

Hetton-le-Hole Herald

The Newsletter for Hetton Local History Group

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Information & Calendar

A happy, healthy and prosperous New Year to all members.

February 27th 2012 7p.m. Talk on the Churches of Hetton & Easington Lane - Shaun Newton

March 26th 7p.m. Talk By Colin Mountford on the Hetton Railway

Part 3 The Londonderrys.

The Start of the Boom for Seaham and its Docks

When she married Londonderry in 1819 Frances Anne was the second largest coal owner in County Durham after Lord Lambton. She owned collieries at Penshaw (Whitefield and "E") and leased a third the Mill Pit, while at Rainton she owned a collection of shallow mines including, Woodside, Nicholsons, Meadows, the Plain

Pit, Hunter's House and Resolution. She also sublet others to independent pit owners, these included, Annabella, North, Old Engine, Pontop and the Knott.

These pits gave her an income of £60,000 annually. The coals were led down to the Wear along horse-drawn waggonways to Penshaw, then into keels which carried them to awaiting ships at the estuary. The cost of transport and port taxes were estimated at £10,000 per year. And when Stewart came on the scene he soon realised that another port would reduce this sum considerably. In 1821 the newly married couple bought the Seaham Estate at auction from Sir Ralph Milbanke and family for a sum of

£63,000 This figure meant that there was little cash left in the family vaults and any idea of building a new port had to be put on hold.

Two new pits were opened in the Rainton area between 1822 and 1824, namely the Adventure and the Alexandrina, later to be known as the Letch Pit. A further addition to the mining portfolio came on stream in 1826 at Pittington with the opening of the Londonderry Adolphus and the Buddle Pits.

In 1820 Stewart had leased land from the Strathmore royalty at Hetton and in

1825 the Hazard and Dunwell pits were leased out to other aspiring coal owners. The royalty was to later allow for the opening of Moorsley colliery in 1838.

This continued expansion increased the need for another port outlet for the coal. Sunderland as a port had reached saturation point by 1826 and it was becoming increasingly expensive to ship from the Wear.

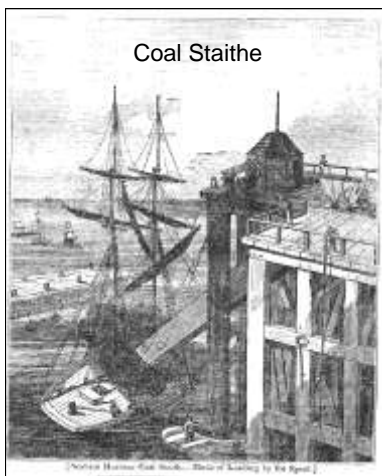
Now known as Viscount (Lord) Seaham or Lord Londonderry saw that the provision of a new shipping point was critical. Addition-



A sketch done by Robert Macreth in 1823 for Lord Londonderry showing the cove where the proposed harbour would eventually be built. When the rock in the middle was detonated 3 onlookers were injured.

ally the fact that locomotives were now being used on railway lines since the opening of the Hetton Railway in 1822 prompted him to review the situation and he began to consider the original plan of Thomas Millbanke to build a new port in the vicinity of Seaham. Having been unable to build a new railway and port in the early 1820s put

with plans to build he was forced to turn to a nearby rival, Colonel Braddyll, who owned a pit at South Hetton . He too had been inspired to build a new port but lacked the land on which to do it. He was however, persuaded to lend £17,000 to Londonderry on condition that South Hetton coals could be shipped from the new port.



Londonderry at a considerable disadvantage over other coal owners. It was now a question of survival rather than just pure competition and he was in danger of being undercut by his rivals. Lacking the funds to go ahead

The Port Develops

Thus on September 13th 1818 the builder and engineer William Chapman began work on the harbour. Londonderry at the time had only £1500 but further loans were negotiated with the Public Works Commission (eventually to be repaid in 1855).

The foundation stone of the north pier was laid on November 28th 1828, the stone for the pier coming from the Penshaw quarries owned by the Marchioness. At the same time a large pinnacle of rock situated in the middle of the

selected cove was blown up to allow for the building of the North Dock and inner harbour. The explosion caused injury to three onlookers who needed medical treatment.

Included in the plans for a port was also the building provision for a new town to be laid out on classical lines. On the same day as the laying of the foundation stone in the **harbour Londonderry's son** Henry, (Lord Seaham) also laid the first foundation stone for the new town in a building destined to become the Londonderry Arms

Also in 1828 the construction of the Rainton and

Seaham Railway was contracted out to a business man, Shakespeare Reed of Thornhill. He agreed to put up the money for the cash strapped Londonderry and was to be repaid at 3/- per chaldron shipped to the port with a guarantee of 50,000 chaldrons annually. The Marquis had an option to buy back the Railway at some point in the future, but it was not until 1840 that he was able to pay back the £22,721 16s 1d owed.

By April 1829 the harbour was able to receive small craft, a considerable achievement in the building process.



Busy Dock

1905

On April 10th 1830 the first **large vessel, the 'Laedlus' entered** the port with a cargo of lime. A month later a ship **called the 'Wansbeck' entered** the port with timber to build the coal staithes and loading spouts. Ten weeks later on July 25th 1831 the first coals from Rainton ran along the railway line to be loaded into **a ship called the 'Lord Seaham' and by the end of the** year 388 ships had been loaded with coal, truly a great success.

The new railway line was 5 miles in length initially but this was expanded in years to come to 14 miles of track, as the number of pits using it increased. Both locomotives and standing engines were used to haul the coals to the top of the Copt Hill bank before more standing engines pulled the chaldrons past Warden Law and Slingley before an engine pulled them the final rise to the top of the Mill Inn bank after which

they ran down hill to the docks on a series of inclines.

This line also carried passengers albeit only on Saturdays when excursions were **arranged for Londonderry's** employees and their families from Rainton and Pitlington were allowed passage to Seaham Harbour.

Examination of the accounts show that initially the cost of the new harbour was a sum in excess of £162,000. Throughout the first five years, development of both the harbour and town were restricted due to lack of funds. Although there were 133 houses and other building constructed in the town by 1831 there was demand for more to house the population who were there to enjoy the employment opportunities.

The same year the second railway to the port was started coming through green pastures from South Hetton via Murton and Cold Hesle-

don. The line was completed by 1833 but served only South Hetton pit, however, within two years it was extended a further two miles to serve Haswell colliery which had just opened. This line was purchased by Lord Londonderry at some point early in the 1850s. This line was to **last until after the miner's** strike in 1984/5. It has now been incorporated in a walkway and cycle track down to the port. The slopes from South Hetton allowed the coal wagons to run on a gravity feed railway line.

In 1843 Murton colliery opened financed by Colonel Braddyll and his Murton and South Hetton Coal Company. It was dependent on the South Hetton mineral railway and this relationship continued through until the closure of the Murton complex in the 1980s. In 1844 Seaton Colliery or High Pit owned by the Hetton Coal Company was sunk but Londonderry, still short

of money was unable to capitalise on the advantages of opening a colliery within the boundaries of Seaham town.

This shortage of money was continually to haunt the Londonderrys during the third and fourth decades of the century. The 3rd Marquis had desires on building an impressive town through his own efforts but in the end he was forced to lease land to anyone who confirmed building intentions. What did however develop, was a grid of houses built on each side of the railway running down to the port. Better quality houses were built in North Terrace and Bath Terrace but the rest of the residential properties were inadequate and badly built and they soon degenerated into slum properties after the middle years of the century.

The Londonderrys did show a philanthropic expression by giving land for

churches to be built, an infirmary was built in 1844 and land and building materials were supplied to build a national school. It seems that Lady Londonderry was the prime mover in helping the community as she took an active part in visiting schools and other public buildings in the villages where their collieries were operating.

In 1845 the north and south docks were complete at a cost of £180,000. Six years later the population of the town was 4042, twice as many as a decade before.

In 1857 new Londonderry dock offices were opened on North Terrace. From here the empire of mines, railways and docks were managed. Eventually **they became the town's police station** and today they are private apartments.

In 1864 the Seaham colliery was sunk and amalgamated with Seaton colliery.



Ships in the south dock 1860s

This was the first time that a colliery had opened in Seaham. The colliery suffered from two very severe disasters, in 1871 the first disaster killed 26 while the 1880 explosion killed 164 men and boys.

In November 1996 most of the Rainton collieries closed, an effect of a recession in the coal industry. As a result most of the Rainton and Seaham Railway track was dismantled. Today it is still possible to trace parts of the old trackbed, particularly in the vicinity of Warden Law.

Due to falling trade as

the century drew to close the 6th Marquess and his Trustees found it necessary to enlarge and improve the dock area. In August 1898 the Seaham Harbour Dock Act was granted approval and changes started. Work began in April 1899 with the project widening and deepening the dock entrance as well as providing a new deep water dock while improving the existing coal handling facilities.

A tunnel was provided linking the north and south docks in 1900. Excavation of the South Dock continued throughout 1902/3 and new north and south piers were completed in 1905 after

which the dock was officially opened with the arrival of the SS Lord Londonderry a vessel belonging to the Londonderry Line.

In 1912 the North Dock received a long overdue upgrade including the replacement of the dock gates. The harbour has on a number of occasions suffered from the effects of severe N.E. Gales and occasionally gates and facilities have been damaged.

Today the docks are thriving albeit with small coastal vessels while a large recent overhaul of the north dock facilities have provided a modern marina and leisure



SS Lord Londonderry taking coals from the new South Dock 1903

Seaham Gallery



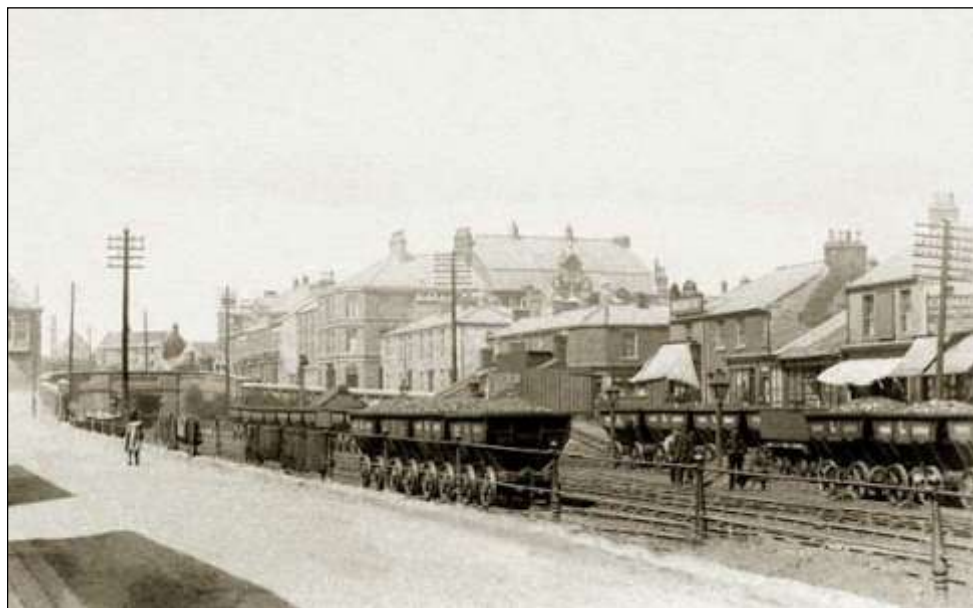
An early photograph of ships in the South Dock



The North beach with 1860 lighthouse and part of the North Pier in c1890



North Dock 1902



North & South Railway Street about 1915



Seven ships of the Londonderry line in dock about 1905



Sail and steam sharing the dock 1902



The Infirmary, Tempest Place built 1844 with money from Frances Anne. It was demolished in 1969



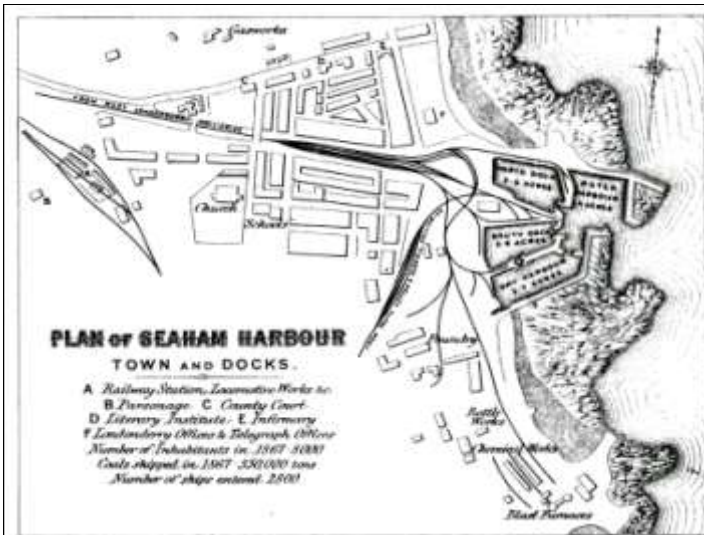
Literary institute, built in the middle years of the 19th century. It is now used as flats for aged miners.



A print of 1858 of the school provided by the Marchioness



North Terrace & Dock railway 1863



Plan of town and dock area in 1867