

BORN OF THE PIT

The story of the
BRICKGARTH

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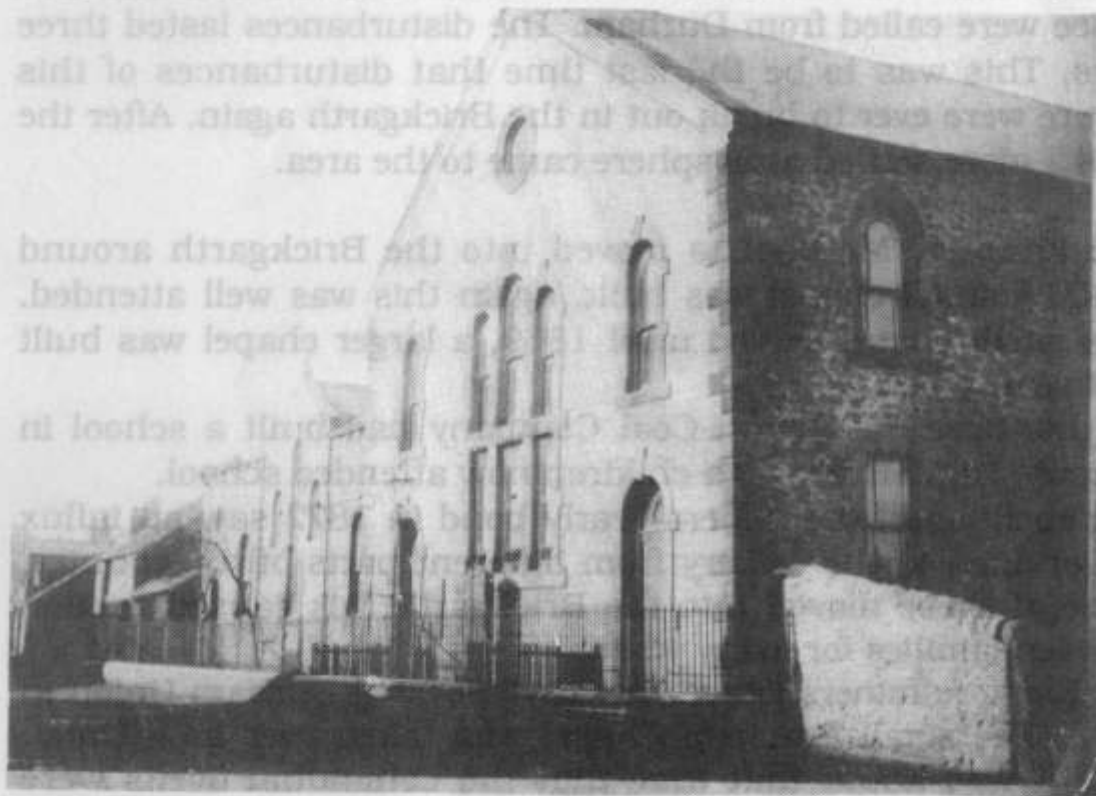
To relate the story of the Brickgarth, we must go back to 1825. It was the sinking of Elemore Colliery in that year, that "gave birth" to an era in the hamlet of Easington Lane that became known as the Brickgarth.

"Cradled in the arms of Elemore Colliery", it was a rough and lawless area of about two hundred tied colliery dwellings in twenty three small rows, forever engulfed in the dust and noise from the colliery. An unfenced railway line running from the colliery to Easington Lanes High Street bordered its south side, with a five foot wide passage or alley way running its full length bordering its north side.

The dwellings, that could only be described as hovels, consisted of, one or two bedrooms, a kitchen, and a pantry. Each had a small yard with an earth midden toilet, this was known as the "netty", all had a coal house. Water had to be carried from communal taps that were placed in each street. All cooking was done on the open fire. Bread was baked in the communal ovens that were built at the east end of the area, just of the High Street. Families would buy their flour from the Brickgarth Mill. This was situated in a field at the west end.

The building of two public houses, first the Nags Head, locally called "The High Flat" then the Davey Lamp were soon to create more problems in the community. Drunkenness became a serious problem. The only thing the community had in common was that they were all bonded to Elemore Colliery.

It was the building of the Wesleyan Chapel in 1827 that brought the "wind of change" gently blowing through the rows and alley ways of the Brickgarth. It was the building of this chapel that "sowed the seeds" of respectability that were to blossom in later years.



*The Brickgarth's Wesleyan Chapel built 1827
demolished in 1951*

Social conditions improved in the area over the next few years, many started attending the chapel. A Sunday School was started and this was well attended. Sadly 1833 saw the Brickgarth at its "blackest ", and it started with "blackleg" miners being drafted into the area to replace striking miners at the colliery. Riots broke out, and many were injured with stones and marbles. Lots of windows were broken and riot police were called from Durham. The disturbances lasted three days. This was to be the last time that disturbances of this nature were ever to break out in the Brickgarth again. After the riots a more settled atmosphere came to the area.

The Primitive Methodists moved into the Brickgarth around 1840. A small chapel was built, again this was well attended. This small chapel served until 1869, a larger chapel was built that year.

By this time the Hetton Coal Company had built a school in Elemore Lane. Brickgarth children now attended school.

The abolition of the miners yearly bond in 1872 saw an influx of workmen to the colliery from different parts of the country. Some of these moved into the Brickgarth this caused friction between families for many years.

The Elemore miners joined the newly formed Durham Union in 1873. The small Primitive Chapel was taken over as a Union hall. It was about that time that the communal ovens were pulled down and coal ovens installed in all homes. And at the bottom end of the Brickgarth a new row of houses had been built. These were a larger and better type house, and used to house colliery officials.

1884 saw the building of another chapel, this time it was the Independent Methodists. Again this was well attended. At the same time the Easington Lane and South Hetton Co-operative Society was formed and a store was built in the centre of the Brickgarth. This was a large building of four departments, grocery, green grocery, hardware, and clothing. A butchery department was built a few yards along the road. This had its own abattoir. Just off the Brickgarth in Bradley Terrace stables were

built. These were to house the horses and delivery carts. In later years behind these stables Tennis courts were to be built for the store staff.

The late 1880s brought hard times for the folk of the Brickgarth. The colliery closed for a few weeks after the terrible explosion of 1886 that claimed 28 lives. The coal trade was on the downward trend, and to add to their troubles, the owners of the colliery ask the men to take a reduction in wages. This is refused, and so began one of the most bitter strikes in the history of the Durham miners. After 13 weeks of hunger and little money the men are forced back to work. But the scars inflicted on the community during these terrible days take a long time to heal. It was these brutally hard times that forged the Brickgarth into the loyal and affectionate close knit community that was to be its characteristic through the years.



*The Primitive Methodist Chapel built 1869
demolished 1977*

The 1900s saw more small shops and business springing up in the community. Dover was selling bread and cakes. Gardener was the general dealer and off licence. The "Pot Shop" would sell anything from pots and pans, to lampwicks, gas mantles and paraffin oil. You could even buy sweets there, but these always seemed to have the taste of paraffin oil. John Buckham was landlord of the Nags Head. And Mary Barkhouse was in the Davey Lamp.

William Colwill opened up as a Marine Dealer, with a Marine Yard near the bottom end. But in actual fact all it was, was a sort of rag and bone yard, dealing in jam jars, rags and lumber. He would employ girls and women to wash the jam jars and rags at sixpence a day. His place was always known as Colwill's Yard and was well known all around the area.

For entertainment a cinema called the "Star Electric" on Pemberton's Bank would show silent films. The Chapels would provide entertainment for all ages, such as plays and concerts. Children would be always dressed up for the Annual Chapel Anniversary. The Good Templars held meetings in the Union Hall, preaching the evils of drink. And the Salvation Army would have pie and pea suppers.

Quoits was a favourite pastime for the menfolk of the Brickgarth. Quoit pitches would be set up on any spare land. Whippets and pigeon racing also featured strongly in the life of the Brickgarth people. A gambling school was set up in the area known as The Hollow. This was near gardens at the South side of the Bottom Rows. Pitch and Toss gambling was to be a feature in this area until the late 1950's.

Characters were coming to live in the Brickgarth in the early 1900's, none more colourful than Andrew Brady who was the local barber. He was a tall fellow with large moustache, and only one leg who could be seen riding his push bike all around the

village. Families were also coming to the fore and taking an active part in the life of the Brickgarth. One of these families was the Grays. They were to play a prominent part in the running of the primitive Methodists Chapel. Many were to become local preachers. Through the years the chapel become known as "Gray's Chapel". Their sons were to become Union Leaders, local Councillors, one was to achieve the post of Member of Parliament for Durham.

As the Brickgarth moved into the 1920's it was a very friendly community. A place where doors need never be locked, and seldom were, folk were helpful in times of need, and law and order prevailed.



*Colwill's Yard, sixpence a day workers were paid
to wash jam jars.
W Colwill on the left.*



The Co-operative Society Committee of the 1920's

"DAMSEL."



'DAMSEL'

*One of the Store Horses ready for the
Local Flower Show. With the Store Staff on the Cart.
1912.*



A Miner's wife of the 1930's



A Mother and Son of the 1930's

Looking at the Brickgarth of the 1920's. We find that the old corn mill is now disused, and just a relic of bygone days. The old colliery railway line that bordered the South side, is in the process of being dismantled. A child had been killed with waggons on the line previously. It was this accident that speeded up the decision to stop its use. The line was gone by 1927 but the coal trucks depot at the West end, and the rail cabin at the High Street end were not pulled down until the 1940's. These plus the old mill were to be "play areas" for Brickgarth children for many years.

The Barkhouse family were still in the Davey Lamp public house. And the Nags Head was in the capable hand of "Flat" Annie Robson.

1928 saw the building of the new Union Hall. This was called the Miners Welfare Hall and had the facilities for billiards and snooker. A small shop in the snooker room would sell sweets, chocolate and soft drinks. Upstairs there was a library of over 1,000 books. A Reading Room, and a large room where Union Meetings were held. This room was also used for playing card games. The caretaker was William Taylor. He was to remain there for many years.

With Brickgarth now a respectable and law abiding community folk were beginning to give names to certain areas in the community, Emerson Square and Quality Row are best remembered.

Poverty that had stalked the Brickgarth for years, was now evident as the Thirties arrived. The colliery, due to the recession in the coal trade, was now only working part time. But despite the hardships the Brickgarth was still a happy and friendly place, full of character that had built up over the years.

It was these recession years that saw the closure of the Nags Head with Joe Moore being its last landlord. The building was bought by a Mr Gordon and turned into flats. But all is not gloom, water is piped into the houses and the communal street taps were removed. The building of the Pit Head Baths in 1933 eased the work load for the

womenfolk, and the Welfare Hall proved a pleasant retreat from the boredom of not working for the men. The old Union Hall had been taken over by the Salvation Army, and their penny pie and pea suppers and magic lantern shows would attract children of all ages.

Martins the Bankers set up in business at premises on the High Street corner of the Brickgarth and opened twice a week. Mrs Hall opened up a fish shop near the Independent Chapel.

The Brickgarth of the Thirties produced many colourful characters, John George Walton the Jester in the local carnivals. "Boxer" Walton. Pat Hardy. Phil and Tot Collet and little Meggy Bond, the list was endless. Caroline Tempest, Hetty Wharton, the Evanses and the Purvises. All grand folk who helped to bring a little "bit of spice" into the Brickgarth of the Thirties.

As we moved into the late Thirties the recession has taken its toll. Dover the bakers shop had gone, Colwill's Marine Yard is no more, Hall's fish shop closed down, and Gardeners and the "Pot Shop" only a memory and Martin's Bank was soon to follow. But all was not lost, the Co-op was still trading well and paying its members a two shilling in the pound dividend. Bella Williams in her Brickgarth corner fish shop would sell a fish and a pennyworth. And beer was sixpence a pint in the Davey Lamp. In the Welfare Hall, Bobby Bell who only had one arm, stood supreme on the billiard table. And on the snooker table Jimmy Wigham was one of the best. Upstairs in the Reading Room, Sam Howe and George and Joe Metcalfe were bookies runners working for bookie Jimmy Bunn and the Pitch and Toss Gambling School in the Brickgarth "Hollow" still flourished.

1939 brought the start of the World War 2 and the end of the recession. "Coal was king again" and full employment returned to Brickgarth.



The Brickgarth as it used to be.



The Homes of 1935.

The Primitive Methodist Youth Club. The Boys' Own
on camping holiday in Yorkshire 1947.



*Outside the Brickgareth's Welfare Hall 1947
The first of many annual outings for the old folk.
Primitive Methodist Chapel to the left.*



*The Primitive Methodist Youth Club. "The Boys Own"
on camping holiday in Yorkshire 1947*

As we moved into the 1940's we find that the Miner's Welfare Committee had built tennis courts behind the Welfare Hall, but these were hardly used.

With the war at its height it was food rationing and nightly blackouts. But other than that things hardly changed. It was still midden toilets and the weekly bath was still in front of the fire in the tin bath tub. The Davey Lamp was still doing a brisk trade and the Co-op was never busier, paying its members dividends of two and six in the pound.

The chapels were still well attended, with the Independent running a Youth Club called the "Boys Own". The Primitive Methodists held weekly meetings of the Rechabites and in the old Union Hall the Good Templars held a weekly meeting, and the good old Salvation Army was still packing them in with their pie and pea suppers and magic lantern shows.

The Brickgarth was never bombed during the war. But in 1943 German planes dropped parachute flares all around the area, lighting up the district in readiness for a night bombing raid on the colliery. But the search lights and anti aircraft guns kept the bombers at bay. One thing must be said about the war years in the Brickgarth for all the hardships, blackouts and food rationing, no one was ever mugged, robbed or molested during those years.

With the end of hostilities the Brickgarth returned to normal living. But as the Forties came to an end things began to change. The end of the war had brought a post war building boom. New houses were going up all around. Folk were moving out into better homes with more modern facilities. The old Brickgarth was doomed. "The days of the Pot Shop and Colwill's Yard were to disappear forever".

Today little is left of the Brickgarth of yesteryear. The old official's houses at the west end are still standing. The Davey Lamp is still trading. The Welfare Hall is now a Community Centre. The Co-op that served the community so well is not closed and boarded up. Of the old

chapels only the Independent has survived. The Primitive Methodists did build a small chapel when their big chapel was demolished. But it's only a "shadow of its glory days" of years past.

Today a council estate stands where the small little rows stood. A far cry from the days when the Brickgarth vibrated to the sounds of the pit boot and the colliery, and the "clip, clop" of the Store horse and carts.



*Brickgarth . Easington Lane 1935
How It Was.*