

## **The Development of Coal Mining in the Hetton-le-Hole and Easington Lane Districts**

It is known from documentary evidence that coal mining existed in Co. Durham as far back as the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is, however, likely that localised outcrops were being used prior to this date, particularly in the west of the county where coal deposits lay close to the surface. It was not until the nineteenth century that coal mining operations increased in areas away from the rivers Tyne and Wear. Coal production relied heavily upon the rivers to transport the coal to coastal ports where it could be loaded into sea-going ships, normally collier brigs, for export to both foreign countries as well as to southern parts of England.

Thus most collieries were built fairly close to a river system where the coal could quickly and easily be led away to the riverside. As collieries developed and the technology of mining changed it was necessary to have larger tracts of land available to house surface installations, workshops, waste heaps and storage of coal. Generally the latter was provided at the riverside but eventually production often outstripped demand and as a consequence it was necessary to hold surplus production near to the pit. Also the waggonways which served the collieries had to be provided with the permissions of the landowners over whose land they traversed. It was at this point conflict often occurred.

The owners of the collieries were not always the owners of the land, more often the land was leased to the colliery owners, the land owners not having the necessary investment capital to develop the mine. The cost of wayleaves to cross the land of other landowners were occasionally difficult to obtain because of the suspicion regarding the 'new' methods of transporting coal which promoted noise, dust and disturbance as well as the uncertainty of return on any outlay provided by the land owner.

The degree of mining required to make each venture profitable had to be on a scale whereby all sinking and start-up costs were minimised. This usually involved getting as much out of the mine in the shortest possible time. In order for this to come about, in the absence of technology there was a great reliance upon man-power and often this meant that they had to be provided for in terms of accommodation for miners' families as well as support activities such as shops and other skills necessary to build the houses as well as the surface installations.

The Child Employment Commissioner noted in 1841 when writing about East Durham the following:-

“where formerly there was not a single hut of a shepherd,  
the lofty steam-engine chimneys of a colliery now send their

columns of smoke into the sky, and in the vicinity a town is called, as if by enchantment, into immediate existence”

There is no doubt that if you were on a journey from Easington Village to Houghton-le-Spring in 1818 you would not come into contact with any houses other than the occasional farm house on the lane side or a hamlet of two or three dwellings supporting the rural way of life. Thus one can say, that once coalfield colonisation came about, small compact settlements appeared, usually close to the colliery, so interrupting the pre-mining settlement patterns and nearly always intruding on the rurality of the situation. At first the intrusions were small and acceptable but as the nineteenth century progressed with population increased to the point that settlements were forced to grow and increased urbanisation became the norm in many areas.

The lack of land ownership initially restricted the coal owners from building the necessary houses in close proximity from the place of work. From the start of the venture it was necessary to take what land was available for building and squeeze as many houses on to it as possible. Thus miners’ houses were small, squalid and lacking amenities. The community idea was not in the forefront of the coal owners’ minds, merely an attempt to minimise the cost per unit and so maximise the profitability of the mine workings. This had a detrimental social affect too as wives and children were forced to work, since the wages were so low. As a way to increase family income, family size increased and this led to overcrowding. Quite often more than one family lived in the same property if houses were in short supply.

Once greater numbers of houses were built the pattern of the rural landscape changed forever. In some areas buildings mushroomed, often with little semblance of order. The pattern of building brought about by the pits and their adjoining settlements quite often bore no relationship to the physical landscape or the rules of settlement within a rural setting. Hetton and Easington Lane were in one way very fortunate in that the desire to build was in the hands of one company, the Hetton Coal Company who owned the collieries of Hetton Lyons, Elemore and Eppleton. Because of this the placement of houses was probably more structured. It was common practice throughout Durham County to build living accommodation as close as possible to the mine installations as this was the only land available to the mine owners. Examples of this occurred as far apart as Haswell , Pagebank, Chester Moor, Littleton, East Rainton and Craghead as well as dozens of other villages.

In 1851 Hetton parish was made up of three townships, Hetton – close to Hetton Hall, Great Eppleton and Little Eppleton. Until 1838 these townships formed the southern part of the ancient parish of Houghton-le-Spring adjacent to its boundary with Easington parish. Straddling the limestone plateau it was at an area called Lyons that the first colliery was sunk. Following the first coal production from this colliery late in 1822 it was soon augmented by production from Elemore ( in Pittington parish) in 1827 followed by Eppleton

in 1832/3. Opening so many collieries in a few years of each other put immediate pressure on the housing provision for miners. This can be shown by the population statistics for Hetton parish and the number of households

Year	No. Households	Population
1801	53	253
1811	56	322
1821	109	994
1831	1062	5951
1841	936	4260
1851	1144	5751

Thus a complex industrial system of pits, railways, ancillary industries and waste heaps began to litter the rural landscape. Restrictions were imposed on these developments as well as the location of housing for the miners. In Great Eppleton estate the land owner Francis Mascall was unwilling to approve any land for colliery development of any kind and constrained the building of a railway within 440 yards of his home at Great Eppleton Hall. Gradually agreements were drawn up with the local landowners. A waste heap was approved on the land adjoining Lyons colliery owned by John Pemberton when a long lease was drawn up.

By far the most co-operative landowner was John Lyon but even he seemed at times to impose a negative influence on the position and growth of coal production. In a series of agreements drawn up between the Hetton Coal Company and John Lyons during the period 1820- 1822 the financial motives of the landowners were most apparent. Lyon agreed with the Coal Company on the following:-

1. Provision for pit installations and a heap.
2. Wayleave by horses, ropes, rollers or engines
3. The building of waggonways to the River Wear or elsewhere with restrictions on width up to 15 yards.
4. The building of dwelling houses, hovels, stables, fire engines etc.

In return the Coal Company paid an annual rent to Lyon, secondly a royalty on the coal extracted from Lyons ground dependent upon the seam and thirdly, an additional wayleave rent levied on the tonnage of coal transported over Lyon land.

I suppose one can suggest that the location of dwelling houses for miners was low down on the list of major interests. A small number of miners' cottages were built in close proximity to the colliery at Lyons, mainly for officials and staff having specialised skills. At the southern extremity of the Hetton Township land had to be sought for the homes of miners' families, the members of which worked at the Lyons colliery. Since the Coal company did not own land in this area it had to lease an area of land within the antecedent field pattern. A narrow field measuring 700 yards by 70 yards commonly known as the Brick Garth was leased from the Hutchinson family. Miners cottages were built quickly following the opening of the Hetton Lyons colliery and further building extended after the opening of the Elemore colliery in 1827.

In order to maximise the number of dwellings which could be fitted into this narrow field it was decided to build a series of 22 short rows aligned across the width of the field with a further 11 head rows arranged along the long axis running from east to west. Thus each block comprised a three sided shape surrounding a small courtyard area. By 1827 101 houses were built in the Brick Garth and by the middle of the century this number had more than doubled.

Finally the antecedent pattern of the landscape influenced the shape of what was now developing as Easington Lane. Two rows of houses were built lining the roadsides so cementing the establishment of a permanent community. By 1827 180 properties had been built alongside the roadway and included a number of shops and public houses. Many of the properties were a full two storeys and they occasionally housed more than one family.

In other parts of the parish dwelling houses were also being built. The location of Hetton Lyons colliery had been influenced by the restrictions imposed by John Lyon who did not want a colliery built within 500 yards of his house Hetton Hall. However there was land made available reasonably close to Hetton Hall in what is now the centre of the town. Thus small miners' cottages were started to the east of the lane running through Hetton to Houghton-le-Spring. In 1823 the Hetton Coal Company embarked on a policy of purchasing land to build dwelling houses. Initially an estate of just 28 and a half acres was purchased and by 1826 according to Company valuations the Company owned 158 acres at the Downs. The Tithe map of Hetton by 1839 showed a block of land equivalent to 161 acres in the Downs area. It was on this land that the Coal Company concentrated its efforts in the building on miners' cottages and the wider mining settlement of Hetton Downs came about during the 1830s and 1840s.

The first houses which comprised the mining settlement of houses were built on a east-west alignment to the east of the road through the village as it passed on its way to Houghton-le-Spring. These Streets were Richard Street, John Street, Pemberton Street, another Street later to be named and Barnes Street. The name of Union Street was not added until the mid 1830s. Another structure, triangular in shape was built with its longest side bordering what is now known as Caroline Street. This location on the south side of the

street was known as The Square. In addition, Pemberton Street was enlarged to form Pemberton Place. All of the streets mentioned above were dissected by the Hetton Railway which ran from the Lyons colliery in the direction of Houghton and in particular Copt Hill.

A few cottages occupied by miners also existed in the location close to the Quay at Bog Row. In the Hetton Estate plan in 1826 the Coal Company had started to build on the land which they had purchased in 1823. The houses were built in two squares and called Low Downs Square and High Downs Square. By 1839 only nine acres had been used for housing, gardens and roads. The remaining space was divided into two fields of nine and ten acres each. The two squares were comprised of houses surrounding a central open space, one of which was occupied by a communal bake oven. These houses were larger than others in the vicinity and continued in existence well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

It wasn't until the 1850s before further building took place in the Downs area. Looking at the previous population figures for 1841 show a reduction in both population and households in the Hetton parish. In fact at the time of the 1841 census there were 228 houses uninhabited. This reduction in population can be partly explained by the author of the footnotes of the 1841 census who states:-

“ The great number of uninhabited houses and the decrease of population..... arises from several new collieries having been opened in the surrounding townships, which has caused a large portion of the mining population to remove thither.”

The collieries involved were Moorsley (1838), Murton (1839), Haswell (1836) as well as others farther afield. The difficulties of a strike at Hetton in 1832/3 were still fresh in the memories of many miners and the fact that a number had been subject to forced eviction did not promote a strong loyalty to the Hetton Coal Company. Subsequently many miners were looking for fresh pastures and better opportunities. In addition the miners' bond whereby miners were committed to remain at a colliery for up to a year became a millstone for many and any opportunity to leave to go elsewhere was better than staying in a position where they may be enslaved. A shortage of skilled miners allowed coal owners to offer various sweeteners, extra money on signing the bond, better class of housing etc. to attract them to their collieries and this took them away from their workplaces elsewhere.