

The Queen Mother's Visit to Hetton Lyons Boys Club June 1963

Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother when she came to Hetton in the summer of 1963 saw the results of a remarkable transformation, with her official opening the new Hetton Lyons Boys' Club. The idea of converting the old locomotive sheds into club rooms and an indoor cricket school was put forward in 1960, developed by a small committee and brought to realisation by the co-operation of people of good will in all walks of life. It was the culmination of years of effort.

A club was first formed in 1935 by the late Rev. W.L.M. Law with headquarters in the Lyons Church Hall. P.C. R. S. Wanless was appointed leader and the local mining agent, Mr. A. L. Scott-Owen, club chairman. Use of the football field was obtained and the pit pond was converted into a swimming pool

On January 7th 1941, the club reached another milestone when new premises, converted from an old blacksmith's shop were opened by Lord Joicey. During the war it was used by units of the Air Training Corps, Army Cadets and Girl's Training Corps.

Disbanded

The club thrived until 1946 when its popular leader, Constable Wanless was promoted sergeant and transferred from the Hetton District.

This proved a severe blow. For a time the club continued under first one leader then another, but the vital spark appeared to be lacking and eventually it was decided that the club would have to disband and what funds there were, disbursed among local organisations.

The most recent club was founded in 1954 when Mr. Fred Seadon, now the Assistant Secretary, put up the idea of converting the old locomotive repair shop into a cricket coaching school.

Five years elapsed before approval was granted from the National Coal Board for the lease of the premises. Durham County Association of Boys Clubs agreed to assist in forming a combined Boys Club and cricket coaching school scheme. The National Association of Boys Clubs had been steadily expanding all over England and Wales following the cessation of hostilities in Europe. Many of the mining villages in the Durham coalfield had affiliated clubs and the County Association was particularly strong at the time.

In February 1960 a small committee comprising some old boys of the club and members of Hetton Lyons Cricket Club was set up to raise 25% of the cost of the scheme. The Committee at that juncture included Mr. W. Gibson (Chairman), Mrs G. Johnson (Vice-chairman), Mr F. Seadon (Secretary) and Mr. J. Heslop (Treasurer).

But the estimated cost increased considerably with plans to convert the adjacent offices into club rooms and building extensions to include showers and changing rooms. The project costs were £9,030 of which £2,250 had to be raised by the committee.

Three more years elapsed before sufficient money was raised. Finally the operating committee was set up at a public meeting in November 1962 to supervise the alterations and re-equip the club.

Royal Opening Crown Club's Great Effort

When Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother opened the new club and indoor cricket school during her visit, it marked the completion of years of planning and weeks of preparation.

The Queen Mother was assured of and given a warm reception by the little mining community.

Perhaps the premier reason for the Queen Mother accepting the invitation to Hetton was her link with the Bowes-Lyons family which was associated with the district.

Like the Lyons colliery before them the new premises were once leased to the Lambton Collieries and then to the National Coal Board by the Bowes-Lyon family.

The Route

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When she left the club the Queen Mother's route took her through a council housing estate bearing the name of Bowes Avenue and Lyons Avenue.

She arrived at the club by car which had travelled via Hazard Lane from the main Durham to Sunderland road, North Road and Springwell Terrace, to Four Lane Ends near the Lyons School arriving at the club about 5.45 p.m. The weather at the time was warm but there had been a number of light showers which continued during the time of her visit.

Among those to be presented to her was Councillor Mrs Catherine Buckingham, Chairman of Hetton Urban District Council, Mr. Douglas Richardson (Clerk), Mrs Douglas Nicholson of Plawsworth Hall, near Chester-le-Street, wife of the President, Mr. C.F. Grey, M.P. for Durham, Mr. Duncan Gibson, Secretary of County Durham Boys' Clubs Association, the Rev. R.W.Bell, P.C. Harry Rogers (Club Leader) and Mr. Jim Heslop, Secretary.

The Queen Mother stayed at the club for about three quarters of an hour. She left, about 6.30, p.m. to board her train at Horden, shortly before 7, p.m. The Queen Mother travelled through Easington Lane, South Hetton and Easington Village.

After the official welcome by Councillor Buckingham the Queen Mother looked at the Boy's Club crest in blue and yellow, specially done by 67 year old Mr. James Arkley, a retired horse keeper of Elemore Vale.

At the south end of the gymnasium she unveiled a plaque on the wall to commemorate the occasion and sign the visitors' book

It was a memorable day for five year-old Dorothy Mary Heslop, the secretary's daughter. For weeks past she has been preparing her curtsey as she presented her bouquet.

The Queen Mother then walked around the gymnasium and inspected the equipment stopping to have a chat with Mr. Fred Seadon, assistant secretary as well as cricketers using the practice nets.

The Queen Mother accompanied by Mr. Nicholson, Mr. Wally Telfer, Development Officer for the County Boys Club Association and P.C. Rogers was shown the photography dark room, the art room and she watched some of the boys playing chess, draughts and dominoes.

After a short refreshments break Councillor Mrs Buckingham thanked the Queen Mother for her visit and said good-bye to the Royal visitor.