonways between Houghton-le-Spring and the River Wear.



**Section taken from "A Plan of the Collieries on the River Tyne and Wear".
Survey carried out by John Gibson 1788.**

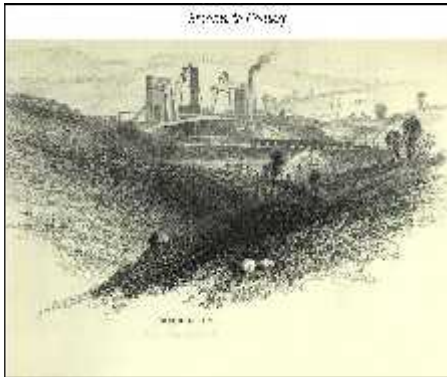
REFERENCE:-
 ——— LINES SHOWN ON 1788 MAP
 - - - - - ADDITIONAL LINES SHOWN ON 1812 MAP
 1788 LINES NOT SHOWN IN 1812

Part 3 The Importance of Pittington and the Raintons.

In 1819 the Third Marquis of Londonderry married Frances Anne Vane Tempest the only daughter of Sir Henry Vane Tempest. Coming from a family who lived in Northern Ireland this was Londonderry's second marriage. The Vane Tempests were a coal owning family with considerable interests in the Pittington, West Rainton and Fence Houses areas. The marriage to Lord Londonderry brought importance to the Vane Tempests while Londonderry acquired considerable wealth. He was a man who recognised the importance of the coal mining interests and together with his wife embarked upon a programme of expansion which brought the family great wealth long into the 20th century. In order to maintain the impetus of development he was responsible for the creation and growth of Seaham Harbour which would allow the easier shipment of coals from the

Rainton and Pittington Pits and ease the strain upon the River Wear and in particular on the staithes at Penshaw where most of his coal ended up.

At present day High Pittington, close to allotments lies the site of the Pittington Colliery. Opened in 1826, it was the pit which influenced the decision of Londonderry and his wife to build Seaham Harbour on their estates at Seaham. The construction, started in 1828, was completed four years later. A new railway was also constructed from Pittington, over the Benridge Bank crossing the Romney Road at the east end of West Rainton, then downhill to join the existing Londonderry Railway to the North of both East and West Rainton. It then turned east came through Rainton Bridge then up over the limestone ridge close to the existing Mines Rescue Station at Houghton before climbing up Copt Hill and passing across the present day Houghton Golf Course on its way to Seaham Harbour.



A Londonderry pit, Broomside Colliery near Carville. Drawn by Hair in 1844

The expansion of the Londonderry Railway system, if it can be called that, prior to the opening of the Seaham branch was a significant milestone for the carriage of coal which led from West Rainton via Chilton Moor, Fence Houses and Penshaw to the staithes on the River Wear. It was opened in September 1827 and the guest of honour at the official opening was the Duke of Wellington, the hero of Waterloo and a good friend of Londonderry. A special car called the Wellington Car travelled the length of the line to the Wear. The line did not use locomotives but relied upon stationary steam engines

throughout its length as well as the occasional incline. A little known fact related to this line was that a locomotive was tested on the line during the early part of 1822.

Close to the first pit at Pittington was a second, much smaller shaft known as the Buddle Pit. Named after John Buddle, a competent engineer and mine manager, who took up the position of Viewer, then manager to the developing Londonderry collieries. He brought a steam adhesion locomotive to the Londonderry line for trials. However it broke a number of rails due to its weight and slipped badly as it moved. Thus it was never adopted for use, even though it was later demonstrated to the Duke of Wellington on his visit.

The waggonway ran downhill to Low Pittington before heading over to West Rainton. Located within a mile or two of Londonderry's Collieries at Pittington were a number of collieries belonging to Lord Lambton. The nearest Pit, known as Lambton Pit was

a few hundred metres from the Buddle Pit. A short waggonway left the colliery to join up with another coming from Littleton Colliery before following the Londonderry waggonway down to Low Pittington. The fact that both waggonways ran parallel to each other and only a short distance apart indicates the degree of non co-operation between the two coal owners. Once down at Low Pittington the Lambton line took a different route over to West Rainton and then on towards other Lambton Collieries in the Cocken and Lumley areas.

Just to confuse the issue at Low Pittington, a further line was constructed in 1837. This was the Durham to Sunderland Railway line. It started at the original Durham station in Shincliffe village before crossing fields to pass Sherburn House Hospital then on to Sherburn itself and finally Low Pittington. For about a mile close to Low Pittington it ran parallel to another branch of the Londonderry line, namely the branch from

Broomside Colliery close to Carville. From Low Pittington the D&S line ran along the valley to the north of High Moorsley before passing through Low Moorsley (Peat Carr) on its way to Hetton station. This railway was worked entirely by eight standing engines and it wasn't until the start of the 1880s that locomotives travelled along part of its length. In 1842 it was described as "The longest public railway in the kingdom worked entirely by the fixed engine system."

A picturesque line, it was principally built to handle mineral traffic although in later years it carried large numbers of passengers. More often than not the carriages were attached to coal trains coming from collieries along the route. During the first two years of opening it carried more than 77,000 passengers. At some point the section in the west at Shincliffe was closed and a new station for Durham City was built at Elvet and the line was diverted to this terminus fol-

lowing the building of a flat metal bridge over the River Wear in the vicinity of Old Durham in 1893.



Durham Elvet station in 1949

By this time the principal station for Durham City was the present one which carries the main East Coast line from Darlington to Chester-le-Street. After leaving Hetton station this line continued eastwards to Murton where it joined a further junction carrying the coast line north from Shotton in the direction of Ryhope and Sunderland. By the 1870s this line between Durham City and Sunderland was really a secondary line, the major route being one which travelled from the present station in Durham to cross the River Wear in the woods close to Leamside be-

fore travelling on to Fence Houses Penshaw and running alongside the River Wear's south bank into Sunderland.



Hetton station in the 1920s and below in the 1950s



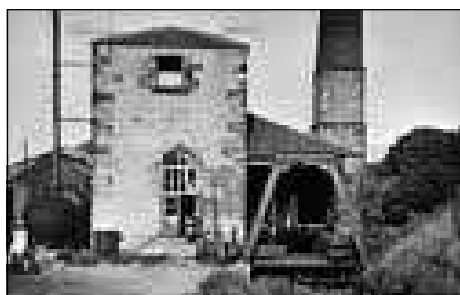
The last train to use the Sunderland, Murton, Hetton, Pitlington, Durham Elvet line was in the early 1950s when an excursion to the Durham Miners Gala brought people to the event, and it finally closed on the 5th January 1953. Today the majority of the line forms



Gala train at Pittington Station 1948

part of a walk and national cycle route through the area. For most of the first 50 years this line relied upon stationary engines and an engine house on Murton Moor helped pull the traffic up from Hetton station. There was also another engine placed in the field close to Pittington Station and another close to the Lecht colliery. Reliability of movement along the line was lacking due to ropes breaking or snagging while steam hauling gear needed constant attention. The D&S line in its latter years carried coal consignments from a number of pits close to it. This included coal from the Alexandrina pit, named originally after one of Londonderry's daughters and later to become known as the Lecht or Letch Pit (named after a lecht or stream). Nes-

tled in the vale below High Moorsley, opened in 1824 and close to the line it was in an ideal location for coal to be loaded on to chaldron wagons for transportation.



Fixed Haulage engine located near Murton. Cable drums on right hand side.



Pittington Engine—drawing by Hair 1844. Note the drums on the side of the building and the strange little carriages for passengers. View from station platform.

Some four field lengths to the east of the Alexandrina pit was the Moorsley Colliery. Opened in 1821 and closed in 1915 it was owned by the North Hetton Coal Company. This pit stuck on the side of rising ground at Moorsley, did not use the D&S line which ran a short distance below it. Instead it crossed the D&S line by a wooden bridge heading north in the direction of the Hazard Pit lying to the east of the village of East Rainton.

The Hazard Pit and another the Dunwell Pit were also owned by the North Hetton Coal Company. The traffic from Moorsley and Hazard ran underneath the Londonderry waggonway coming from North Pit before joining another Londonderry waggonway, close to Rainton Bridge. The waggonway then continued towards Chilton Moor and Fence Houses before arriving at the Londonderry staithes at Penshaw on the River Wear.

The coal from the Hazard, Dunwell and Moorsley collieries was later switched to run down hill, along a short

length of way, before joining up with the Londonderry line in the vicinity of the mill at Rainton Bridge and proceeding to Seaham Harbour. The line to Seaham Harbour continued in operation carrying coal up the Copt Hill until it became defunct around 1896. For a short length it travelled in parallel on the Copt Hill with the Hetton line coming from the Lyons Colliery before the latter swung north in the direction of Warden Law. Once the Seaham line closed the coals from the Hazard Pit and Moorsley pit were transferred to the Durham and Sunderland line for transport to Sunderland via Murton and Ryhope.



Moorsley or North Hetton Colliery