

**MEMORIES OF THE VILLAGE OF
WEST RANTON**

A Personal History by

Philip Ronan

Editorial Preface and Acknowledgments

This final version of Philip Ronan's book comes, sadly, after his death although he did see and express his pleasure in the earlier drafts and the original presentation copies. Subsequent changes have been to reorder the material without changing the substance and sense of Philip's original.

Philip had acknowledged within his text the contributions of friends. It remains to thank the very many who have supported and contributed to the process of typing and printing. It is impracticable to name all involved but special thanks are due to a few. West Rainton Parish Council enabled a start to be made with their generous purchase of a word-processing package and printer to enhance the village school computer system. The burden of typing was shared by very many willing hands. The book binding expertise of Bob Johnson produced the two leather-bound presentation copies of the book. The final task of printing was achieved with the considerable help of Skill Training Ltd. at Ushaw Park, with particular thanks due to Stephen Black. Most of the photographic material was contributed by Ken Richardson.

Finally, it falls to the editor to take responsibility for any errors remaining in the text and for the delay in publication - much has changed in the village in the meantime. I am comforted by the belief that this personal history is well worth waiting for.

J.S.

1989.

Introduction

I was born in the Village of West Rainton on October 6th, 1900 in Dene Cottage. The cottage was demolished some years ago and on the site three very fine dwellings have been built. It is known as the "Dene" and is situated at the north east end of the village.

I remember the cottage well, it was stone built, very cosy and attached to the cottage was a very fine garden, producing plenty of vegetables and soft fruits; most of the soft fruits were made into jam which lasted the family for many months of the year. There was a large fire place in the living room with a round metal oven where Mam did all her baking of bread, teacakes, flat cakes (locally known as stotty cakes) and pastries, might I add very successfully too. There was some tasty food came out of that round oven, not forgetting the various types of meat joints. Those days there was never any thought of buying bread or cakes - it was all home made.

You can imagine on a cold winter's night, a good big fire burning, coal was then plentiful and reasonably cheap, the oil lamps lit and the outer door shut - how warm and cosy it felt. A stone building seemed to retain the heat. There was no fresh water laid to the cottage, all our water for heating, cooking and washing was carried in enamel buckets from a well 200 yards from the cottage. The well is still there today. The water was of excellent quality, lovely and cool in the summer. The spring kept running even during the winter and severe frosty weather. The only trouble we had was having to walk there and back carrying the water during stormy weather.

The village itself is situated four miles north east of Durham City on the Durham and Sunderland road (the A690). History informs us that the district was an ancient manor and park belonging to the prior and convent of Durham. (The first park

keeper was appointed in 1338.) In the early 10th century the village was named Reynton and then Reynington. Before this however one can imagine the surrounding area would be under the domination of the Romans during their three and a half centuries occupation of Britain for they had a station at Chester-le-Street, four miles west of West Rainton Village. It is stated that in AD 217 a wing of Roman cavalry was stationed at Chester-le-Street to serve probably as a reserve to the forces employed on the wall.

Geography, Buildings and People

Boundaries and Local Government

The majority of people living in the village of West Rainton and especially those families whose ancestors who had lived in the village many years ago are proud of their heritage and are interested in the changing scene and atmosphere of their place of abode. They have a very obvious regard and respect for the past. The Local Government Parish of West Rainton comprises the townships of Cocken, Moorhouse and West Rainton with other smaller hamlets in the area, Leamside, Rainton Gate and Pit House Lane. The Parish was formed from the Parish of Houghton-le-Spring by an order in Council dated 15th May 1838 which constituted a separate and distinct Parish.

I well remember when I was chairman of the West Rainton Parish Council in 1936 and had been chairman for the previous eight years, each year members of the Parish Council walked the boundaries. There was an old stone cottage opposite the then Leamside Chapelry, occupied by an elderly man named Thomas Storey. This cottage was in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Hallgarth, but in the civil parish of West Rainton. It would appear that the Priors of Hallgarth Church, which was built in the year 1070, controlled land and buildings of the Parkland of West Rainton and Leamside, through the Toll-Gate at Rainton Gate and as far as

Cocken Ford over the River Wear. When Houghton Church was built in the early 12th century it seems that the Parkland and buildings were transferred to Houghton and under their control. As boundaries change from time to time, West Rainton was taken over by Durham Rural District Local Authority in the 1930's and remained ever since, except it is now the Durham City Council which was enlarged and took in Durham Rural District and Brandon and Byshottles Council.

Township of Cocken

Cocken comprises an area of 437 acres. This delightful part of the village possessing beautiful trees and parkland is situated on the east side of the River Wear. Go due west from the village of West Rainton through Leamside and on through an attractive avenue of trees, past the entrance of the ancient and majestic Cocken Hall which unfortunately was demolished in 1922. The whole site was cleared and the land reverted to Agriculture. The road continued winding its way down Cocken bank and on to Cocken Ford where the River Wear is crossed by a wrought iron single span bridge, 120 feet in length which was erected and opened on April 27th 1880 at a cost of £3,400. This ended people and vehicles having to ford the river. Once over the bridge travelling west for approximately a quarter of a mile you arrive at a T-junction, you have now reached the old coach road, turning right on to Chester-le-Street and Newcastle and turning left at the junction to Durham and the South.

Ellafus a priest, gave Cocken to the Prior and monks of Durham and it subsequently passed to the Priors of Finchale. At the dissolution of the religious dwellings, Cocken was taken over by the Crown and later was held by various private owners. In the 35th year of his reign, King Henry VIII granted the Grange of Cocken to Sir John Hilton of Newcastle. It passed to Ralph Carr, grandson of Lady Hilton. The estate continued in the Carr family for over two centuries. It was then owned by the Earl of Durham

whose families over a number of years occupied the Hall. In 1804 it became the residence of a community of Feresian nuns who came from Liere in Belgium. Owing to the working of coal mining in the neighbourhood which the nuns disliked, they left Cocken Hall and moved to Field House near Darlington in 1830. The Hall was occupied for some years by Samuel Peter Austin, JP. The last tenant to occupy Cocken Hall from 1900 was a Mr Hudson and family. Mr Hudson owned a very prosperous factory making corned beef. In the early 1900's one of Mr Hudson's employees lost a thumb in the factory machinery and it was later found in one of the tins of corned beef that had been sold. This caused a rumpus and from then on the business went down and down until 1912 when Mr Hudson was in such financial difficulties that he was unable to pay the rent for the Hall and was obliged to leave the district. In his more prosperous days when he was living in Cocken Hall one of his daughters was married in St. Mary's Church, West Rainton. It was a great day for the villagers to witness such a flash wedding. There was a red carpet laid all the way from the church entrance gates along the path to the west door of the church for the bride to walk on. Rose petals were also dropped onto the red carpet. The Hall was empty from 1912 until 1915 when the Hall and grounds were occupied by the Military, the 18th Durhams, known as the Pal's Battalion and later the 19th Durhams, Bantom's Battalion.

Cocken Hall was a fine building, charmingly situated on an eminent site within beautifully laid out gardens, bounded on the east side by deep hills shaded with stately forest trees and closed on three sides by the winding River Wear. From its grounds was a remarkably fine view of the ruined Priory of Finchale. Varied and beautiful were the scenes within the grounds which abounded in nature's wondrous charms.

I have many recollections of Cocken Hall from 1915 to 1918 and became acquainted with many of the troops billeted at Cocken and sad to relate many of these fine men gave their lives

on the battlefields of Flanders. On evenings I used to serve the troops in the private canteen owned by the late Alderman John W. Pattison, J.P. of Durham. He provided canteen facilities for the Soldiers. Shortly after the war finished the Military authorities relinquished its occupation. It was a great tragedy to see the extent of the damage that had been done by the troops to this ancient and beautiful residence with its Clock Tower and its spacious gardens and grounds.

Mr William Herdman and his family lived in the gardeners cottage in the hall grounds and was the last gardener here. He and his family remained in the cottage until the whole site was cleared. Mr Herdman had been the head gardener for many years and all through the 1st World War years. I remember Mr Gray, estate agent for the Earl of Durham telling me that he and the Earl had discussed the whole question of Cocken Hall and both he and the Earl had come to the same conclusion to restore the hall and grounds to its former beauty would be too costly and the only thing to do was to demolish all the buildings and clear the site, which they did in 1922.

Finchale Priory

Although Finchale Priory is in the Ecclesiastical Parish of St. Oswald's, Durham City, and the Priory is situated on the west banks of the River Wear, it is evident that the area around West Rainton would have close connections with the Priors and Monks of Finchale Priory, seeing that at first Cocken township was under their direction.

Finchale Priory was the home of St. Godric and was built in the early 12th Century. The mode of life of this most remarkable man is extremely fascinating and interesting. He was a native of Walpole, Norfolk. In his early life he was a Pedlar. He became part owner of a ship trading between Scotland and Flanders. On his sea journeys he had visited the Holy Island of Lindisfarne and learned of the saintly St. Cuthbert which made a deep impression

upon him. Later he took a pilgrimage to Jerusalem and another pilgrimage to Rome. These sea journeys in St. Godric's days must have been very hazardous. On his return from Rome he settled for a few years at Carlisle. He went to Wolsingham in the Wear Valley and lived the life of a hermit. He took a second journey to the Holy Land and on his return he lived two years at Whitby and came to Durham Cathedral where he became a Sacrist. He made his home in the woods at Finchale. Bishop Flambard gave him fishing rights on the River Wear. He and his Monks built Finchale Priory and he spent 63 years at Finchale. He was robbed and injured by the marauding Scots in the year 1138. St. Godric applied himself to gardening and to the planting and grafting of trees. He practiced almost unheard of austerities, wore sackcloth, mixed ashes with his bread and a stone served him for a pillow. It was his custom to stand naked in an earthen bath up to his neck in water all night, devoting himself to prayer and meditation. He avoided as much as possible all intercourse with his fellow men, only admitting visitors to an interview on their showing of a token, a certain wooden cross from the Prior of Durham, but his efforts to remain unknown were of little avail. The fame of his sanctity spread far and wide. Many gifts were bestowed upon him, all of which he devoted to the relief of the poor, retaining none for himself. He, however, did not escape ill-usage. His humble abode was several times ransacked by robbers in search of his supposed wealth. Some stragglers discovered his solitude, beat him cruelly and threatened him with death. They relented however, disarmed by the meekness and fortitude he displayed. For the last eight years of his life he was in such a state of weakness as to be unable to leave his bed. During that time he was carefully attended to by the brethren of the Monastery of Durham, one of whom, the monk Reginald, afterwards wrote the life of St. Godric. This monk was most constant in his attendance upon him. Finding his end approaching, Godric asked to be laid before the altar of his little oratory and there in constant prayer and in the midst of great suffering he expired on the octave of the Ascension, May 21st,

1170. His body was laid to rest in the oratory under the spot where he died. He was subsequently canonised.

After the Reformation, the building deteriorated mainly by thieves stealing the lead from the roof. Many local people wrongly believe and sometimes relate that it was Oliver Cromwell with his troops who were in the vicinity of the Priory when some of the Monks mocked Cromwell and in revenge his troops partly destroyed the Priory.

To gain easier access to the Priory, the Ministry of Works built a new wooden footbridge across the River Wear from the east banks to Finchale Priory in April 1925. As you leave the Leamside to Cocken road you have about 60 steps to negotiate down the steep winding wooded path through high cliffs to the footbridge. I might add that it is easier going down than coming up. Before this bridge was built, many would ford the river at this point, it was quite safe providing the river wasn't in spate. I have known at holiday times various temporary footbridges have been erected. The only other way to Finchale Priory from the east side of the river is by road, Leamside to Cocken Ford, Newton Hall to Brasside, a distance of about 4 miles.

Finchale Priory is a favourite place and throughout the year receives a large number of visitors, some go picnicking, or camping and others to see the old Priory and walk in picturesque surroundings. It has always surprised me how in ancient days people like St. Godric seemed to have a gift of knowing where to build these places of worship for the majority were erected in such picturesque places. I can understand them building near a river, for apparently the monks did a lot of fishing and fish was part of their staple diet.

Township of Moorhouse

Moorhouse, a small township, comprising an area of 277 acres belonged to the Marquis of Londonderry and later Mr.

George Fenwick Boyd. The previous owners of this small township were the families of Ingleby's and the family of Roper in 1664. Moorhouse consisted of a very fine country residence occupied by Mr. Boyd and his family when I was a boy. They were relatives of Field Marshall Earl Haig, Commander General of the British Forces in the First World War (1914-1918). They were also relatives of Lord Rhonda, who was Minister of Food during the first World War. The Boyd's family gave extensively to the Parish church, they were contributors to the building of the Leamside Chapelry and Day School and contributed to the welfare of the village in general. The family also owned a large estate in Wales. They left Moorhouse about 1925 to reside in their country house in Wales. Over the years the family have frequently visited the village and the church where some of their earlier relatives rest in the church yard.

Their country house at Moorhouse was demolished in 1925 and on the site was erected a building to accommodate Scouts and Girl Guides from far and wide who come for long weekends or during holiday periods for recreation and to learn Scouting technique. These Scout headquarters are managed and looked after by a Warden and his wife and the premises are frequently used to good advantage.

The residents of Moorhouse parish used to hold one parish meeting in the year where they used to assemble in the old farm house, which is still there and occupied by the farmer. A few of the cottages still remain that were on the estate, but the rest have been demolished.

We often visited Moorhouse for it was a well known Rookery.

A short while ago I visited Woodside Farm, the second farm in the parish and I had a talk to Mr. and Mrs. John Lowrie who farm there. I was explaining to them that for a number of years an Annual Flower and Vegetable Show was held at their farm. The

last one held there was on the 12th August 1893. To arrive at Woodside Farm from Leamside, I had to go along Salters Lane, past Salters Cottage. Mr. and Mrs. Lowrie who were greatly interested in the past history of the district, asked me if I knew that some three or four hundred years ago that there had been salt mined down the Mallagill going from Woodside Farm to the River Wear. This is the first time I have heard this mentioned, but thinking the matter over this is not impossible. There is circumstantial evidence to establish that salt was mined there. The name of the lane from Leamside to Woodside, Salters Lane and Salters Cottage make it sound quite feasible that the names could have originated from the Salters. The road leading through the gill to the river runs between very high sandstone cliffs and the road is made up of very old cobblestones, providing a solid access so that horsedrawn wagons could haul loads of salt from the Salt Mines.

Salt mining is an industry of great antiquity which formed an important trade in Durham County. We find many traces in the names still common in the district such as Preston Pans, the Pans at Sunderland and South Shields, the same as Saltholme near Middlesborough. Then there is the famous Cerebos Salt still mined at Greatham which is world famous. This ancient industry flourished in many parts of the county for over 400 years to the end of the seventeenth century.

The Township of West Rainton

West Rainton Township comprised an area of 1776 acres. We find that in 1801 the number of inhabitants was 435. In consequence of the extension of coal mining in the area, the population had risen to 2,793 in the year 1900.

The principal landowners in the Township were the Dean and Chapter of Durham, The Ecclesiastical Commissioners and the Marquis of Londonderry. The latter were the mine owners of the Collieries in the village and surrounding districts.

There were 149 houses, known locally as the "Freehold" built in 1865 by the Marquis of Londonderry to house the miners and their families who were working in the Londonderry Collieries. The streets were named as follows: West Row, Middle Row, Anderson's Row, Drapers Row, Quarry Road and Cross Row. All these streets were demolished in 1950 and the Durham Rural District Council built on the same site a modern council estate.

The Londonderrys, in the early part of 1800, built a Reading Room and Billiard Room opposite the site of the Parish Church in North Street between Rainton Lodge, (then the Doctors house and Surgery), and School House which stood on the site where now stands a stone built garage adjoining School House. It was a cosy and friendly place, it had a pantiled roof and consisted of a large room the whole length of the building with a coal fire at each end of the room and a full size billiard table in the centre and fixed seats around the room. There was a separate room at the rear with a coal fire where you could sit quietly and read. It was also used as a Committee or Supper room. There was also a small kitchen with water laid in and white glazed sink. The building was very well supported by men of all ages from 16 years and upwards. Usually they were men who liked this quiet type of recreation and who didn't frequent public houses or associate themselves with their activities.

After the First World War travel was being made easier, people were travelling further seeking fresh interest and support for the Billiard and Reading room was waning. In the end it closed after serving the village and affording many of the villagers with much enjoyment for many years. The building was pulled down about 1950.

Drill Hall

The 5th Marquis of Londonderry was responsible for the building of the Drill Hall, West Rainton in the year 1880. It was

built to accommodate his own private army and the army was named the 2nd Durham (Seaham) Artillery Volunteers. There were 2 large cannon used for field practice. My eldest brother was a young cadet in the Volunteers. They wore blue uniforms with a red stripe down their trousers and wore a Pill Box hat. The Senior Volunteers wore a black Busby which the Marquis had been given permission by the British Military Authorities for them to wear.

The Sergeant Instructor in 1900 was Sergeant Matthews who came from Dover Castle to the Drill Hall at West Rainton. He and his family occupied the cottage attached to the Drill Hall. After the death of Sergeant Matthews his spinster daughters, Henrietta and Rose, lived in the village for the rest of their lives to a good age. They were both great church workers.

The first Annual Grand Ball was held in the Drill Hall on Friday 18th December 1894. Since the volunteers finished at West Rainton in the early 1900's, the Drill Hall has been used in various ways. It accommodated some soldiers in the 1914-18 war for a time. It was used by the church as a Church Hall for a number of years, then as a School feeding centre where they cooked meals for a number of schools in the districts during the Second World War and for a good number of years after the war. It was given back to the church. The County Council of Durham gave the church I think it was fifteen hundred pounds to pay for alterations and renovations to restore the hall and again be used as a Church Hall, this was in 1962. After a few years the Parish Church Council realised they could not keep it going any longer. Overhead charges were too great and the church was losing money. In the end the hall was taken over as a Community Centre and renamed the "Jubilee Hall" as it was dedicated as such in Jubilee week in 1977. So far it is run very successfully and an asset to the village. The work and running of it is done by voluntary helpers and there is a tremendous amount of work done by the Community Committee to keep the centre going.

Tempest Charity

The Londonderry family left what is known as the Tempest Charity by will, bearing the date 1st April 1794. This gave to trustees such a sum of money as should be sufficient to purchase in their names £1,200 worth of three-per-cent Consols, upon trust to pay the dividends yearly, in such proportions as they should deem fit, to the widows of six pitmen for their lives, whose husbands should have been usually employed as pitmen, in the time of the testator's father or his own time, working the Penshaw and Rainton collieries, such six widows to be nominated by the trustees; and, in case the collieries should close, so that there should be no such widows to be nominated, that the trustees should nominate six widows whom they should think fit objects of charity, and pay them dividends in like manner. The dividends, amounting to 36 pounds a year, are divided as the testator directed. I am the trustee for this charity at West Rainton and have been for the past 50 years. I visit the beneficiaries twice a year to give them the gift of 2.50 pounds in the June and December each year. It was a welcome gift to these widows until the last few years when the value of money has been reduced considerably.

Buildings and People

The Marchioness of Londonderry, Frances Ann Vane Tempest was responsible for the building of the old Boys School in 1850 at a cost of £700. She had it built to give encouragement to the families of the mining people to promote moral and religious education.

Some years before my parents came to reside at the village of West Rainton, my Grandfather, Amos Hudson, was tenant of Dene Farm for a few years. There were 30 acres of land and this dairy farm was situated where now stands One to Three Dene View. The farm and land were owned by a family named Jefferson who had run the dairy farm for many years up to about 1890. This

family left the farm and moved to Spennymoor but still retained the ownership of the farm and land. The Jefferson family owned land in front of the church on the north side, and on this land there were three thatched cottages, a blacksmiths forge and horse trough. They gave the land to the church for the extension of the church front graveyard. My Grandfather took over the farm after the Jefferson family left in 1890 but lived there for only three or four years. The farm and land was then let to Mr. William Glew who farmed there up to the beginning of the first World War. Jeffersons sold the farm house and buildings to a private owner and the 30 acres of land was bought by the Rainton Coal Co. Ltd.

In 1938 the government at that time gave grants towards bringing agricultural properties up to modern standards, and it was called an Agricultural Grant. Mr. Joseph Swinburn of Stables Farm bought the old property and got the agricultural grant and altered the old farm and cottage building and made three houses: one, two and three Dene View. Number 4 Dene View is a very attractive double fronted house built on the site of the old public house the "Lord Seaham Inn".

At the east end of the village there was an open stream which flowed under the Workingmen's Club, running north down through the Dene. A few years ago this open stream was piped to prevent flooding and it is now invisible above ground. The local village people named this stream the River Jordan, why they gave the stream this name I shall never know. Close by the stream there once stood old public baking ovens which were for a long time in general use.

In front of my home at 38, South Street on the open green, many years before I was born, there were washing facilities with an old iron mangle. It was owned by a family named Thompson who performed the services of clothes washing and wringing. Husbands and young men would carry their baskets home with their washed and mangled clothes for their wives and sweethearts. It was an important meeting place for the young people who

would do their courting whilst waiting for their clothes to be washed.

In North Street there is the attractive Village Post Office, now managed by Mr. Edwin Francis. This dwelling was only a single storey cottage, but in 1860 it was raised to a two storey dwelling. During the alterations, roofing beams were exposed and they were dated 1635, placed in their position in the days of King Charles the first. The great majority of the old properties left in the village over the years have been improved and brought up to modern standards. There are two fine old houses in North Street, first there is School House, opposite the New Rectory. School House was built in 1662. This house has undergone many improvements with all the modern facilities.

Then there was South Sheen, where just recently the name has been changed to "Rainton Lodge". This fine house is now owned and occupied by the staff of the Association of Scientific, Technical and Managerial Staffs and used as offices. When I was a very young boy, North Sheen was the home of the Sutherland family, greatly loved and respected in the village and surrounding district. Dr. Russell Sutherland, D.M.R.C.S., L.S.A. was born in 1833 and was the village doctor. A genial man of short stature, about 5 feet 4 ins tall, He had served as an Army Doctor in the Crimean War from 1854 to 1856 during the battles of Alma, Balaclava and Inkerman. He was at the fall of Sebastopol in 1855 after the years siege. He had worked in the battlefield with the noted Florence Nightingale. When talks on the B.B.C. television have been given on Florence Nightingale, they have also mentioned Dr. Russell Sutherland who worked with her on the battlefield. He lost half of his right foot in the Crimea and through his disability he walked with a limp. He passed away on the 28th January 1910 aged 77 years and his body is laid to rest in the front graveyard of the village church. The Sutherland family were regular attenders and active church workers. I well remember the day Dr. Sutherland was buried, it was a choir funeral and I was

one of the choristers, the boys were given time off school by the Head Master to attend the funeral. Snow was lying so deep that workmen had to clear a way from North Sheen to the church and graveyard. It was the first time I had seen horses drawing various types of traps on sleighs instead of wheels. It was the only means of transport in such adverse weather for Doctors and friends from places like Houghton, Hetton and Fence Houses managed to attend the funeral. Motor cars were not then in general use; if they had been it is questionable whether a motor car could have managed to run in such conditions.

Dr. Charles Russell Sutherland, the only son of Dr. Russell Sutherland had graduated as a doctor and finished his University studies in 1900. I was born on the 6th October that year and I was the first child he brought into the world after he qualified as a doctor. He was living in North Sheen next door to my present home, 38 South Street. He assisted his father in the practice until his father died in 1910 he then took over the practice and moved house into North Sheen where his parents had lived. He retired in October 1945 after faithfully serving the village and district for 45 years. He was greatly missed and loved by the people of West Rainton. Both he and his wife were very kind people and helped the villagers in all sorts of ways. They retired to a small village near Scarborough, a retirement that was richly deserved.

Then followed Dr. Alexander Burns, a Scotsman. A doctor of many excellent qualities. He had served the country with distinction as a doctor in the Second World War in Burma and was decorated in the field with the Military Cross by Field Marshal Sir William Slim. After the war he came to West Rainton to take over the practice in February 1946. He served the village and district for 32 years and retired in April 1978. He and Mrs. Burns are greatly respected and loved by many. They didn't leave the district but retired to a very attractive bungalow in the village. I said he retired, but since he gave up the practice he has been busier than ever, engaged in St. Johns Ambulance Brigade and

Community Association work. He is known from one end of the country to the other. His enthusiasm and involvement in this worthy and important association with St. John's Ambulance are paramount, having filled the various positions from the beginning of his medical career to the high office of Commander of the Brigade. In recognition of his devotion and hard work he received the high honour of Knight of Grace of the Brigade. Also conferred upon him was the most noble Order of the British Empire in 1944. He was appointed in April 1982 a Deputy Lieutenant of the County of Durham.

Dr. A. Hughes took over the practice after being in partnership with Dr. Burns for many years. Dr. Hughes has two young doctors assisting him. The surgery was closed at Rainton Lodge and re-established in a newly built modern surgery at Rainton Gate which was opened on Monday 18th September 1978. The people of West Rainton and district realise how fortunate they have been in having such excellent medical service and devoted practitioners over the past 80 years.

The Hall at West Rainton

My early recollection of the village was a completely satisfying scene of old world serenity. The most attractive and outstanding building which caught one's eye was the old Rainton Hall in South Street, in the centre of the village.

The hall was built between 1680 and 1690. It was built and occupied by the noted Sir John Duck. He was reputed to be the wealthiest Burgess, Borough Freeman in the Civic Annals of Durham. His birth and parentage remain in impenetrable obscurity. He came to Durham City when a young boy and was employed as an apprentice butcher with Mr. John Heslop of Elvet, Durham in defiance of the whole butchering craft of Durham. In John Heslop's books recording his business transactions, there appears a gentle reprimand to Mr. Heslop for employing John Duck in the butchering trade and the Association fined him 39

shillings and eleven pence for doing so. It was evident that John Duck disliked butchering and it is reported that Mr. Heslop sacked him for his inefficiency and disinterest in his work. However, after much pleading from his daughter, he gave John another chance. John Duck married either the sister or daughter of his employer. John Duck was born to greatness and grew rich in spite of his failure as a butcher. He not only built Rainton Hall, but many more places beside. He built a splendid mansion in Silver Street, Durham City which adjoined the Market Place. I well remember this building in the 1950's which had been converted into a cosy and attractive Cafe and Bakery and it was well patronised. It was owned at that time by Mr. Turner and was widely known as Turner's Cafe. Incidentally when Mr. Turner retired from the catering business in Silver Street, Durham City, he came to reside in a bungalow at Rainton Gate, West Rainton and he is still living here having reached the age of 99 years in September 1982. Reverting to the Cafe in Silver Street, there hung a most interesting panel painting in the main room, depicting Duck's happy rise to fortune. He had been cast out of the butchering trade by the butchers of Durham and he appears standing near to the river edge and bridge in an attitude of despondency and hovering in the air was a raven bearing in his beak a gold coin which according to tradition fell at his feet and he put this money to good use, making the nucleus on which he built a fortune. On the right of the painting is a view of the mansion in Silver Street and on the left the hospital at Lumley. Sir John Duck was responsible for founding and building the hospital and Almshouses in Great Lumley in the year 1635.

The Almshouses afforded accommodation for twelve poor widows, he endowed it with 40 pounds a year, which was equally divided amongst the inmates. In one corner of the quadrangle building stood a tiny Prayer Room where under John Duck's ruling a Church of England Minister was to pray with the inmates twice a day. The old bell that hung and rang to summon the widows to worship. Since the demolition of the building the bell

is now in safe keeping in Lumley Parish Church. Sir John Duck died without issue and was buried in St. Margaret's Churchyard, Crossgate, Durham on the 31st August 1691 and his wife is buried beside him.

I well remember as a very young boy in 1905 the old hall in the village was a striking and impressive stone building with its stone mullioned windows. One could imagine it had been a fine residence in its former days. The whole building when I first remember was let off in a number of tenements. One of the ground floor tenements was used as a general shop, occupied by an elderly gentleman named Chapman. His shop looked more like Dicken's old curiosity shop. It was dimly lit, an old hanging oil lamp and two or three candles lit up the interior.

When the hall was first built an archway of stone was attached to the last end of the building to the opposite side of the road, supporting tall iron gates. This was the entrance to the hall from the village, which also led in to the spacious gardens. Part of the garden walls still remain. So does the Hall Farm and the Gardener's Cottage now named "Oak Tree Cottage". This is rather a picturesque cottage now after extensive alterations and renovations that have taken place over the years. At the time of the hall being built the main entrance and drive to it from the Sunderland and Durham Highway was what we now know as the Hall Lane. This was their private road into the hall.

The road into the village from this highway at that time was through what was known as the "Slack's" which is now built up with modern and attractive bungalows, named "Sheen Close". There is still a public footpath past these bungalows which will take you through to join the Sunderland and Durham highway.

When I was a boy there was a farm house and outbuildings and two farm cottages at the village entrance to the "Slack's" where now stands two modern red brick houses named "Carbisdale" and "Fosca".

A very interesting family occupied Rainton Hall from 1691. Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Nicholson and their three daughters who came from Haswell Hall. Daughter Jane married Thomas, Earl of Strathmore, Ann married the Hon. Patrick Lyon, brother of the Earl, and Mary died a spinster in 1759. Jane who married the Earl of Strathmore was an ancestor of Elizabeth, our present Queen Mother.

As late as 1912 there were a number of families occupying the Rainton Hall tenements. An old Irishman named Harbottle lived alone in an upstairs tenement at the rear and east end of the hall and below him on the ground floor the local Salvation Army corps occupied two rooms which had been made into one to accommodate their worshippers. To gain access to Mr. Harbottle's tenement you had to climb an outside wooden staircase. You can imagine the noise and disturbance it caused the old gentleman when the Salvation Army held their rousing services. What with the banging of the big drum, the clanging of the tambourines and exuberant singing and hand clapping, it was more than Mr. Harbottle could endure, he would in his room above join in with banging on the fire blower, commonly known locally as a blazer, with a poker and the noise was deafening. In the end it came to a swift conclusion. The Salvation Army were holding their Harvest Festival Sunday services in September 1912 and on the Monday evening following, they had their sale of fruit and vegetables. The sale started with some rousing hymn singing. Mr. Harbottle was not idle, he had borrowed a drill and bored a hole through the wooden floor which was also the ceiling of the Salvation Army accommodation. Then he connected a hosepipe to the cold water tap which was behind his room door and led it to the hole. Next he turned on the cold water tap and we all had to run for it, grabbing hold of the oranges and apples and filling our pockets on the way out. The drummer with his big drum and the girls with their tambourines vacated the premises as quickly as they could after having a good soaking. That was the end of these premises being used as the meeting place of the Salvation Army Corps. They

immediately built a hall with corrugated sheeting outside and wood-panelling and a wood floor inside. It was erected behind the Greyhound Public House. The interior of their hall was reasonably comfortable. There was a small platform at the south east end with a reading desk and a small organ. A coal stove in the centre of the building to provide heat, there were wooden forms with back rests and the hall could seat about 60 people. Lighting was first provided by four hanging oil lamps. Electric lighting was installed when electricity was brought into the village in 1929. The Salvation Army hall was demolished in 1977 as there was no Corps serving the district.

The Rainton Hall was partly pulled down and converted into dwelling houses soon after the first World War and over the years many alterations have taken place which has brought the properties to their present standard.

Workingmen's Club and Public Houses in the Village.

When I was three my family moved from Dene Cottage to "Oak Tree House", a large stone house containing seven rooms. At the rear of Oak Tree House there was a yard with three old cottages occupied. It was known locally as "Tollentyne Yard". How it got this name I cannot tell unless it was the name of a previous owner and occupier. My family lived in "Oak Tree House" until the early part of 1906. We were forced to leave as the property had been purchased by the Workingmen's Club Association. It opened in 1906 as the Rainton Workingmen's Club making it possibly one of the oldest clubs in the area. Extensive alterations over the years have made it a very desirable building. The club is well supported and has served the district of West Rainton and surrounding villages well. It always surprised me, even from a very early age, that there were so many public houses in such a small village and however they all got a living. I shall start at the east end of the village in North Street. First of all there was the "Lord Seaham Inn". People who didn't frequent such

places would say "The Lord sees them in and the Devil sees them out". The Lord Seaham Inn was a real old village pub. It had never been modernised. It was demolished in 1938 and a fine double fronted house erected on the site, No. 4 Dene View.

Moving on through the village we come to "Garden House Inn" in South Street. This building is built on part of the site of Rainton Hall. The license was taken away from this public house round about 1930. It is now used as a dwelling house and still retains its name, "Garden House".

About 50 yards further on, situated near to and adjoining the public footpath was the "Bee Hive Inn" in the middle of a block of old property now demolished on the site cleared. Adjoining this site is the "Greyhound Inn" which still serves the village and is owned by Messrs. Vaux, the Brewers of Sunderland. About 1920 it was only a small village pub but extensions and alterations which took in the garden that adjoined the pub at the east end of the building brought it up to its present standard.

In North Street, on the opposite side of the road to where the "Bee Hive" stood was the "Bull and Dog" inn which ceased to be a public house in the 1950s. It has been made into an attractive dwelling house named "Northlands". I remember about 1905 there used to be a butcher's shop situated in the front garden of the Bull and Dog. The gable end of the butchers shop came to the end of the pavement and shop front faced up the village facing east. It was a single storey building.

The next public house was the "Brittania" which stood on the opposite side of the road to the present Leamside Junior mixed school. This public house was demolished and council houses built on the site in 1950.

We now turn right at the T-Junction to go down Station Road and make our way to Leamside and Pit House Lane. First we come to "Leamside Hotel" on the right hand side of the road, now a general dealer's shop. On the opposite side of the road near

the railway is the "Station Hotel" renamed the "Leamside" and is still in existence serving the public.

Walking over the Railway bridge on to the right hand bend in the road, looking over your left side you will see the beginning of Salters Lane. At the entrance of this lane stood the "Robin Hood Inn". This public house was demolished in 1911. On the right hand side of the road, opposite the old Leamside school and chapelry (now demolished), where now stand two modern stone built houses, there were two public houses adjoining each other. There was the "Pit Laddie" and the "Highland Laddie". One was demolished and the second one converted into two dwelling houses. Proceeding onwards we come to the "Three Horse Shoes Inn" at Pit House Lane. It is an attractive country pub, still serving the people and owned by the Newcastle Breweries. This public house was very old and small, it was pulled down in 1908 and rebuilt to its present standard, re-opening in March 1909.

Retracing our steps and walking back to Rainton Gate, if we turn right at this T-junction and as you approach the new dual carriageway, there on the left hand side of the road stood an old public house named the "Nag's Head" which was demolished in the 1930s.

We return to Rainton Gate junction, where stands on the corner a general dealer's shop owned and occupied at the time of writing by Mr. and Mrs. A. Flannigan. You will notice as you pass this dwelling there are the remains of the hinges built into the gable end, this was part of the old tollgate. Anyone passing through the tollgate to gain access through the Parkland and Cocken on to the old coach road, west of Cocken Ford, would have to pay a toll.

Just along from this general dealer's shop on the old Durham and Sunderland highway, stands back from the footpath an old village dwelling house, recently modernised with half round bay windows on the ground floor, which was once the

"Three Tuns", a coaching Inn. This inn could have been a few hundred years old. The last landlord of this old Inn was Mr. Arthur Proudlock. It closed as an Inn in the 1920s.

A few yards further on is the "Masons Arms" owned by Messrs. Vaux the Brewers which is still in existence.

Now I come to the last public house in the parish. "The Robin Inn" This Inn was situated on the West Rainton to Hetton Road. It adjoined the old colliery waggon way from the "Letch Alexandria Pit" that crossed the Hetton Road at this point and went on to Benbridge bank.

The Robin Inn was a well known public house and fairly large building. It had a smooth cemented surface gable end and a cement bay on ground level which was used as a hand ball alley, which attracted many notable hand ball players from the north such as Jackie Mordue, a noted professional footballer who played outside right for Sunderland F.C. before the First World War. Mordue was a handball player of distinction. There was much money gambled on handball matches in those days. This game seemed to go out of favour soon after, for I have never read or heard of handball played anywhere in the north since this public house lost its licence in the early 1920s. The Old Robin Inn was demolished a few years later.

In 1906 there were 16 public houses and one Workingmen's Club in the parish, now in 1982 there are 4 pubs left which includes the Greyhound, Leamside, Three Horse Shoes, and the Mason's Arms plus of course the Workingmen's Club. It certainly made one wonder how ever did 16 pubs exist in such a small village.

Before 1914 pubs were open all day and sometimes all night as well. Beer then was only three pence a pint (in old money) a glass of whisky, brandy or rum was only three pence. They charged you two pence for a large bottle of lemonade. A lemonade bottle had three different types of stoppers. There was

the screw cap, another was a cap held in position by a strong wire clip fastened round the neck of the glass bottle. The most fascinating glass bottle stopper was a glass marble. It was forced into position by machine pressure after the bottle had been filled with lemonade. To get the liquid out of the bottle you had to force the marble down into the neck of the bottle with your thumb and this released the pressure. Boys were always keen to get hold of these empty lemonade bottles which they would break and take out the glass marble to replenish their stock of marbles.

Cigarettes were cheap, you could buy a paper packet with five "Woodbine" cigarettes for 1 1/2 pence (old money of course).

In the early 1900's you saw more men drunk than you do today. In fact it is very rare seeing a person drunk walking through the village. I have heard it said by older people that the beer and spirits were much stronger in the early days than they are today. I am sorry I cannot comment on this subject.

It was not uncommon in the early 1900's for men, especially those who were self employed to spend two or three weeks away from home drinking and staying a few days at a public house and then on to another and so on. It could not have been the interior comforts of the country pubs that attracted these men, such comforts didn't exist. The furnishings of these public houses were very plain indeed. There were seats made of wood or cane with back rests, and hard wood chairs unupholstered. Sawdust covered the floors and three or four spittoons placed on the floor. On a cold winters night the publican saw there was always a good fire burning, of course coal was plentiful and cheap those days. These men must have been attracted to the pubs by their strong desire for intoxicating drinks and to spend some time with their associates.

What a difference between public houses 80 years ago and those of today. Brewers and private owners have gone to the extreme to make their pubs attractive with lavish fittings and

furnishings, fitted carpets, strip lighting, hygiene and central heating. Many of them now provide expensive meals.

In my early days very seldom did I see a woman drunk or drinking in a village pub. If they did frequent a pub they were looked upon by the villagers as low and undesirable type of person. In fact many landlords would refuse to serve a woman with beer or spirits. I have known many men who would not sit in a pub if there were women there.

I always remember when a small boy in the summer evenings with half a dozen of my pals, we would walk down through the village then through fields to the Leamside Hotel where we knew that a well known old farmer from the village would be drinking for hours and would leave his pony and tub trap, the pony fastened to a staple in the pub wall. We would undo the pony from the staple, the six of us would get into the tub trap and have a nice drive round Finchale and Lumley, bring the pony and tub trap back to the pub and fasten the pony to the staple again. The old farmer never knew his pony had had a drive around the district, he was too busy drinking. There wasn't much danger on the roads those days, there was no motor vehicle traffic.

When the old farmer came out of the pub to go home, more often than not he was very unstable on his legs and certainly not capable of driving anywhere, he would undo the pony from the staple and scramble into the trap and he would tell the pony to go home. The pony would find its way back to the farm without any further instructions or guidance from the farmer.

The Village Schools

Girls and Infant Schools

In 1905 I started my schooling in the Infants school which was accommodated in the same building as the Girls School. The National School for Girls and infants was founded by deed on

20th November 1861 and was dedicated to St. Godric. Mrs Lowthier was the first Headmistress of the Girls School and Miss Isles was in charge of the Infant school. There was accommodation for 125 pupils in the Girls school and 125 infants.

When I started in the infants school in 1905 Miss Thompson was the Mistress in charge. She was of short stature, very strict, she controlled the children with a thickish cane and used it rather frequently. She lodged with Mr James Turnbull who lived in "School House" opposite the school. I remember the infants section had one large room with a gallery at one end and one coal fire with a strong fire guard to heat the room, also a smaller room with a coal fire and the same type of fire guard. This was a cosy room and much warmer than the large room with the gallery. In 1869 Miss C. Christy was Headmistress of the Girls School and she was followed by Mrs Ridsdole as Headmistress some years later.

This Girls and Infants School was closed in 1927 and the pupils transferred to the new Leamside Junior Mixed School at the West end of the Village at the T-road junction to Rainton Gate and Leamside. The building was used for a few years as a Church Hall, and later the West Rainton Scouts used it as their headquarters. Over the years the building deteriorated and eventually it was demolished in the 1960's and the site cleared.

On this site was built the modern Rectory in 1975. The old Rectory on the east side of the Durham and Sunderland dual carriage way was sold owing to its unsuitability as a Rectory. The new Rectory is much more beneficial to the Rector and the Parishioners being situated so near to the Parish church.

The Boys School

The Marchioness of Londonderry, Frances Ann Vane Tempest was responsible for the building of the old Boys school in 1850, at a cost of approximately £700. It was built to give encouragement to the mining people to promote moral and

religious education. It was large enough to accommodate 260 boys from the age of seven to the time they left school at the age of 14. The playgrounds at the school were added in 1856.

A plaque over the entrance to the School has the following inscription "This edifice, erected in 1850 by Frances Anne Vane, Marchioness of Londonderry as an encouragement to the Colliers to promote the moral and religious education of their children, and as a lasting memorial of the interest she takes in their Welfare". She was also responsible for the costs of the books, maps and other stationery, and for the salaries of the teachers, and for all other expenses incurred. Each child was asked to pay 1d per week as an acknowledgement. It was designed originally for the education of both sexes and in 1865 the Londonderry school became a boys school and the girls were transferred to the national school for Girls and Infants in the Village near the Church. Before these schools were built, the Sunday School Movement taught children, one day a week (Sunday) reading, writing, arithmetic and religious doctrine. The rapid growth of the Sunday School movement had shown that there was a great need for a day school system nationally for children to attend every day, rather than on just one day a week.

In the early days of an organised school, the whole process was regulated by a system of rewards and punishments, and was seen as in itself as a course of moral training. The system was operative in large and small schools alike. The rewards may have consisted of 1/2d for the best boy of the week in class, another 1/2d or a medal for the best catechism of the day. Promotion to another class earned another 1/2d. Punishments could be given for a variety of reasons, including swearing, lying, quarrelling, talking, coming to school dirty or late, playing truant, telling tales, being disobedient or absent from Church.

The National Schools in Leamside and West Rainton presumably followed a similar pattern to that already mentioned, but unfortunately the log books of the school which would give an

interesting impression of the school life, cannot be found, so the only source of information is old Church records or the personal recollections of people in the villages who attended these schools.

From the time I started the infants school in 1905 till the time I left the boys school in 1914 to start full time employment, I can never remember any scholar in the Rainton Schools receiving any reward but they certainly received plenty of punishment, it never varied, it was always the same, a severe caning and I might add it was extremely painful.

The first Headmaster of the Boys school was Mr Lowthier. He was followed by Mr James Turnbull as Headmaster from 1869. Mr Turnbull lived in School House a very fine old dwelling dating back to 1662. This house is situated opposite the present new Rectory, previously the site of St Godric's Girls and Infants School. Mr James Turnbull was a very strict disciplinarian and to achieve this aim, he used a heavy cane. If a boy misbehaved, Mr Turnbull's favourite expression was "Come out boy and get a good yark". Yark was a local word meaning a "good thrashing," and he was always ready to do that. I'm afraid there wasn't much fun in being a pupil in those days. This School building was a solid type of building, built of hewn stone. The large room was the whole length of the building. It was made into two large class rooms, partitioned with sliding glass and wood panels that fold and ran on rollers. There was another class room at the rear of the building, slightly smaller than one of the partitioned class rooms.

The classrooms were heated by large Coal fires. There were two fire places in the West end of the partitioned classroom and one fire place in each of the other two. A large strong metal fire guard in front of each fire place was fixed to protect the scholars coming into contact with the open fire. You can imagine how cold it was in those classrooms, especially during the winter months. A large portion of heat from the coal fire went up the chimney, the ceilings were extremely high, reaching up as far as the roof timbers and the heat from the fires had little effect at floor level. It

wasn't unusual during the winter months to have ink in the inkwells frozen solid. At times it was so cold boys had difficulty holding a pen or pencil in their fingers. Boys who walked a good distance to school would bring their sandwiches and bottles of tea for their lunch. They would place their bottles of tea on the fire hearth inside the large fireguard to keep the tea warm.

It was a little easier for the teachers to keep warm, they kept as close to fire as possible. The only time the boys could get near to the fireguard to get warmed was during lunch time.

Towards the end of Mr James Turnbull's reign as Headmaster, his health was deteriorating. He was crippled with arthritis and had great difficulty in walking. Four boys from the school at a time took their turn to call at School House and collect Mr Turnbull and place him in his basket chair which had two large wheels at the side and a small wheel at the front with a handle for the rider to steer the chair. He was continually issuing instructions to the boys on how to negotiate the bends and slopes in the road from his home to the school. This went on for a few months until one day Mr Turnbull had had a busy morning "Yarking" the boys for various reasons. The four boys who were detailed to wheel their Master back home for his lunch had come under the severity of the cane that morning and they decided to get their own back. Placing him in the wheeled basket chair they moved off steadily, then started to run with him as fast as they could, Mr Turnbull calling out "Steady, boys, steady". The more he called out the faster they went until they came to a steepish slope in the road, near the Workingmen's Club, let it go and left the chair to career on down the hill. Mr Turnbull trying frantically to steer the chair round the bend, couldn't make it and finally the chair capsized and there was Mr Turnbull in the gutter. Some men arrived, rescued him and carried him to his home where he remained in bed for three weeks. That was the end of schoolboys taking their Master to and from School. They employed a man instead.

There was Joseph Peebles, Assistant Master for a number of years, he was a tubby man, a good drinker and often in the afternoon you could smell that he had been drinking in the village pub during lunch time. He was a cruel man, with a cruel method of giving out punishment to the boys. He used to put the palm of his hand under your jaw and bang your head off the wall. In 1910 he lifted a boy named Rex Walby off the floor holding him by the ears. One of his ears was partly torn away from his face, the teachers were unable to stop the bleeding and he was rushed to Durham hospital to have it attended to. There was pandemonium let loose at school. Rex Walby's father was the village family butcher, he came to school and threatened to prosecute the teacher. However, he took his son away from the school and sent him to a private school. Mr Joe Peebles was expelled forthwith and was never permitted to teach in any school again. He obtained work in the clerical section at Houghton Colliery where he remained until his retirement.

After the death of Mr James Turnbull on the 3rd March 1905 aged 63, his son William was appointed Headmaster. The school ran on similar lines as it had done over the years. After a few years Mr William Turnbull, the headmaster left the village and took a school appointment in North Yorkshire.

The next Headmaster was Mr. Noel Collypriest a man over 6 feet tall. I can only describe this man as a terror, worse than his predecessors. He came to the school in 1911. He used to take his jacket off to give him more freedom of movement so he could bring the cane down with terrific force. It was common for a boy after receiving the cane going to his seat with bruised fingers and congealed blood on the joints of his fingers. He would cane a boy on the smallest pretext. If he met you out of school and you didn't touch your cap and say "Sir" you got it next day. You couldn't get out of his way. He was a regular attender at the Church Services and if he saw a choir boy whispering to the boy sitting next to him, or if he saw any boys in the congregation talking to each

other, they would receive the cane the next day. I am sure if he had been teaching today, he would have been prosecuted for cruelty, in fact he would not have been permitted to teach in any school. He was greatly interested in good singing, music and concert work and produced some very fine concerts, but that's about all.

He had favourites and woe betide you if he didn't like you. I am sure every time he looked at me, he thought I was something evil. He introduced new ideas in the school. One idea was school prefects, this didn't work too well. The prefects were given a badge of authority and if they saw a boy doing something he ought not to be doing, they reported him to the teacher or master. Boys would bribe prefects with sweets and the like so they would not be reported. It got to the point of being a type of blackmail. No wonder boys prayed for the day when they were 14 and could leave. There was very little interest in learning, in any case most of the boys only wanted to follow their fathers and brothers into the coal mines. The nine years I spent in the village schools, I can never remember any boy being entered for the scholarship exams, which if they passed, entitled them to a place at Houghton-le-Spring or Durham Grammar Schools.

Mr Collypriest left the area soon after World War I and took a Headship in Nottingham. He was followed by Mr William Gilliland who was also Choir Master and organist at the Parish Church for a few years. Mr Gilliland was Headmaster at St. Oswalds School, South Street, Durham City before he took his appointment as Headmaster at the boys Londonderry School. He was a very fine gentleman and well respected in the village, and during his headship there was a different and happier atmosphere in the school. Mr Frank Orr followed Mr. Gilliland.

Eventually the old school closed in 1927 and the boys were transferred to the new Leamside Junior Mixed County School at the west end of the village. The new school was described as "heaven" compared with the old ones. The school was centrally

heated, with indoor toilets and all modern facilities.

Since the Londonderry Boys School finished as a school, the church used it as the Church Hall for a few years. The building was sold a few years ago and is now used as an office and stores.

Leamside Mixed School

This school opened about 1865 and completed the schools provided for the education of the children in the village. Again, this school was of the National System depending upon the Church of England for support. It was a school through the week and a chapelry for religious services on Sundays.

Mr Malcolm McCullough was the Headmaster of this School. He was a man of small stature, very alert and very strict. It was generally understood that the standard of education at this school was high. I remember all the boys attending Leamside School had to wear a white collar, these were about 4 inches in depth fastened with a stud attached to the front of the boys shirt neck. They were rather brittle and if the master used the cane and caught the white collar with the cane, it would split, especially the eye hole where the stud held the two ends together. The Headmaster had many parents to see him complaining about the cost of replacing the broken collars.

After the death of Mr. McCullough in 1922 Mr Herbert Bullock replaced him. Finally, the Leamside Mixed School finished as a school the same as the other two schools in the village in 1927. Mr Herbert Bullock was the first Headmaster at the New School.

The religious services on the Sunday continued until May 1948 when I took the last evensong. The building was used as a small Engineering Shop for a few years. The building was demolished in 1979 and two modern stonebuilt houses erected in 1981.

The New West Rainton Infant School

In 1968 there was a large farm house, farm buildings and stackyard named "High Blue House Farm" situated at the west end of North Street adjoining the Adventure lane that led to the Adventure Colliery. The owner of the farm Mr Fred Handley died in 1968 and his widow sold the farm house and buildings to Durham County in 1970. The Council cleared the large site including a garth adjoining the buildings and built a very modern and attractive Infants School. Everything has been done to make this school an enjoyable and pleasant building to educate the small children. This left the Leamside School with Juniors only.

The West Rainton County Infants School was officially opened on Thursday 27th June 1974 by County Councillor D. Thornton J.P. The children had been in residence from 3rd December 1973.

It is interesting to note that when the old schools were first opened, the scholars had to pay one penny or two pence per week. In 1881 the Mundella Act was passed which made all schooling free. In 1891 parents were given the right to demand free education for their children with the results that the majority of schools became free. It is not sure whether this Act just referred to "Board Schools" and not to schools depending on Church of England support. I do know that school money was paid in the Rainton Schools up to 1892 as I had relatives and friends who paid it. When I started school in 1905 there was no charge, it was free education.

Churches in the Village

The Church of England and Methodism

The social life of the village centred around the church and chapels. I suppose one can say that the village pubs come under this category. There were plenty of men who never looked inside

a church or chapel, apart from their christening, marriage, or attending a funeral. The same applies today, but in the early 1900's they spent most of their leisure time at a pub of their choice, enjoying their various sports and drinking. Of course the licensing laws and opening times were different then.

To try and compare the social life of today from that of 1900 is almost impossible as the differences are enormous. You have got to realise there was neither wireless nor television and the distance of travel was greatly restricted in those days. To take a journey to other parts of the county to seek mutual converse was restricted owing to the lack of money. Therefore, to obtain any social life at all you have to create and unite in your own village and the more you put into life, the more you got out of it, and the church and chapels were the ideal places to give you this opportunity.

The first knowledge of any important religious buildings in the village of West Rainton stood on the present site of the Parish Church. It was a 12th century chapel with chantry dedicated to the Virgin Mary. The convent obtained many successive grants of land after Bishop Bainbrigg of Durham Cathedral gave a grant of free warren to Prior Thomas in 1508. This was after the suppression of the monastic institutions when they were granted to the Cathedral.

After the demolition of this ancient building, the stones were used in different buildings such as farm houses and outbuildings in the village which belonged to the Dean and Chapter of Durham and the Ecclesiastical Commissioners.

Nothing seems to have been built on this site until the 28th August 1828 with the consecration of a new chapel of ease from and belonging to Houghton Parish Church. I have always understood that this chapel of Ease was a wooden erection but I cannot be absolutely sure about this. We do know that the chapel had a gallery at the west end of the building. The chapel also possessed a barrel-organ.

The Parish Church

The Parish Church dedicated to St. Mary the Virgin is a fine building in the French Gothic style erected in 1864. The church consists of Nave, North and South Aisles and chancel. The total cost of the erection of the church was £6,000. The tower with spire which is at the North West Angle of the building and is 130 feet in height was added to the church in 1877 and was the gift of Sir George Elliott in memory of his daughter.

The chancel contains a beautiful though somewhat highly coloured examples of Mosaic work by the Italian Salvati, erected to the memory of the Revd. R. H. Poole, a former Rector. The centre piece represents our Lord in glory with an angel in adoration on either side. The Eastern Orthodox churches prefer the idea of the risen Lord. West Rainton Parish Church is one of the few churches in the area which have "Christ in glory" in the altar part of the church, normally it is the suffering Crucifixion scene which is depicted.

The nave as well as the chancel is remarkably lofty, and the roof of high pitch by which means a clerestory of full height is obtained. The aisles are divided from the nave by plain massive, pointed arches supported upon cylindrical pillars with square capitals. The east and west windows are covered with stained glass, also the south window of the chancel. The church stands well back from the road, within a large burial ground which is now practically full. The church will seat 400. The living is a Rectory in the gift of the Bishop of Durham.

I joined St. Mary's church choir as a chorister in 1907. For a number of years the choir boys were paid a handsome sum of 4 old pence a week on condition you didn't miss any services or choir practices, if you did then deductions were made. When I first joined the choir, the organ was in an alcove in the chancel opposite to the position of the present organ. Miss Scorer of Leamside was the first church organist I can remember, her parents were farmers.

I always felt that the church interior on dark nights was warm and inviting with its oil lamps on the pillars and a chandelier complete with lighted candles in the centre of the choir stalls in the chancel. The chandelier was held by a chain that could be let down so the candles could be lit then pulled up to the requisite height. Before I leave the interior of the church, I want to refer to a tablet in the north wall of the tower inscribed with the date and name of the donor of the tower and spire. It is of special interest because this piece of granite was brought from the Great Pyramid at Giza, by Sir George Elliott who was financial advisor to Ismail Pasha, Khedive of Egypt.

Sir George Elliott was a remarkable person, he lived a few years in the hall at West Rainton. He was born at Gateshead on the 18th March 1815 a son of a miner, started work down a coal mine as a "trapper boy" at Whitfield Pit, Penshaw. In 1849 he became an apprenticed Mining Engineer, and for a number of years he was Chief Agent for the Londonderry collieries. He became a member of Parliament for North Durham Division on the 26th November 1868 to the 28th June 1892. He was created a Baron on the 15th May 1874. He was the inspiration and one of the founders in the formation of the large Powell Duffryn Coal Company. One of the firms Sir George was associated with laid the first Atlantic Cable to America.

The parish church services were very well attended when I was a boy. Mr John Gibbney was Verger and Sexton. For many years the Gibbney family were great workers for the church. It was not uncommon for the Gibbney family to strip their home of every chair and they would go round their friends living near the church and borrow more chairs and forms to seat some of the worshippers who couldn't get a seat as they would all be taken and remember the church could seat at least 400. Special services such as a Harvest Festival, Christmas, Easter and Whitsunday, worshippers would arrive an hour before the service started to obtain a seat. The parish church was alive and very active and they always had a well balanced choir of men and boys and later

were supported by young ladies. There was a large Mothers Union and Girls Friendly Society. All that has changed, school boys are not interested now in joining and church choir and the congregation has dwindled to a mere twenty regular church goers. This puts a terrible strain in church finances and they have great difficulty in finding the money to heat such a large building and to pay for repairs, both very costly items. I believe there are a number of reasons for the decline in church attendances, one is that it is easy for people to travel now, if they haven't got their own car they can go long distances by road transport and on a Sunday they take advantage of the transport facilities and enjoy their outings rather than stay at home and go to a church service. Of course they expect the church to be available for their children's baptism, weddings and funerals.

It is not only the church of England that has changed this way, but the Methodist chapels likewise. There were three Methodist Chapels in the village in the early 1900's and the three were very well attended, now only one remains and only a small number attend the services. There was an active Salvation Army Corps in the village a few years ago but they had to close the Corps down owing to the lack of support. There was a Gospel Hall which functioned well for some years. Mr Charles Hartis kept it going for a long time until about 5 years ago then it was closed as they were unable to get support and their attendances dropped considerably so they had no other alternative. So religious worship in the village is down to a minimum. What a change of attitude over a period of 80 years.

The Rectors of St. Mary's West Rainton from 1846

After the parish was constituted a separate and district community, the Chapel of Ease, built in 1825 and belonging to Houghton church, was made the parish church in 1846 and the first rector was Revd. Joseph Tiffen who stayed from March 1846 to 1858. The Revd. R.H. Poole was the first of the new church

building erected in 1864. He was much involved in its erection. He was Rector from 1859 to 1875.

The Revd. G.A. Ormesby was the next Rector from 1875 to 1885, later he became the Bishop of Honduras.

Then followed the Revd. G.D. Copeland, Rector from 1885 to 1894. Then came the Revd. R.B. Thompson, Rector from 1894 to 1906. I remember this Rector very well. He was a kind old gentleman, with failing eyesight. After his death, he was buried just opposite the belfry door. So far he is the only Rector who passed away whilst serving as Rector of West Rainton and he is the only one buried in the church yard. We had the Revd. S. Parkinson, a tall and smart gentleman who was Rector during the first World War and held the living from 1906 to 1919.

The Revd. F.E.P. Rawlins, a bachelor, came next, he was a man of many excellent qualities. He possessed a wonderful memory. He was rather abrupt in his manner and of course upset many people so much that he created some enemies. He could preach for half an hour without a note. He had a wonderful Bible class of between 30 and 40 young men who enjoyed being with him and looked forward to their Bible class and he enjoyed their company. I'm afraid it was a different story with females, for he had little time for the ladies. He resigned his living owing to ill health. He was Rector from 1919 to 1928. The Rev. R.T. Heselton followed him, he was a different type of Rector from his predecessor. Mr Heselton was very well liked and drew many parishioners around him. He was very successful in raising a good deal of money for the restoration and repairs of the church and was Rector from 1928 to 1931. Then followed the Revd. W. James from 1932 to 1937. Mr James was a Durham resident and an Accountant with the Durham County Council previous to him entering the Ministry.

The Revd. C.S. Nye was appointed Rector from 1937 to 1941. He was also Director of Religious Education for the Diocese. He was married in his parish church during his

incumbency. His Curate Rev. H. Thornton was his best man. I mention this because I cannot remember a more popular Curate than the Revd. Thornton. He was loved by all, even those who didn't belong to the Parish church.

The Revd. E.H. Eaton, a bachelor was Rector from 1942 to 1951. Unfortunately, he had a mental breakdown and had to retire from the living.

The Revd. E. Bailey was Rector from 1953 to 1958. He was followed by the Revd. R.A. Haysom from 1959 to 1966, who was the first Rector to hold the dual appointment of Rector of St. Mary's church, West Rainton and Vicar of St. Cuthberts of East Rainton parish.

Our present Rector is the Revd. R.L. Welsh. He was first inducted in 1966 as Priest in charge and made Rector in 1967 also Vicar of St. Cuthberts, East Rainton. The Revd. Welsh was the first Rector to occupy the new rectory, built on the site where once stood the National School for Girls, St. Godrics in 1975.

Methodism

The Methodist Society owed its early existence in the villages of East and West Rainton to the influence and preaching of John Wesley. He preached to the miners of West Rainton on the Monday 6th April 1747 and again fourteen days later on Monday 20th April.

Of the two villages, East Rainton was the first to form a Methodist Society which members from West Rainton joined and it was not until the year 1783 that they separated. From the time the Methodist Society was formed for many years they held their religious services, Prayer Meetings and Bible reading classes in their members homes until they were in a position to build a chapel to accommodate their members.

The first one to be built in West Rainton was the Wesleyan Chapel in Hall Lane in 1822. It was rebuilt by the Marquis of

Londonderry in 1890. I remember when this chapel with its gallery was very active and after the first World War their choir gave many musical religious concerts in their chapel. The last service to be held in this chapel was in July 1956, when it was closed through lack of support. The building is now used as a storage for books, stationery etc for W.H. Smith and Son, the publishers.

The next chapel to be built was the Primitive Methodist Chapel in Station Road, Leamside. It was built in 1867. The Primitive Methodists were a break away group from the Wesleyan's. This chapel closed for services in September 1973. It was closed for the same reasons as the Wesleyans. The building has just been sold to the Scouts Association and it will be the headquarters for the 14th Durham West Rainton Scouts and Cubs Scouts and the West Rainton Girl Guides will use the same building.

The only remaining chapel that is used for services is the Rainton Gate Methodist chapel built in 1874. The Trust Records state that the first Trust was formed by Revd. Edwin Wright on the 30th December 1874. The site was acquired on lease from the Marquis of Londonderry by deeds dated December 30th 1874 for 99 years at a yearly rental of two shillings and sixpence (old money). A chapel was to be erected at a cost of £450 plus £27 spent on an organ.

The three Methodist chapels were very active when I was a boy, their ideals were similar to religious ideals of the Church of England, but their services were much more simple. There were no Psalms or Canticles sung, the prayers were impromptu sometimes more like a sermon. I have known it to take fifteen to twenty minutes to say them. The service would start with a rousing hymn, then the impromptu prayers, then another hymn, Bible readings, then notices followed, then another hymn, the sermon then the closing hymn. Often the person taking the Service would read out aloud the whole hymn before the

congregation sang it. Most of their services were taken by local preachers, because a Methodist Minister had a number of chapels in his charge and it was only occasionally he could take a Service at each of his chapels.

Three or four times a year each chapel would hold what they called a Rally Service. A special preacher would be engaged to take the service and members of neighbouring chapels would be requested to attend. These services were very well attended. Solos were sung, Hymns of a rousing nature were chosen and the preacher would be well known for his oratory and usually they were very lively and enjoyable services.

Every June the chapels held their children's anniversary services and these lasted for two Sundays. At the services children would recite small portions of scripture and religious poems, the whole service centred round the children. On both Sunday mornings the children with their Sunday School teachers and some of their elders would parade around the village singing hymns and sacred sonnets which the children had learned. They would make a door to door collection and the money received would be used to pay for the children having a days outing at a seaside resort.

In my very young days the members attending Rainton Gate chapel were referred to as Ranters. They were boisterous preachers, very strict against any form of drinking or the use of alcohol even for medicinal purposes. They strongly objected to any form of gambling or lottery. They were keen on meeting people in the street and handing them religious tracts to read.

The three chapels in the village each ran their Faith Teas which were always very popular and well supported. These Faith Teas had a literal meaning, the organisers had faith in their members to provide sufficient choice foods to give those who were attending an enjoyable meal. I have attended a number of their Faith Teas and I can tell you the meal was always excellent. Everything on the tables had been given by their members. There

were all sorts of home made cakes, fruit tarts, savoury pies, sausage rolls, cooked ham and tongue with beetroot, pickles and the like. After the meal, the tables would be cleared and folded away. Harmless games would be played, various ones would sing, play an instrument, give recitations and monologues. You could always rely on having a jolly good night for the small sum of one shilling and sixpence to two shillings (old money).

All this has now gone and what a great pity. There were strong friendships made and brought together members of the various religious bodies closer together which was beneficial for the whole community

The Roman Catholics in the village were very small in numbers. I don't think there were more than a dozen families in the early 1900s, living at West Rainton. The Catholics were not so fortunate as the other denominations for they had to walk 2 1/2 miles to Houghton Roman Catholic church for religious worship and their children had to walk the same distance to their school.

Funerals and Burial Grounds.

The funeral of a person killed in the coal mine, or dying through injuries received in the mine was rather a spectacular affair. The funeral procession would be led by the Colliery Band and Lodge Banner draped with black silk ribbon, the band usually played the Dead March in Saul, or Chopin's Funeral March as the procession approached the church. The Colliery band would leave the village after the funeral service at the graveside, playing a joyful tune. If a Colliery had not a Band and Banner, they usually borrowed from a neighbouring Colliery which had kept up this custom. This type of funeral usually drew a large number of people to the funeral service and remembering of course they were all burials either in the churchyards or cemetery. Cremation especially in the villages didn't become popular until round about the 1950s.

The people of the village had an old and strange custom of

notifying and inviting you to attend a funeral of a person who had passed away in the village. The bereaved family would have men with whom they were closely associated with going from door to door in the village informing the people that such a person had passed away and their funeral had been arranged to take place at such a time and place. The cortege would leave the home at a certain time and they would bid you to attend and those who were closely associated with the bereaved family would be requested after the funeral to call at the home of the deceased and to partake in refreshment. Some people were keen to take advantage of the request, knowing they would get a good meal and a drink if they went. A good meal was often provided at the majority of funerals. the meal generally was cooked ham, tongue, pease pudding, different types of pickles, beetroot, brown and white bread, scones, sandwich cakes, cream cakes and tea. They couldn't sit every one down at once, for a start the houses were not big enough to accommodate them all at once, so they sat them down in relays, the first sitting down would be those people who were related to the deceased.

Those men who were employed informing the people of the funeral arrangements were properly clothed to fit the occasion wearing black suits and black ties and were known as "Bidders" and the custom was known as "Bidding". The undertakers also advertised the funerals in the local press and displaying a sheet of special paper, edged with black in shop windows giving particulars of the funeral. One cannot say that a funeral is a pleasant sight, but there was one type of funeral that in my opinion was very upsetting. If a person had committed suicide, the coffin was not taken into the church for any part of the service, but taken straight to a special part of the church set aside for this purpose. The body was placed in a black coffin with no trimmings whatsoever, and was brought to the churchyard in a cart shaped like a coffin and drawn by one horse.

The Beamish Open Museum has a replica of this cart, a gruesome object. When the family hadn't the money to bury their

dead, they had to be buried by the Parish. The body was placed in a similar black box and brought to the church in the black coffin shaped cart. The only difference was the coffin was taken into the church for the funeral service. Thank goodness this gruesome custom ceased.

Before the motor vehicle took the place of the horse driven hearse, Undertakers who specialised in this type of service took great pride in turning the horses and carriages out with all the trimmings and black ostrich feathers on the hearse and heads of the horses. Messrs George Graham of Fence Houses were noted for their turn out. They bought special horses from Belgium, they were all black and the whole team looked very smart indeed. Four of these black horses were used to pull the hearse and two of these horses pulled each mourners coach.

The old church yard provided a Burial Ground for the parish for over 100 years, when it was brought to the notice of the Parish Council that burial space in the church yard was coming to an end and time was short when only reinterment would be taking place.

The situation was discussed at a Parish Council Meeting and at their Annual Parish Meeting on the 15th March 1938 a scheme was submitted and accepted by the Council. Messrs F. Fennell, Architects of Chester-le-Street were given the work of preparing plans for layout of the land and buildings and the purchase of the land and conveyance. The Parish Council obtained 100% grant from the Commissioners who had deemed the district as a special area for such a grant and the whole scheme was paid for by the Commissioners. The purchase of the land and conveyance cost £250 and the Architects fees for the plans and their supervisions of the whole scheme that was carried out was £1,129 and 2 shillings. The new Burial Ground covered an area of one acre and another two acres adjoining for extension when required.

The new Burial Ground was consecrated by the Bishop of Durham (Bishop Williams) in 1940 during the incumbency of the Revd. C.S. Nye, Rector of the Parish. The first burial in the new

ground was William Nelson Peebles aged 21 of The Crescent, Leamside on the 6th February 1941.

There are still a number of people who prefer burial to cremation. Now the local authority have discovered that the number of burial spaces in the new burial ground are a very small number and to get more grave spaces the Parish Council has decided to take away the present frontage of the Cemetery and rebuild the entrance close to the road and this would provide grave spaces that could ease the problem for a few years. This to me is a great pity, for the present entry to the cemetery is neat and a fitting approach to this resting place. What I cannot understand is the local authorities permitting private housing development on the land adjoining the cemetery which I always understood was to be reserved for the extension of the burial ground when required. I was chairman of the Parish Council when the cemetery scheme was first mentioned and I was the first chairman of the Burial Board.

Within a few years, even taking into consideration the scheme to extend the burial space at the present cemetery by taking in the entrance ground one wonders where the next land will be obtained to provide more burial space for those villagers who prefer burial to cremation. Where can you find suitable land and to be so near to the Parish Church like the present cemetery which is situated opposite the old church yard across the old Sunderland and Durham road and only a two minutes walk from the church?

Ways and Conditions of Life

Sports and Pastimes

Many publicans and their regular customers promoted their sports days and introduced various attractions to draw men into their pubs. One attraction which was frowned upon by many people was Rabbit Coursing. Thank goodness this cruel sport was

outlawed by the Government some years ago. Wild rabbits were caught alive, put in crates and dispatched to the various coursings. These rabbits were caught alive in open country of Yorkshire, Cumberland or Northumberland where they were plentiful. The rabbits were liberated from the crate one at a time and were set down so many yards away from the point where men held their rabbit dogs, which were whippets. These dogs would be released and the chase was on. The poor rabbit was at a great disadvantage, having been kept in a crate possibly for some hours, released on to strange territory and no possible chance of escape. The chase was a very one sided affair.

The whippet dog was very swift and agile, all the characteristics of the Greyhound, they were actually miniature Greyhounds. Hundreds of pounds at times were gambled at these coursings. They were held in a grass field as near as possible to the public house where the publican was sponsoring the coursing. There was one particular publican in the village who often had to apologise to the dog owners because the rabbits had not arrived. Many of the gamblers and dog owners got wise to the fact in the end that the publican had never intended to order the rabbits, he was more concerned in getting the men into his pub and spend their money on the drink that he provided.

In many parts of the country, Whippet racing is still a popular sport. Instead of live rabbits used for the whippet to chase, the dogs run a straight course, attracted by a mechanical device that pulls a wire attached to the end of it is a rabbits skin or a cloth and the whippets are trained to give chase.

A game that was very popular in the early 1900's and often sponsored by the publicans was "Quoits". The quoit was a flattish iron ring with a bevelled angle, sloped along the outside edge and pitched at a pin or hob so as to encircle the iron pin or hob. The distance between the two hobs was 30 feet. There was great skill attached to this game, it was played usually in a grass field and watched by a large number of people who gambled heavy on their

favourite thrower of the ring. It was not out of the ordinary for a thrower to play for £100 a game. A lot of money those days. The winner was the thrower who was first to get 21 points. There were some very good quoit players in the village, such as the late George Rain and Topper Burdess.

There has always been keen competition at the Annual Flower and Vegetable shows in the Workingmen's Clubs and public houses, organised by the Publicans and their patrons and in the Workingmen's Clubs, by the Steward and Committees. The shows are still very popular. There is one vegetable more important to the grower than any other in the North of England and that is the Pot Leek. The growers of this vegetable have over years of experience produced leeks to enormous sizes. Only the white of the leek is measured, the length is taken from the bottom up to the white part joins the leaves and the circumference of the leek as large as they can grow them.

Both the Workingmen's Clubs and public houses have their own Leek Clubs. Those members who are interested make contributions during the year and the money is used to purchase good household prizes for the winners and runner ups of the various sections of the show in which they are exhibiting.

Leek growers are very secretive as to the method or what they put into their leek trench to make them grow. The first important point is to get a young leek plant from a parent plant that has produced large leeks and won a good Leek Show. I have heard of men paying as much as £50 for a good plant hoping that it will grow and develop into a super leek that can win a good Leek Show. After the show the majority of prize winning leeks are taken back by the owners and are placed in the trench again until it has produced a flower head, then the flower is removed from the plant and are kept until the seeds are dried off and ripe, the young seed is sown again and the procedure starts all over again.

The indoor game of Dominoes has figured prominently over the years and is still widely played in Clubs and public houses. Domino Handicaps are often arranged between other clubs and pubs and they attract many keen domino players.

Darts has come into prominence over the past 25 years. Many public houses and clubs have their own dart teams who compete with other teams in Dart Leagues throughout the county. It is now an international game and international players compete for very high stakes. Television has brought the game into the homes of ordinary people and it has become very popular.

Workingmen's Clubs are different in many ways from the ordinary public house. You cannot just walk into a Workingmen's Club and buy a drink as you normally do in a public house. You must become a fully paid up member of the club and possess a membership card.

Since the inception of the Workingmen's Clubs they have run their Pigeon Clubs. These have been well supported by their members who bring their racing pigeons to the club which acts as a centre for collection. The birds are transported by specially built motor vans and taken to the appointed place for release to various parts of the country even across the channel to France and Belgium for their long distance races. This is a sport that requires men who are skillful in breeding the right type of pigeon, special feeding of these birds and training.

The indoor game of Snooker is a very popular sport - Workingmen's Clubs arrange handicap games with neighbouring clubs in the area. It is a game that requires great skill. There are a number of good amateur snooker players in the area. The television has brought this popular game into ordinary peoples homes and the professional snooker players in the international games have brought much enjoyment to television viewers. Clubs often pay large sums of money to professional snooker players to give exhibition games.

Over the years Clubs and public houses have introduced many competitive games to try and interest their members. An old indoor game is Shove Half-Penny. Also the game of Skittles. They have sponsored and run numerous amateur Local Football clubs and all these games tend to draw more men into their licenced premises. Of course their main object is to get the members in to drink the beverages provided by the Brewers.

I still read my Sunderland Football Echo on a Saturday night, to find out how my favourite football team (Sunderland) have played. The first time this paper was published was on Saturday 7th September 1907 and it is still going strong.

Conditions of Poverty

My first memories of the Village almost 80 years ago was different altogether to what it is today, the differences are enormous. In the early 1900s it was very seldom the manual worker including the coal miner took a holiday. They got single days and those days were associated with the Church of England's festivals such as Christmas Day, Good Friday, Easter Monday and Whit Monday. The August Bank holiday (The first Monday in the month) was first introduced and given to the coal miner in 1903. New Years day as long as I can remember has been recognised as a general holiday in the North East and of course Scotland. It would be very difficult for the ordinary working man to afford a holiday in those days. It was not only the cost of a holiday, but they would lose their wages for the days they were off work. Remember there was no holiday pay and wages were extremely low. If an adult had 23 shillings a week (in old money) it was looked upon as a reasonable wage. Agricultural workers wages were 18 shillings a week, but they would probably have a free rented cottage. Some of the farmers were a little more generous than others. The farmer may have given them permission to keep a few hens or possibly a pig for their private use, they would also receive a supply of fresh milk daily. The cottage that the hind

occupied free was usually a tied cottage which meant that the cottage went with the job and if you left your job, then you would have to vacate the cottage. It is only in the last five years that the Government has stopped this tied cottage arrangement between the farmer and his worker. It was a situation that could be exploited by the farmer.

There was a fair amount of poverty in those days. It was quite common seeing children coming to school without footwear. Difficulties existed in homes where there were large families and only one bread winner in the home, or most especially if a father of a home spent part of his small wages on drink or gambling, then you could expect the children to suffer. Illness in the home caused problems and hardship. If the father of a family was ill and unable to follow his employment, he could apply to the parish for Parish Relief and would receive a very small amount, just sufficient probably to keep off starvation. The same situation existed if a man was injured at work, for at that time there was no such thing as compensation. If these circumstances existed, the mother would take in peoples washing or do some domestic work for a few shillings a week even to working in the fields for a farmer for one shilling per day. Widows with a family had the same problems. There were hard times for many. Numerous acts of kindness by neighbours were performed every day. It was a case of the poor helping the poor. There was a closer association between families, more concern for the other person, more good neighbourliness than we experience in our affluent society today.

Girls at School from an early age were taught to sew and knit, they would help their mothers and older sisters to alter clothes that been given to them by their friends and neighbours whose children had outgrown their clothes, or they would make dresses and underclothes from pieces of cloth material that had been given to them. Those families who had financial difficulties were helped by their friends in all sorts of ways. Yet in those hard times there were a few families who would save sufficient money

from their meagre wages to purchase their own cottage. The price of a small cottage would range around £40 to £60. One method of saving was to join the Co-operative Society. They received dividends on their purchases at the Co-op and would leave the dividend in the society for a number of years until it had accumulated to a sizeable amount before withdrawing it.

Food

To try and compare the price of food say in 1905 with prices today would be impossible. Here are some of the food prices in those days (old money of course) :

milk	one penny per gill, 1.5 pence a pint.
can of old milk for cooking	one penny.
leg of lamb	4 shillings.
small joint of beef	one shilling and sixpence.

You could purchase two pennyworth of liver, two pence for bones to make broth, A 5lb of Picnic Ham for two shillings and sixpence, flour at sixpence a stone. A 7lb stone jar of Jam cost one shilling, bacon sixpence a lb, a one lb bag of Sugar one penny. You could go to a Fish and Chip shop and ask for a fish and a pennyworth of chips for 3 pence.

Women from Sunderland and Cullercoats would come around the villages each week, carrying large baskets on their heads selling large fresh crabs, three pence each. Hens eggs were very cheap, I have known them to be sold, three pence a dozen. You could buy a pair of boots for five shillings and a suit of clothes from £1 to 25 shillings.

One never bought bread, teacakes or fancy cakes. The women did all their own baking at home. Brown and white bread, teacakes, spiced loaves and various types of cakes.

I remember my mother used to buy her flour by the sackful. We had a large family and she would bake 40 loaves, flat oven cakes which were locally known as stotty cakes, and teacakes at a time. All biscuits were bought by the lb, loose. There was no wrapping up of biscuits in a packet like they are today and having difficulty in opening them.

Girdle cakes were very popular, they were known locally as "Ned Cakes". These were flat cakes, usually with currants in. The dough was rolled out about 1/2 inch thick and cut into round pieces about 2 inches in diameter, laid on to a flat metal plate, called a girdle which was placed on the open fire. When you had freshly baked teacakes you ate them without butter spread on them.

If you had butter, very thinly spread on your bread or stotty cake, you wouldn't have jam on as well, and if you had jam on either you wouldn't have butter.

We ate a lot of beef dripping and bread. When the family had a joint of beef roasted, there was always plenty of dripping saved. This was a luxury - children much preferred good beef dripping to either butter or jam. Good dripping is something you cannot get today. Beef, Pork and Bacon had a much better flavour when I was a young boy than we have today. The joints were more succulent. I don't know the reason for this except when I have been talking to farmers who rear young cattle for the butcher, they state the reason for the difference is the modern method of feeding the cattle. They all go for quick rearing, quick sale and to please today's housewife lean meat and very little fat.

Rabbits were cheap, from one shilling to one shilling and sixpence each. Rabbit pie was a common dish.

Our Christmas dinners were equal if not better than the Christmas dinner we have today. Turkeys were not eaten by the ordinary working families in my early days, but there were a number of choices such as Beef, Pork, Goose, Duck and Chicken

and there was always a good selection of fresh home grown vegetables. Eggs were plentiful and you could always rely on getting a good Yorkshire Pudding, a speciality of the North East. For afters there would be Christmas Pudding with Rum Sauce. The Christmas Puddings and Christmas Cakes were prepared weeks before Christmas Day.

Many working class families kept their own hens, ducks even geese in their back gardens or allotments. They could always fatten a couple of these birds for Christmas and New Years day. Home fed pork at Christmas was quite common. Many fed and reared their own pigs and whether it was the festive season or any other time in the year it was always an exciting time for those families who either were very friendly or a relative of those who were slaughtering the pig. They would expect some of the delicacies such as Black Pudding, Pork Sausage, Potted meats and the like. It was funny, but no one would kill a pig if there wasn't an "R" in the month, so during the months of May, June, July and August there was no home fed Pork or Bacon. It was not uncommon to keep a pig longer and when it got to about 20 stone would have it slaughtered and have it cured to preserve it. This was done by a special method of salting and drying. What a luxury to go into your larder on a morning and cut off two rashers of home fed side bacon with a couple of fresh eggs from your hens for breakfast. This has all ceased now owing to Government restrictions and regulations.

Broth was extensively used when I was a boy. You went to the butchers, you would purchase marrow bones for preference or bones with a little meat still left on the bones, you would get them for a few pence. These bones would be put into a large metal pan and boiled for a few hours. Then in would go all kinds of vegetables, peas, buttered beans, carrots, parsnips, turnip, leeks, celery, onions, split peas, barley and sometimes potatoes, all boiled together for a few more hours before it was ready for serving. They would put in some suet dumplings and when they

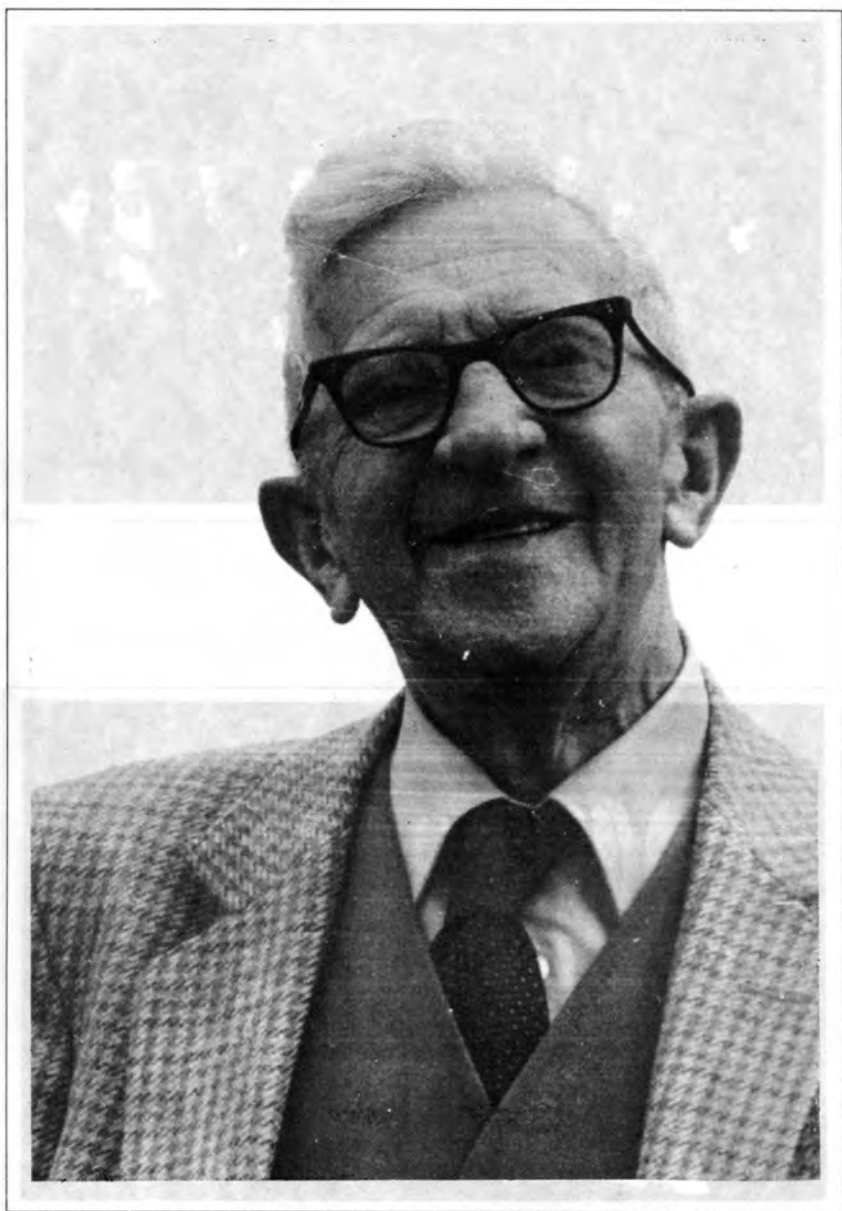
were cooked it would be served in a basin to eat. Another favourite was "Pea Soup". They would buy a Ham Shank, this was the end of the ham with a part of the leg bone in it. The Ham Shank was boiled with green peas and barley. The Ham Shank flavoured the soup. It used to be a cheap meal.

Manual workers in the early 1900's worked extremely hard especially those working in the mines and heavy engineering and the like. There weren't the modern methods nor the up to date machinery as we have today to lighten their burden. Therefore food was a very important factor in their lives to keep up their strength to enable them to compete in their arduous tasks. Beef of course was extensively used and with so many different joints and sections their main meals could be varied. They ate a lot of Suet Puddings both savoury and sweet. Sometimes for afters they would have a Treacle Pudding.

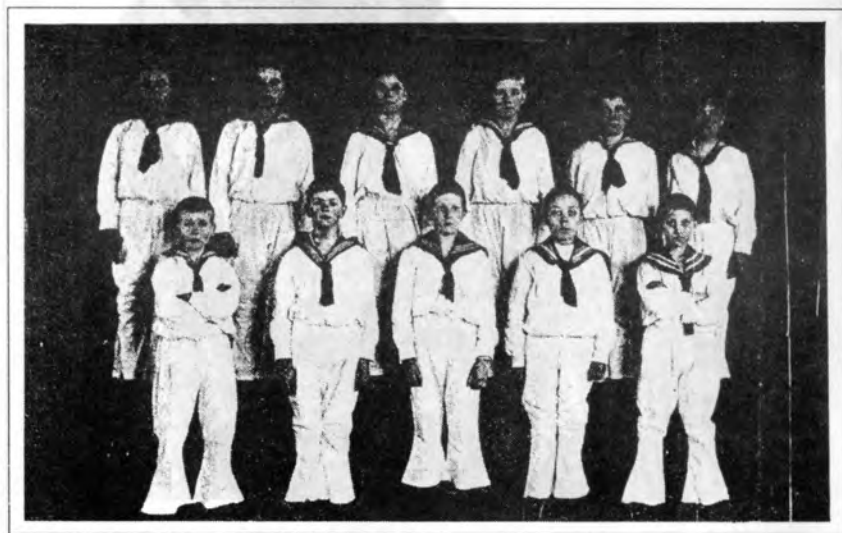
The favourite meal for the miner and manual worker was a Pot Pie and what a delicious and sustaining meal it was. I believe some people called it Steak and Kidney Pudding. It consisted of the following:- 8oz of Suet Crust, 1lb Stewing Steak, seasoned flour, 4oz Kidney, chopped onion (optional), stock or water. Grease a 6 inch pudding basin and line it with three quarters of the pastry, cut the steak into pieces, beat them with a rolling pin and coat with seasoned flour. Remove the skin and core from the kidneys, cut into slices and then flour them. Fill the basin with the prepared meat, onion (if used) and 2-3 tablespoonfuls of stock or water. Put on the pastry top, sealing the pastry edges well. Cover with greased paper or a cloth and steam for at least 4 hours. When the pudding is cooked, remove the cover and fold a table napkin round the basin. Add stock or water to the pudding when it is opened. This pudding was served with potatoes only.

Shopping

As I have pointed out that in the early 1900's travelling out of the Village was rather difficult. The Railway was the only



The Author in 1987



Photographs of School Concerts in 1912 (Boys School)



Leamside



Leamside Station in the early 1900's



The old Robin Inn on the Hetton Road (now demolished).



View of the village as seen from the Meadows Estate. Church Row is in the foreground.



Above: St. Mary's Parish Church viewed from the site of the Meadows Estate. Church Row is in the foreground.

Left: The Author as first licensed reader at St. Mary's Parish Church.



View of the village in 1959
showing the site of the present Meadows Estate



North Street (date unknown).
Post Office is now in first building.



The Consecration of the new burial ground in 1940.
The Author attended the ceremony and became the first Chairman of the Burial Board



Rector and Choir of St. Mary's in 1955



Wesleyan Chapel, Hall Lane, West Rainton.
Built in 1822 and closed in 1956.



Finchale Priory

method of travelling any real distance, but few could afford it. You would take the train from Leamside to Durham, Sunderland or Newcastle to purchase clothing, footwear and things that you couldn't buy in the Village. It was always understood that whatever you bought in the Town especially in the food line was cheaper than the goods in the village, but unless you were a good walker, most of the every day shopping was done in the village. Of course people walked much more than they do today. It was a common occurrence if you wanted to do a bit extra shopping and where you had a wider choice of goods, you would walk 2 1/2 miles into Houghton, a small mining town and walk back. It was a round about way if you wanted to ride to Houghton - you would take the train from Leamside Station to Fence Houses Railway Station and as you came out of that Station an Electric Tramcar would take you to Houghton, but you would more often walk the 2 1/2 miles each way. People regularly walked from Rainton to Durham City and back, a distance of 4 1/2 miles each way. I have known villagers who would walk to Sunderland and back carrying their parcels and bags, a distance of 11 miles each way not forgetting the walking they would do in the town. I have done it myself on a number of occasions as a young man in my teens.

In my early youth there was a sweets and general shop in the ground floor tenement in The Old Hall. There was a well stocked food and general dealers shop at the west end of South Street owned and run by the late Mr. Robert Colman. Another general shop situated at the end of Middle Row, Freehold, just opposite the present County Junior School. This shop was owned by a Mr. Robert Hewitt whose parents came from Northern Ireland in 1844. There were two butchers shops, one at the end of the front garden of the "Bull and Dog" public house, now a private dwelling named "Northlands" and the present butchers shop now owned by Mr. Ed Shaftoe. As a matter of fact he is in the process of moving the present butchers shop to a new one adjoining the Jubilee Hall, Community Centre.

The most important business ever to be established in the Village was a branch of the Pittington Co-operative Amicable Industrial Society. There had existed for some years in the Village the Rainton Gate Co-operative Society but it didn't appear to have been in a sound financial state. Their years balance sheet which was issued on the 5th September 1896 registered a total trading account for the Year of £668 showing a net profit of £6 and two pence.

Pittington Co-operative Society came into existence in 1874, and their shop at Pittington was first opened on the 14th February of that year. The early success of the Pittington Co-operative movement surprised its promoters by their remarkable achievements. Opportunities were offered to the Management for further development and in 1896 they considered the question how Co-operative members who were not resident in Pittington could benefit. They had been approached by the Rainton Gate Co-operative Society as to a possibility of Amalgamation between the two, but Pittington turned the idea down. Shortly after the Rainton Gate Co-operative Society ceased trading and Pittington Co-operative Society stepped in and rented the Rainton Gate property for £50 per year and re-opened the business on the 31st May 1897. The following year on the 10th March 1897 they purchased the property. Business continued to grow to such an extent that it was necessary to expand. Land was bought at Pittington and between the years 1896 and 1901 an entirely new block of buildings consisting of the official office, Butchers Shop and slaughter house, Hall and Committee room, with Yard and stables. The remaining sections comprising of Drapery, Boot and Shoe shop and Tailoring department were completed in 1901.

Rainton Gate Branch was modernised and a very thriving business it became. This Co-operative movement rendered great service to the community. It taught men and women and whole families the art of wise spending and saving. Saving schemes, Insurance and the like were made available. Many young people

took advantage of the facilities which helped numerous young couples to marry and furnish their homes. Over the years many share holders and those who took advantage of their Saving Schemes were able to buy their own houses. There were a large number of families who would never think of making any purchases at any other shop, everything they required would be bought at the Co-operative.

There wasn't a thing you couldn't buy through the Co-op. There were groceries, Footwear, Hardware, Curtains, Suits, Greengrocery, Butchering, Furniture and fittings etc. The Co-operative Society served the people well. Their horse drawn wagons and Butchering carts called on their customers week after week far and near. This service on their door step eased the travelling problem and you need not have left the village.

In the year 1906 three Co-operative members from the Rainton Gate branch were appointed to serve on the full Committee at the Head Office at Pittington. The Pittington Co-operative Society went out of business in 1970. The Rainton Gate branch closed in June 1970. Why? I have not the slightest idea why such a successful business should fold up.

Lighting of Houses and Streets

It is difficult to imagine what it was like to have no street lights in the village and our homes and buildings lit with oil lamps and candles. There was no electricity and the village has never had Gas, despite attempts by the local Parish Council. Rather strange a village less than two miles away has had Gas in their homes for many years now. The excuse given was that the cost of laying Gas pipes would be too expensive.

The Village streets without lights especially in the long dark winter nights didn't seem to cause the villagers many difficulties. They got so used to the darkness that they had no difficulty in recognising people or objects on the opposite side of the street or road.

It was not until December 1929 that the streets and roads were lit by electricity and in August 1930 electricity was brought into our homes. There was no doubt that it was a great asset. It was never in our thoughts that one day you would go into the house, put a switch down and on would come a good light.

Before we had the electricity in our homes, you had to use oil lamps and candles. If your living room was rather a large room you would probably need two oil lamps to give you a reasonable light and if you were doing any close work or writing or to read small print, you would have to get as near to the oil lamp as possible. The oil lamp needed plenty of attention to obtain the maximum of light. You had to trim the oil lamp wick often, the glass where the flame came into had to be kept very clean and the lamp bowl filled with paraffin. It was all a dirty job and they had to be attended to every day. Farmers if they wanted to go on dark nights to the outbuildings to inspect their stock carried an oil Hurricane lamp. These lamps were unaffected by the wind or rain and were easily carried by a strong wire handle. The light was protected by a large glass surrounding the light and the glass was protected by a strong wireguard. Paraffin for the oil lamps was easy to purchase. Traders with their horse and specially built carts carrying a large tank with the paraffin called on their customers every week to supply them with the oil for their lamps and oil heaters. They were known as Lamp Oil Men. You never see these traders today, their service is not required. In the home candles were used extensively, if you wanted to go into another room for something or to the bedroom for the night, you would take a lighted candle. There were many different types of candle holders to catch the melted wax to prevent the wax dripping onto the carpet or floor. There were a large number of brass holders and candle sticks used. Now after 50 years brass holders and candle sticks are bought and sold as antiques.

Transport.

Looking back over the past 78 years to 1905 it was difficult to take a journey to other parts of the County seeking mutual converse for the lack of money which restricted this possibility, therefore, to obtain any social life at all you had to create and unite locally. The only way one could go any reasonable distance from the village was by train from Leamside Railway Station. For shorter distances you would hire a pony and trap, this wasn't difficult as there were a number of ordinary working class people who owned ponies and traps and they were quite willing to let you have the loan of them for a day at a very low charge, usually for a few shillings in old money. If there was a party they could hire a horse drawn brake. These horse drawn brakes were sometimes called wagonettes and varied in size, a large one could carry up to 20 people.

I think one of the greatest disappointments to the residents of West Rainton was the closing of Leamside Railway station. It had served the village for over 100 years and during this period it was the only motorised transport capable of taking passengers to far away parts in the country. There has been two stations at Leamside. The first station was a small single storey building which stood just below the south side of the bridge that takes the road traffic onto Leamside. Before this bridge was built, road traffic from Rainton to Leamside had to cross the railway where there were Railway crossing gates and the road took you passed the Leamside Farm and on the low side of the present road to Leamside. The Newcastle and Darlington junction railway was opened on the 18th June 1844 and the first railway station at Leamside was built during that year.

The second railway station differed from any other on the North Eastern Railway, it was an island platform with a bay at each end. It would be built with the opening of the branch to Durham and Bishop Auckland on the 1st April 1857.

Unfortunately, this station was closed on the 5th October 1953 and the existing railway line is mainly used for goods traffic. This fine station building was dismantled around the 1960's and the site cleared. It is difficult to visualise that there had ever been a railway station there.

It had been an important station during the years for it was a four way junction. You could get a train from Leamside to Newcastle via Washington, or to Sunderland and South Shields, to Durham or Darlington via Sherburn, Shincliffe or Ferryhill. When I was a teenager along with others, I used to go to Leamside station on a Sunday night about 8 o'clock in the evening to watch the theatrical people changing trains at Leamside making their way to Newcastle or Sunderland where they would be performing on the stages the following week.

I remember in 1914 when the troops were billeted in Cocken Hall, some war machinery had arrived at Leamside station and the station master for some reason would not release the machinery, soon a detachment of soldiers arrived from Cocken Hall and marched the unfortunate station master to the soldiers headquarters, the goods were soon on their way to their destination.

The station master Mr James Willis was a man who was very strict and took his position very seriously. He was always very well groomed and looked extremely smart in his railway uniform and cap edged with gold braid.

At the end of the first world war, changes began to move more rapidly, motorised vehicles were coming more into use and replacing the horse. In the early weeks of 1919 my brother-in-law and I started running motor cars taking parties and running passengers from and to Durham, Sunderland, Newcastle, Chester-le-Street and numerous other places. Many other people did likewise and there was plenty of competition. This method of transport grew over the months. The fares were cheap compared

with fares on the railway and we were able to get passengers nearer to their destination. Villagers were seeing districts and areas they never had the opportunity of seeing before and they were getting an appetite for travel. When I started driving cars, petrol was, I believe, one shilling and sixpence a gallon. At that time there were no driving tests and it was sometime before motor vehicles were taxed. Cars were very different from what we have today, certainly not so reliable. Year after year the motor vehicle improved.

In 1920 the United Bus Company, was established and started running passengers to many parts of the County. This method of transport grew and expanded and many large transport companies were formed throughout the county creating a network of passenger transport serving both town and rural districts and has become an essential part of life in the Country.

On the 30th December 1932 Mr Hunter of Chester-le-Street started running small buses which carried 16 and 20 passengers from Rainton to Lumley and Chester-le-Street. It was a bus service that was very popular and well supported; it was a very reliable service. After providing this excellent service for 21 years, Mr Hunter in 1953 sold his buses and route to the Northern General Bus Company. Unfortunately the Northern General withdrew the service a few years ago. What a change from the beginning of 1900 and now both the Railway and the network of buses in the country are in decline. Travelling by either is very expensive and it is a question how Governments are prepared to continue meeting the heavy subsidies to keep the railways going.

Over the past 15 years thousands of miles of branch lines over the whole country have been cut. Steam power has been replaced by Diesel engines. No more coal is used and with all the cutting back and effort in trying to lower the cost of train locomotion the Governments are having to make grants of millions of pounds every year to keep trains running at the present level. The local bus services throughout the Country are also

losing heavily and bus companies are having to be subsidised by Local Authorities Rates and excessive bus fares. The long distance buses seem to be profitable and can run passengers from one end of the country to the other for half of the cost of the train. Air travel of course has become a colossal business taking millions of passengers a year to every corner of the world. One can understand that the method of travel by air for thousands of miles cannot be cheap.

From the time when families thought themselves very fortunate to own their little pony and trap, another form of transport has overtaken even an ordinary family and that is to own your own motor car. Some families can afford to own two cars. One for the worker of the family to get to his work and the other to do shopping and pleasure. What a change in one life span. If a builder of property is building private houses today, it is necessary for him to build the house with a garage, to garage the car which has become a normal way of life.

One of the great improvements in the district for the past 25 years has been the improvement in road communications. Not only West Rainton village has benefited but the whole county of Durham and we now have in the north east area dual carriage ways and easy access to motorways second to none in the country.

Our village is situated very conveniently. We are only 1 1/2 miles from the A1(M) motorway which will lead you to the far south or the far north. Fancy you can travel from West Rainton to Scotch Corner on the A1(M) in 20 minutes. Join the dual carriage way at Herrington travelling on the A19 and you could be at Stockton in half an hour or going north to the Tyne Tunnel won't take you any longer. Dual carriageway to Sunderland from the village, a 15 minute journey, and a 7 minutes run to Durham City. These new roads have not only helped the travelling passenger but have been a great asset to commerce. The authorities were rather late in providing these necessary facilities to the area, but we can now compete with the best network of motorways in the country.

Entertainment.

To compare the social life and entertainment today from that of 1900 is almost impossible to grasp when we have got to realise that there was neither wireless nor television. It was then not easy to take a journey to other parts of the county, the lack of money restricted this possibility, therefore to enjoy any social life and entertainment you had to create and unite locally, and the more effort and ability you put into it, the more enjoyment you would get out of it. The ideal places to give you this opportunity were the churches and chapels. There were many older people who were active members of these places of worship and possessed musical ability and they were never afraid to spend their leisure time and to teach the younger people singing and acting.

The churches and chapels had very good balanced choirs and could be relied upon to give a good account of themselves and produced many enjoyable musical evenings.

When I first joined the church in 1907, I became very active in singing and acting and after a couple of years in the choir I became active in entertaining the public and before I left school in 1914 I was arranging numerous concerts and taking an active part in them, and by the time I left school I produced plays and wrote some of my own small sketches. Concerts were organised in aid of church funds and also many worthy charitable causes. We had no difficulty in filling a hall at every performance, charging (in old money) one shilling for a seat, one shilling and sixpence if the seats were reserved, children charged sixpence. Those who took an active part in one way or another spent their leisure time learning and practicing their parts, organising and making costumes and attending to stage props and the like. After the first world war travelling became easier and we gave concerts in many different parts of the county. I formed a male voice choir and was their conductor for a number of years performing in many parts of the county bringing pleasure to large numbers of people.

Just recently I have heard that many young people are bored with life, this is rather difficult for older people like myself to understand, for I can never remember being bored, life was so exciting, full of action and interest, in fact our days in our youth were not long enough for all the things we wanted to do.

In the early 1900's travelling entertainers would visit villages and I remember on a few occasions these entertainers came to West Rainton and got permission from a local farmer or even from local council to put up their staging either in a grass field adjoining the village or on some open ground in the village. They would inform the villagers by displaying a few posters and getting the word around that they were performing that night. When they had erected their stage and large curtains and ready to start their performance, they would light up their staging with oil flares and the villagers would gather round and listen to some interesting entertainment there were sketches, musical items, juggling and the like. After their performance they would take a collection from the people who were watching. After this they would take their staging down and load it on to a horse driven cart with their oil flares extinguished. They would leave the village with their horse driven vehicles and make their way to other parts of the country.

Villages were often visited by men with performing bears. The bears would dance whilst the man played a barrel-organ. The barrel organ was played by turning a handle on the instrument, it was transported on a low platform pulled along on two wheels, one wheel on each side of the platform.

Men also used to come round the villages with a type of Pianola transported on a similar platform as the barrel organ. The pianola was also played by turning a handle on the instrument, usually they would have a monkey sitting on the top of it fastened by a chain lead. The monkey was there mainly to draw attention.

We were frequently visited by men, known as "Buskers", playing various musical instruments, any thing from a tin whistle

to a violin. Many of them would rather do this for a living than work.

Carol singing and entertaining was very popular in my very early years at Christmas time. You could always muster between 20 and 30 grown ups and children to go carol singing with members of the parish church choir. Often you would be invited into homes to sing carols and we would be given home made ginger wine and mince pies and christmas cake. It would take 3 or 4 nights before you got through the whole village, what happy times they were.

When we were six or seven years of age, four of us would go round to homes and farm houses where we had been requested to perform a little play we were noted for. We would dress up, two of us wearing a belt around our waist with a home made wooden sword each, the third one would dress up with a felt hat, long coat, carrying a little black bag, supposed to be the doctor and the fourth boy would be the narrator. This type of acting was known as "Mammers".

When we arrived at the house where we were going to perform, the furniture would be moved to one side so as to give us sufficient space to do the play.

I don't know if I can remember all the words of the play, but it went something like this:-

Narrator: "Here are two champions who are going to fight who have never fought a dual before, I will give a pound to the one who can slay the other one to the floor. Who is the champion swords man in this dual?"

1st swordsman: "I am the champion with the sword"

2nd swordsman: "You sir"

1st swordsman: "Yes me sir"

2nd swordsman: "Take out your sword and try sir"

1st swordsman: "Well sir, I have so much power, I will cut you into mince meat in less than half an hour"

2nd swordsman: "You sir?"

1st swordsman: "Yes me, sir"

After much parrying and thrust with their wooden swords the second swords man would fall to the floor, badly wounded. There he would be lying, groaning and moaning, the victor standing over the wounded man, lamenting:

1st swordsman: "Oh dear, what have I done, I've slain my greatest friend's only son."

Narrator: "Call for a doctor."

(In would come the doctor carrying his bottles of medicine in his bag)

Narrator: "Here comes in old Doctor Brown the best old doctor in the town."

Victor: "What made you the best old doctor in the town?"

Doctor: "By my travels"

Victor: "How far have you travelled?"

Doctor: "From Timbuctoo and back again"

Victor: "Can you do anything for my wounded friend?"

Doctor: "I have a little bottle in my bag, when I give him a sip and say, 'Nick Nack Jack', he will rise up and sing again."

The wounded lad after receiving a sip out of the medicine bottle would jump up and the four boys would put their arms around each other would dance around and sing.

"My friend has come to life again, we'll never fight no more"

It was all done very dramatically and the audience would show their appreciation and give us sometimes an old shilling piece and sit us down to mince pies, christmas cake and homemade ginger beer.

The musical halls were growing up and down the country and many famous musical hall artists were making their name and drawing large audiences to their shows. Unfortunately, the village dweller like those of West Rainton had difficulty in affording their train fare to Sunderland or Newcastle and their admission charges into the theatre. However, by 1920 onwards travel was made easier and cheaper by the introduction of the network of buses which enabled many from the village to visit the theatre more also to go to the cinema and watch the silent films.

The first silent film I saw was when my parents took me to Houghton Feast in 1911. There was a large tent in the fair-ground with rows of hard forms to sit on, facing a large white screen, a young lady sat playing a piano just below the screen. I remember the picture very well, it was cowboys and indians on horseback fighting each other. The figures on the screen were not very distinct - it looked as if it was raining all the time. The pianist played the piano to fit in with the action of the silent film. If the horses were galloping she would play fast and loud, then when there were some sad moments or the action quietened down she would play softly and slowly. I am sure we all thought it was marvellous at the time.

After the first world war changes began to take shape more rapidly. The social life of the village dweller was branching out and taking on a different form. In the middle of the 1920's wireless was beginning to take shape. Many wireless enthusiasts were making their own sets with what we called the cat's whisker which gave communication by electromagnetic waves instead of wires. This form of entertainment had an effect on conversation, for if you were in the company where they were listening to the little wireless set, you had to sit quiet and not speak otherwise

they would not hear what was coming through the set. The first experimental wireless Broadcast was in February 1920. This was followed by Television which was first shown in Harringey, 2nd November 1936. This form of entertainment has changed the whole Country's attitude. At the beginning of the first world war in 1914 the cinematograph was developing fast and by 1920 Cinemas were springing up and down the county like mushrooms, but these were silent films. Within a few years these silent films were replaced by the talking films and became a tremendous industry throughout the world. Cinemas in this country were filled to capacity every night of the week for many years. This was a form of entertainment that was so popular it became the way of life to the majority. Things were not standing still in the entertainment side of life. Television in the homes of ordinary people was advancing leaps and bounds, the price of television sets were fast coming into the range that the ordinary family could afford. Then a few years ago coloured television appeared and has swept the country and become a terrific business. Also wireless has improved considerably over the years and affords entertainment to the majority of homes. Now we come to the press button age, families would rather sit at home, press a knob and enjoy their television sitting beside their own fireside. They needn't turn out wet or fine and go to the cinema to be entertained. It has been the cause of thousands of cinemas throughout the country having to close. Now there are only a small number of cinemas left and these are in the towns, but nothing like the number that existed before the wireless and television arrived.

Farming

In the year 1910 I went to live at Stables Farm with a relative. Stables Farm is situated about half a mile from the village, the first farm you approach after leaving the village on the "Marks Lane" leading from West Rainton to Pit House Lane. It

was a farm of about 2000 acres of agricultural and grass land and in those early days the work was extremely hard. We kept on the farm eight large draught horses to do the heavy work for there was no motor power in those days. We also had 22 shorthorn milking cows and all the milking was done by hand apart from feeding and attending to young cattle for the butcher.

We supplied milk every day to many of the villages. You never saw milk delivered in bottles as it is done today. Every morning I got up at 6 a.m., had my first breakfast which always consisted of a large pot of milk that had stood overnight and there would be at least 2 inches of cream on top of the milk, I had that with a large thick slice of bread with thickly spread farm butter. I got my second breakfast at about 8.30 a.m., tea, a bacon sandwich consisting of two large slices of bread dipped in bacon fat and a good helping of bacon. My job every morning after my first breakfast was to milk by hand 3 cows, carry cans of milk from the byers to the dairy where the milk was put through a cooler. This was all that was done to the milk before it was distributed to the customer. I would yoke the pony into the milk float, take two large milk containers, holding 10 to 12 gallons of milk each and take them to Leamside station and they were put on the next train for Gateshead station to be collected there by the dairy man and delivered to his customers. A can of 12 gallons of milk was left in my milk float to replenish a two gallon can which I carried from customer to customer serving them with their daily milk. In my two gallon can was a metal rack and a gill measure hung on it. When the customer came to the door, either with a jug or basin you would take the measure and serve with the required amount. When I was finished serving my customers in the village, I drove the pony back to the farm, had my second breakfast and then walked up to the village school to start at 9.0 a.m. When I finished school at 4.00 p.m., the same procedure took place, milking 3 cows again and taking 2 more milk cans to Leamside station for despatch to Gateshead. This was part of my job 7 days a week and I wasn't quite 11 years of age.

I remember having a very unhappy Christmas day when I was 12. I set out on the Christmas morning to deliver the milk to our customers, the next thing I knew was when I woke up at 6 o'clock that night, having missed my christmas dinner and tea. My relative said to me, "Do you know what you did this morning?" I said, "No" "You loosened the pony out of the milk float in the middle of the farm pond". The customers had given me so much wine, that I was drunk. Of course the pony would find its way back to the farm without anyone having to drive it. Over the years there has been a lot of talk, even legislation about boys doing too much work whilst still going to school. The work I did for about 8 years never seemed to do me any harm. I would have loved to have made farming my profession, but it was not to be. My relative at the farm was a very heavy drinker, both beer and spirits. He only lived to the age of 44, drink having ended his life here, so my parents took me away from the farm a few years before he died. Farming over the last 50 years has changed out of all recognition not only has farm machinery been mechanised, but the whole way of thinking about farming has changed.

First there was the mechanised tractor replacing the horse, very few farmers throughout the country still use horses to do the heavy work on the farm. Hay making has gone. The grass is cut and when it is properly dried it is picked up by a baler attached to the tractor pressed and machine tied into bales, easy to handle and store. If the grass crops are not baled, it is cut and brought to the farm yard and made into silage, an excellent cattle food in the winter.

The harvesting of grain has changed completely. No more corn sheaves to stack then and later in the year the grain separated from the straw over the husk by a steam thrashing machine. They now harvest the corn with a combined harvester which cuts and at the same time separates the grain from the husk. The grain is taken to the farm and put through an electric drier, it reduces the water content before the grain goes to the mills. The straw, when

dry is picked up by a baler the same as the hay, pressed and tied into bales.

Owing to the housewife demanding lean meat the method of feeding them has changed. The farmer feeds his cattle and has them ready for the butcher when they weigh about 8 cwt and upwards and under a year old. A lot of concentrates are used such as fattening nuts and meal. Somehow beef has not got the flavour or taste as it had before this modern way of feeding.

There are some farmers who don't have any live stock. They till the land and grow a varied selection of cereals without any farm yard manure. They use nothing else year in and year out but chemical fertiliser. How long this method can go on it is difficult to say before the land is starved for the want of humus. Today farmers use all the modern mechanical power they can afford. It doesn't only speed up the work, but it cuts out labour. The cost of man power has become very expensive these last few years. The farm labourers' wages have increased considerably. It is cheaper for the farmer to use the advanced modern machinery. Milking, leading of wagons, clearing out of buildings, tilling of the land even cutting and trimming of hedges, draining of land etc are all done by the machine. The tractor is fitted with all types of gadgets including hydraulic lifts. There is no milk sold straight from the farm to the housewife. All cows are milked by machinery, it is pumped through coolers then into large tanks, some of the tanks can hold a thousand gallons. It is stored in these sealed tanks until the large milk transporters call at the farm twice or thrice a week and take the milk to factories run by the Milk Marketing Board and put through a special process and treatment then bottled and delivered to the individual Dairies throughout the country ready for delivery to their customers. The milk is never touched by humans. Great care is taken to see that the Dairy Herds throughout the land are healthy and clean, free from tuberculosis, Brucellosis or diseased tissues and are examined regularly and the farmer is given a certificate that the herd has been tested and free from any disease.

Gone are the days when the farmer if he wanted to hire a hind or a farm worker would go the market place of a town like Durham which held hirings twice a year on or near 13th May and 13th November and the farmer would meet those farm workers and discuss terms of employment with a view of hiring them. If you wanted to employ a farm worker today, it would have to be done through the Ministry of Labour at their employment offices. It is necessary now for a farmer or farm worker to make a success of his job not only to have knowledge of farming, but to have a general knowledge of machinery.

In 1900 farming was extremely hard work, plenty of it and little time for leisure and very low wages of from 15 shillings to 18 shillings a week with board and lodgings. All that has gone - their wages are anything from 50 pounds a week plus board and lodgings, all overtime worked above the recognised weekly hours, the farmer would have to pay him. As far as the farm worker is concerned, his conditions are much better and his work not so laborious.

Coal Mining

Local Pits

Coal and coal mining had a great influence in the developing and the manufacturing power of the whole county. The Durham coalfield is the oldest in the British Isles and it is scarcely necessary to point out the vast importance and influence it had on the surrounding villages like West Rainton. There is evidence that the Romans during their occupation of the country mined coal, or they gathered beach (sea) coal which had been washed up on to the beaches because during excavations, coal cinders were found amid the ruins of several Roman stations in Durham County, South Shields fort being one. They would have little difficulty in mining coal if they wanted to, all they had to do was to dig a drift into the earth and work the top seams which

were very near the surface, not more than 15 feet underground. This evidence was borne out some 10 years ago when the coal board was working an open cast coal site near High Blue House Farm, Marks Lane, West Rainton and the top seam of coal was only 15 feet below the surface.

Then monks of Finchale in the early 12th century mined coal in the surrounding area. They drifted into the earth using the Norman Arch method which prevented any part of the roof from collapsing on top of them, it also saved them the expense and the bother of having to provide timber to prevent roof falls. They worked as far underground as the incoming air would keep their candles burning to give them light.

It was not until the 13th century that coal was systematically raised for fuel and power. In 1239 King Henry III granted a charter for this purpose to the townsmen of Newcastle-on-Tyne when coal was first shipped to London by sea. At the beginning of the following century a complaint arose from the citizens of London pointing out the injury caused by smoke from burning coal had an adverse affect on the health of their people. A petition by Parliament in the year 1306 to King Edward I caused him to issue a proclamation commanding the people to use wood or charcoal for their domestic fires.

The people of London and the South of England were afraid of coal fires and called it "Devils Fire", they wouldn't eat food that had been cooked by coal as late as the 16th century. From 1239 to the 16th century coal was mainly used in that part of the country for glass making, blacksmiths forges and small foundries. In the year 1602, 9080 tons of coal vended were shipped from Newcastle and Sunderland to the south using a fleet of 400 sailing ships. The amount of coal shipped south from both north-east seaports rose to 14.5 thousand tons by the year 1616. Then came the speculators and adventurers bent on making as much money as they could and ground down the workmen in a shocking and inhuman manner in doing so. Women and boys, as young as 8

years old, worked down the mines. Many of them, especially during the winter months, never saw daylight during the whole week apart from their only day off on the Sunday.

There were a large number of coal mines and shafts in and around the village of West Rainton. I will mention just a few. The Cocken Pit was in the field opposite the steps leading through the wood across the wooden bridge over the River Wear to Finchale Priory. This colliery closed in June 1882. All the out buildings were demolished and the site cleared, the land reverting to agriculture. There is little trace of a coal mine there now.

The Letch Alexandria pit closed and its building demolished in 1895. This mine was situated between Robin Lane, the road leading from West Rainton to Hetton and Low Moorsley. The coal mined at this colliery was transported by wagon rail: the railway crossed the West Rainton to Hetton road and on to the Sunderland and Durham road, crossing this main road at Benridge Bank at the east end of the village. Parts of the old wagon way are still visible. The wagon way continued on past the old Meadows Pit to the Fence Houses Marshalling Sidings, then on to the Lambton Drops at Sunderland, where the coal was shipped to various parts.

I have referred in passing to the Meadows Pit, this colliery had worked for a number of years and first closed in 1896. It reopened on April the 23rd 1946 and finally closed in March 1960 and the site cleared.

There is an old pit shaft at the entrance to the Mallagill Leamside, there are signs that coal mining was worked here many years ago. This pit shaft stood between Leamside junction and Woodside Farm. At Leamside junction there were six Railway Cottages (now demolished). It took its name from the railway junction, for at that point the railway lines branched off, one set going to Ferryhill via Sherburn and Shincliffe and the railway line to Durham North Road Station. The Mallagill entrance is close to Woodside Farm. It is covered with woodland, there is a public right of way through the woodland and gill, a very pleasant walk

leading to the River Wear.

There was a small colliery named the "Lady Ann Pit", east of Pitfield on the Rainton and Pitlington Road near to the road junction that leads from Pitlington to Morsley. This small colliery closed, as I remember, about the year 1912.

Belmont old pit near Pitfield closed about 1874 and the site was used for a number of years as a Coal Sales Depot. The depot was managed by Mr Miller who had some years previously lost a leg in a mining accident whilst employed at Littletown Colliery. He was given the job of Coal Salesman, he lived in a miners cottage adjoining the depot, it was situated just before you approached Homer Hill Farm, Pitfield.

There was a small colliery and pit shaft at Pit House Lane named the "Resolution Colliery". This pit shaft was sunk in 1876, but closed before 1900. The shaft remained for many years acting as an air shaft for the Adventure Colliery. Adjoining the old Resolution Pit was a garth and enclosure where people could sit and enjoy a little recreation.

There is a pit shaft and signs of coal mining at "Hunters House". This is situated on the east side of an old wagon way which was used for conveying coal from Littletown Colliery to the coal mining marshalling sidings at Fence Houses. The wagon way ran from Littletown Colliery, passed the villages of High and Low Pitlington and to Pitfield, from here it went through an underground tunnel under the Sunderland and Durham Road between Moorhouse and Rainton Gate and over a metal bridge that spanned the railway at the west end of the then Leamside Railway Station, continuing on the west side of Leamside and Pit House Lane, crossing the main road at the Resolution, this was the main road from Leamside to Sixth Pit. The wagon way crossing was manned by an operator who would come out of his little cabin and stop any road traffic whilst the wagon train was passing over the road. The railway continued past Hunters House old colliery and joined the railway at Blackie Boy then on to Fence

Houses. This wagon way closed in 1916. The rails were taken up and sent to the munitions factories to provide material for the first world war. The coal wagons on this wagon way were drawn by colliery locomotives, known as tankies.

I now come to what I consider and describe as one of the most interesting coal mines in the County, the "Adventure Colliery". The age of this coal mine is not absolutely clear, however, we do know the colliery was re-opened in 1791 by the then Marquis of Londonderry. It was closed and dismantled in 1893. The mining rights were purchased by a private company and the Adventure Colliery was re-opened in 1912. The purchasing company was named "The Rainton Colliery Co. Ltd.". The two main share holders were Capt. Ramsay of Darlington and Mr A.J. Cook of Low Beech Burn Crook. His two sons were Mr T.C. Cook, colliery Manager and Mr Smith Cook, engineer. Mr A.B. Morgan was Company Secretary.

The only building remaining on the site when the pit closed in 1893 was the pitshaft. The colliery developed under the private company. They built, in 1913, a 131 foot chimney and steam boilers to provide steam power for the machinery and haulage engines. The company changed over to electricity for power, steam boilers were removed and the 131 foot chimney was demolished on the 10th January 1953. The pit shaft which was in use from the time the private company took over was closed and filled in during October 1937. All the coal sold at the colliery after the closing of the shaft was brought up to the surface up the main drift by electric haulage.

The largest number of men and boys employed at the Adventure Pit at any one time from the year 1913 to the time the pit finally closed on the 20th July 1978 was 400. The site has been cleared and apart from the Colliery's waste tip on the north side of the railway which is still visible, it would be difficult to visualise a coal mine had ever existed there.

Pit ponies were used extensively for a considerable number of years in the Durham Coal mines. They hauled tubs of coal from the Coal face which had been hewed. Then along a steel railway to an assembly point near to the bottom of the shaft to be placed in a cage and brought up the shaft to the surface by a winding engine, or brought to an assembly point near to the entrance of the drift. Fifteen to twenty coal tubs, each tub carrying on an average seven hundred weight of coal were hauled up the drift by a large haulage engine with a thick steel rope which was wound round a large drum, part of the haulage engine machinery.

The young men who worked with the pit ponies pulling the tubs along the metal rail were called "Putters". Many of these Putters were greatly attached to their ponies. There were many reports throughout the coal field of ponies helping to save the lives of drivers. Some of these ponies seemed to possess an extra sense when danger was near, they would refuse to go any further and within seconds there would be a fall of roof which could have killed the pony and the driver.

Pit ponies once they were taken down the mine were stabled underground and seldom saw daylight from one year end to another unless the miners were on strike for any length of time.

In later years when the miners got annual holidays, the ponies would be brought to the surface and put into a grassfield. How those ponies enjoyed themselves when they were in the field grazing. They were a joy to watch, kicking up their legs and chasing each other around the field. It was evident that this natural way of life for them was more congenial than having to spend most of their life underground in artificial light.

There were ponies down the Adventure Pit. They seemed to have a better life than the majority of pit ponies at other collieries especially the large pits. During the latter years at the Adventure pit the ponies were brought up from the pit to the surface each night and stabled in proper stables in the colliery yard. On a week end they were put into a field to graze and they attracted a number

of young people from the village who were very kind and friendly towards them, talking to them and giving them scraps of bread fruit etc. As their names were called they would respond. Some of the ponies names come to mind - Smudge, Snowy, Colin, Duke and Britain. The largest number of ponies working down the mine at the Adventure Colliery at any one time was 20. When the colliery closed down in July 1978 there were only seven or eight ponies left, three of them were transferred to another colliery and the others were taken to a place of rest and retirement at Consett.

There are still a small number of ponies working at some pits, but they are gradually being replaced by mechanised vehicles.

I was employed at the Adventure Colliery as a clerk from 1916 to 1933, a period of 17 years. In 1928 some of the miners employed were working in some old workings in the mine when they came across some very old working tools and implements. They found wooden shovels edged with iron strips, wooden picks with small iron points. They also found goat bones. Goats were known to have been used down the mines a long long time ago to convey coals up the drift to the surface. A basket would be fastened on each side of the Goat to be used as panniers and filled with coal. These relics were presented to the Hancock Museum in Newcastle-on-Tyne for safe keeping.

The Adventure Colliery could have been worked some two or three hundred years before 1791 and could be possibly one of the oldest pits in the Country. Some mining experts believed that the relics were very old and could have been used a few hundred years before 1791.

All the mines in the country apart from a very small number of privately owned small coal mines employing about a dozen people at each were nationalised on the 1st January 1947.

Coal mining had such a bearing and influence on the life of the inhabitants of the village and surrounding areas that it will be

necessary for me to refer from time to time to the many upheavals and disputes in the mines especially the Adventure pit during the last 65 years of its working life. Disputes between coal mine workers and coal owners were frequent. There was always a certain amount of animosity between the coal owner and the coal mine worker which lasted right up to January 1947 when the mines were nationalised. This was the end of the coal owner. Even 40 years after nationalisation Politicians and Union leaders often refer to the bad old days in the coal mines and the wicked coal owners.

In the early 1800's, the Londonderry family owned and worked a number of collieries in and around the Raintons. The miners referred to the owners as hard task masters, for life in their coal mines was extremely hard, wages were very low and the conditions could only be described as terrible.

The miners working in the pits in and around the village came out on strike in 1844. The Marquis threatened that if they didn't get back to work he would bring workers from Northern Ireland to work the mines. Over the years from 1844 he brought 1,800 men over from Ireland to work in the mines at West Rainton and surrounding district.

The Marquis of Londonderry lived in Seaham Hall, had his business headquarters at Seaham Harbour and owned a large estate at Mount Stewart, Londonderry, Northern Ireland. There are a number of Irish descendants from the 1844 emigration living in the village of West Rainton. Here are some of their names - Lackey, Gibbney, Thompson, Peebles, Moralu, Beadham, McIlwraith, McKeag, McKitten, McCullough, Minnus, Gilliland, McCabe and Collins, all well known names in the area.

Many of the Irish emigrants were Orangemen and those who were religiously minded amongst them attached themselves to the Church of England or the Chapels. Some of the emigrants were staunch Roman Catholics. Even in the early 1900's animosity between the two factions was widespread. Especially

those Irishmen who were not in any way religious would meet in the local public houses. Intoxicating drinks were cheap and plentiful and after imbibing the troubles would start. There was also a great division between the Protestants and Roman Catholics. For instance if there was a wedding or a funeral service in the Church of England or chapel you would hardly ever get a Catholic to go inside, they would wait outside and join in with them after the service. Thank goodness this has all changed over the last 20 years.

I well remember an active Irish descendent member of the Church of England and on the Parochial Church Council in the Parish Church. The Church Council thought it would be fitting to have a Patronal Cross to carry in front of the choir when they were in procession, but he resented the idea very much to the extent of resigning from the church for he thought carrying a cross was getting too near to Roman Catholic ritual. However, in time the church did get a Patronal Cross.

There were many fine and intelligent families of Irish descent, a number of them rose to take responsible position in life. For examples Malcolm McCullough born at West Rainton 1859 and died in July 1972 was Headmaster of Leamside mixed school. William Gilliland, a fine gentleman, Headmaster of St. Oswalds School, Durham City and later Headmaster of the Boy's School, West Rainton and Organist and Choir Master at the Parish Church. William McKeag, solicitor, became a member of Parliament for some years. He was also chairman of Newcastle United Football Club for a number of years. There were many more beside the three I have mentioned. Some of them were prosperous in business.

After the local miners strike in 1844 and the mines got back to normal working, their working conditions improved in the Londonderry collieries. The Londonderry families began providing many amenities in the villages, they took a greater interest in the working life of those they employed. They were

keen on providing better accommodation for the education of the children and reading room facilities for the adult population and assisting in promoting religious knowledge and they improved their image and their attitude towards the people they employed. They went a long way to eliminate the thoughts of the harsh treatment that had been meted out to their workers by their predecessors in previous years.

Villagers of West Rainton often ask did ever any distinguished guest visit the area? It so happened on the 4th October 1827 that the Duke of Wellington, as guest of the Marquis of Londonderry visited the village of West Rainton and was taken down the coal mine at the Adventure Colliery.

It is interesting to note that the Marquis of Londonderry built his new Harbour at Seaham in 1828 to ship coal in his own colliers from his coal mines to many parts of the Country and abroad. A railway was built from the Raintons to Seaham Harbour Drops for shipment. The mineral railway line ran from West Rainton via the Nicholson's, Rainton Bridge, Copt Hill and Warden Law. The railway crossed the Hetton road near to the present Fire and Rescue Station and passed under the Hetton Railway at Copt Hill. This railway from West Rainton to Copt Hill, closed in 1896 when the Rainton Londonderry pits closed.

Conditions in the Coal Mines and Mining Disputes

The conditions in the Coal Mines in 1900 were vastly different to the conditions that exist today. Mining was far from congenial, yet the majority of boys leaving school preferred to work in them. Other work in the district was very limited and coal mining was the major industry. It is necessary to have some idea of those conditions men and boys had to endure, for it had a great effect on the life and how they coped in those days.

The actual hewing of the coal, shovelled into metal coal tubs, each tub holding about 8 cwt, was all done by hand. More

often than not, the men would be unable to stand upright to shovel the coal into the tub but in a cramped position and probably in a few inches of water and water dripping on them from the roof.

When full, the tubs would be hauled by pony or pushed by hand on a small gauge rail known as the "Wagon Way" to an assembly point where 15 to 20 tubs coupled together and hauled by a steel rope, attached to a haulage engine, were taken to the shaft bottom where they were placed, 4 or 6 tubs at a time in a cage and drawn up the pitshaft to the surface. The winding engine in the early 1900's was run by steam, it had a large drum, as part of the engine machinery, attached round the drum was a thick steel wire rope fixed to the cage. When the cage reached the surface, the tubs were taken out of the cage and the coal put on the screening plant for the coal to be riddled and any stone that had got mixed up in the coal picked out.

The miner worked for eight hours underground each day. They usually worked three shifts. One set of men would work from 6.0 am to 2.0 pm. The second set worked from 2.0 pm to 10.0 pm and the third from 10.0 pm to 6.0 am. One week they worked 6 days and they called this week end "Baff week-end" this was a local word, but I have no idea how the word "Baff" originated. The next week they worked 5 days to complete the fortnight and they called this weekend "Pay Week end." They were paid fortnightly on the "Pay Week End" Friday. It was a good weeks pay if they received 23 shillings per week (£2 and 6 shillings a fortnight).

The miner didn't have annual holidays, only the recognised Christian holidays referred to earlier. The first time miners were given holidays with pay was one week each year, starting in the year 1939. This annual holiday was raised to two weeks holiday with pay per year in the year 1953. This is now extended to 3 weeks holiday a year. They have 2 weeks together and a week later on in the year. There are no more fortnightly pays for the miner, he receives his pay weekly. Fortnightly payments of wages

seemed to cause more troubles on their pay week-end. Especially those miners who drank at the pubs or clubs, they would take part of their wages to spend on drink even to the detriment of their families. Their general excuse was that they worked extremely hard during the fortnight, therefore they thought they were entitled to some recreation.

Miners disputes were many, but they were confined to single Collieries or those colliers that were in the area and who were willing to support the Colliery that was in dispute. All the Durham Miners Unions culminated into the formation of The Durham Miners Association in 1869 although single collieries in dispute with the owners didn't always receive the backing of the Durham Miners Association in those early days.

It is interesting to note that in the year 1905 the output of coal in Durham County Coalfield alone was 37 million tons. There were 72 thousand miners employed below ground and 21,640 employed above ground. The Durham Coalfield reached its peak in the year 1913 when the output during the year was 41,532,890 tons and number employed at this period was 132,661 men and boys employed underground and 33,146 employed above ground.

After a few years from the time when the Durham Miners Association was formed in 1869, miners were beginning to think of a national Miners Union distinct from the district association as the most effective means of improving the conditions and standard of living. This situation to shift the power from the district to the National Miners Federation, firmly believing that unity was strength and this came to pass in 1912 when the first national strike in the coal mining Industry took place in the dispute on the question of a minimum wage for all coal Miners. This was a step towards the consolidation of the Mining Federation of Great Britain into a united Trade-Union organisation.

During the local mining disputes in the early 1900's especially if the strike lasted for a few weeks or months, the villagers would do all they could to help the Miners families. The late Dr. Sutherland and his family were very kind, they would open Soup Kitchens on their premises and fed the miners children. There was no government aid in those days.

The coal owners tried to deliver coal to their officials who were keeping the pits open by working the water pumps to prevent the level of the water rising in the mines and other odd jobs. The coal was delivered by horse and coup cart, as they entered the village, the strikers and their families would stop the horse and tip up the coup cart spilling the coal on to the road. Men and women would come out of their homes and fill their zinc baths, buckets, home made barrows and in a very short time all the coal tipped from the coup cart would be cleaned up.

Years passed and conditions in the Durham Coal Mines were slow to improve. This was through the majority of the Durham pits being very old and the remaining coal seams could not be worked applying modern methods and modern machinery, therefore in these mines the underground workings were such that coal was becoming more costly to produce and the work was very laborious.

However, the first world war broke out with Germany on August 3rd 1914 and lasted four hard and difficult years. The German "U Boats" did untold damage to our ships and men. Food rationing had to be introduced and I remember the flour to make bread was very coarse and dark, the bread that was made from it wasn't very palatable and different altogether from what we had been accustomed to. I am sure that those people living in the rural areas fared better than those who lived in the towns. In the villages we could get a few hens eggs, we had our own garden vegetables and potatoes and sometimes managed to get a little farm butter and even bacon.

The Miners were treated as a special case and they were given extra rations and certain concessions to prevent any stoppages or disputes taking place. I'm afraid that throughout the country the public were displeased with the Governments action.

The miners were on a War footing and those men engaged in producing the coal, especially those who worked at the coal face were exempt from War service for the duration of the War. Some of the miners however, volunteered for active service and paid the supreme sacrifice. It was vital to the war to have a maximum amount of coal produced to provide power for the war machine. Eventually, the First World War finished on the 11th November 1918 with a great sigh of relief by everyone.

Changes began to move more rapidly, within a few weeks rationing ceased, Licensing hours for Public Houses were brought into operation, they were not open all day and night as they used to be, they could only sell their beer and spirits during the licensing hours from 11.30 to 3.0 pm and 6.0 pm and 10.0 pm.

Life was changing in many ways, but it didn't prevent the miners striking for better conditions and wages. I suppose one couldn't blame them. Conditions were not too good and the miners wages were round the 30 shillings to 2 pounds per week. By the end of the 1914-18 war the Miners Federation of Great Britain was encouraged by its success in securing wage increases on a national scale and by the vague promises of Politicians of a "brave new world" and decided to seek a substantial improvement in the standard of living of its entire membership. At their annual Conference in 1918 the Miners Federation adopted resolutions calling for a wage increase, a six hour working day and nationalisation of the mines with joint control and administration by the miner and the state. It took a number of years before they got any of these conditions they called for. While life in general was changing fast and improvements in all sorts of ways for the better, the Coal Miner was still an unhappy worker, they were wanting more money and better conditions all round.

The Coal Owners were having great difficulty in keeping their collieries working for a full week. For a few years they were finding great difficulty in finding Markets for their coal and coke. Hundreds of Coal Ships throughout the country were tied up in the Main Rivers and the Owners were having to store millions of tons of coal and coke, for there was no demand. If Collieries in the Durham Coal Field got 3 days work in a week they were fortunate. In fact the general worker throughout the Country was very dissatisfied and in the end it came to boiling point.

In the Durham Coalfield alone by the 3rd May 1926, 200 pits had closed down and over 150,000 miners were out of work. In spite of the miner suffering long periods of unemployment they were ready to join in the battle to resist longer hours and lower wages. On Tuesday May 4th the majority of the general workers in the North East were called out on strike in support of the miners, and responded wholeheartedly. The Durham Chronicle which appeared twice during the General Strike reported on the 8th May 1926 the commencement of the General Strike.

It completely paralysed the commercial and industrial activities of the country and especially the Durham district. The workers response had exceeded all expectations. All the essential industries and transport services had been brought to a standstill. The only exception was that the distribution of milk and food had been permitted to continue. Never had the workers responded with greater enthusiasm to the call of their leaders. The Government, via its official strike bulletin in the "British Gazette" took every opportunity to portray the strike as a direct threat to the nation. On the 5th May, it was reported that the strike is intended as a direct hold-up of the nation to ransom. It is a conflict between Trade Union leaders and Parliament and must only end in the decisive and unmistakable victory of Parliament.

On the 12th May at noon a deputation of the T.U.C. headed by Mr A. Pugh arrived at Downing Street and informed the Prime Minister that the General Strike was over. It was an unconditional

surrender. It had lasted for 9 days and during those nine days various numbers of Police were rushed from one part of the Country to another to quell disturbances, at times the scenes were ugly, vehicles overturned, people were prevented from going where they wanted to go. We were all grateful when the General Strike ended. But little did we think that we would have to witness such problems and disturbances which at times were frightening. I would never hope to experience again such times as we did in the village of West Rainton.

After the General Strike the Miners were still a great problem, they stayed on strike which lasted for a few months. West Rainton Village erupted and it was caused by the Rainton Colliery Company who owned the old Adventure Colliery in the village requesting the miners to return to their work and ignore the instructions of the National Union of Mineworkers and break the strike. The owners promised the Adventure Colliery Miners that they would be paid the same amount of money as the National Union was striking for. Also of course the Owners were afraid seeing that the colliery was very old and they were continually having to make an extra effort to keep the level of water down and if the pit was idle for any length of time, they may lose the fight to save the Colliery and put out of work the 300 employed there.

A few of the miners who did work during the strike were experiencing problems and their position was becoming very difficult. The Durham Miners Association threatened to withdraw the safety men if these miners continued to work. In the month of August 40 miners were working at the Adventure Colliery and a meeting was arranged to take place on the old recreation ground in the village and the meeting would be addressed by the National Miners Secretary Mr A.J. Cook. An estimated crowd of 5 thousand miners from the mining areas around attended, some of the miners brought their Colliery Banners with them. The National Secretary Mr A.J. Cook in his first words very much inflamed the situation. He confessed that he was collecting names

and addresses of all those working at the Adventure Colliery in the hope that they and their wives and families would be ostracised. At the time of this disturbance I was a clerk in the colliery office and was coming into contact with the situation every minute of the day. I could never imagine that the circumstances would cause such hatred and animosity in a village. It didn't effect me so much, but the miners who had gone back to work had to face the full force of the National Union of Mine Workers who were on strike. They were called "Black Legs", "Scabs" and had to face abuses of all kinds, not only the miners themselves, but their whole families. The feeling was running so high, they had to have Police protection. They had to be escorted from home to the colliery and back home after they had finished their shift. A number of Police would escort about 6 miners at one time, they would be in the centre and ringed on all sides by Police. As I was an official at the colliery, I was very much involved in making the arrangements with the Police and the Workmen. Swift action was necessary on a number of occasions. We would receive information that the strikers were organising a march of protest at the time they thought the miners would be making their way to the pit, so times for mens shifts were altered from time to time to try and outwit the strikers.

Support for all those miners who were on strike, stretched for miles around and regular meetings were taking place in the village in the open and were attended by large numbers, between 5 and 10 thousand. These meetings were addressed by important Miners Union leaders. For the second time Mr. A.J.Cook, secretary of the National Union of miners, addressed one of the meetings attended by an estimated crowd of 6 thousand people with colliery bands and banners from collieries as far away as Whitburn, Murton and the surrounding neighbourhood. A large number of policeman mingled with the crowd and groups of them were situated at various points in the village.

In the Adventure Colliery yard large water hoses were laid

ready to use if necessary. There had been threats by the strikers to invade the Colliery. One day some 500 strikers armed with pick handles, sticks and stoves marched from the recreation ground in the village to the colliery entrance, the situation was tense and threatened to be ugly. There were 100 police under the leadership of the Police Superintendent from Houghton. As soon as the strikers reached the colliery entrance, the Superintendent with some of his policeman appeared, he gave the order to the marchers not to proceed any further, facing the mob he instructed them to give up their weapons to his police, which they did. They turned around and marched back to the village and held another meeting, this sort of behaviour continued for weeks. Policemen were continually being called upon to rush to workers homes to prevent serious trouble, feelings were running high. Families who had been close friends for years found their relationship completely destroyed. It even split families. Court cases followed and animosity continued. It wasn't until the middle of October there was a limited breakthrough in the Coalfields throughout the country. Miners began to return to work. On the 23rd October 1926, the Durham Chronicle reported a marked weakening in the miners position during the past week. Men were returning to work in considerable numbers in various parts of the Coalfields, in Durham County the miners were showing their eagerness to resume work. It is difficult to determine exactly the extent of the return to work, the determination of particular districts to fight on, but the position of the miners slowly deteriorated in the absence of sympathetic and financial support and by the end of 30 weeks of heroic struggle the majority had returned to work. Miners at the Adventure Colliery left the Durham Miners Federation and organised a "Thrift Fund" to promote closer working and better understanding between management and men. They named it the "Rainton Colliery Employees Thrift Fund" It is sad to say that in general the miner returned to the pits in a worse position than they were in before the strike, it was a reduction in wages.

I have often wondered if all the trouble was worth men and their families ruining their lives for the sake of men having the right to work if they wanted to. Life in the village had been greatly disturbed, the bad feeling that had existed, since the beginning of the strike lasted years, in fact it took the terrible Second World War in 1939 to heal wounds and bring the village closer together.

The National Miners strike didn't solve the miners problems, actually they were just beginning. The coal trade got worse and worse, the couldn't sell their coal, stock piling was necessary to keep pits working, if they were lucky two or three days a week. Men were leaving the pits if they were fortunate enough to get different work. By 1932 under a Coalition Government the unemployment figure rose to 274,500. It was a serious depression. The country struggled on until the inevitable happened. The second World War was declared on the 3rd September 1939. Everything was put on a War footing immediately. Unfortunately, the country was ill prepared to face such a formidable enemy and the situation at times was desperate. The situation didn't stop the coal miners from threatening to strike unless they got more money and a number of concessions for their labour. They got what they had demanded - extra rations, clothing and footwear etc. They were able to purchase many things that other workers couldn't purchase. This caused much dissatisfaction among the workers but they couldn't do anything about it and they had to accept it. The priority position which the coal industry enjoyed during the difficult wartime period added considerably to its problems and at the same time increased its ability to secure long sought after improvements. The end of the war with Germany came in May 1945.

On the 1st January 1947, vesting date arrived, the coal mining industry passed into Pubic Ownership. The Northern Divisional Coal Board became responsible for more than 200 collieries in Durham, Northumberland and Cumberland, a mass of

ancillary and miscellaneous property including 44,000 colliery houses, 200 farms, 100,000 acres of land, 18 separate coking plants in Durham and numerous brickworks.

The nationalisation of the mining industry was celebrated by miners lodges in the county holding dances and socials, parades with colliery band and banners. At the pits the blue and white flag of the National Coal Board was unfurled. At each pit the seal of ownership was signified by a simple notice board which read: "This Colliery is now managed by the National Coal Board on behalf of the people."

After nationalisation of the mines, the miners at the Adventure Colliery who came out of the Durham Miners Association in 1926, rejoined it and they received all their normal union benefits right up to the time the pit closed in 1978. Life as a coal miner was improving and in May 1947 they got a 5 day week.

In the year 1956, Pit Head Baths were built at the Adventure Colliery at a cost of £45,000 and opened by the late Sam Watson, Secretary of the Durham Miners Union. Men and boys were able to go to the Pit reasonably dressed and change into their working clothes that had been locked in their locker in the Pit head baths, when their shift was over, they would have a bath and change into their decent clothes and go home clean and leave their working clothes in their locker ready for their next shift. It always seemed strange to me, providing Pit head baths after the miners had been rehoused into modern houses with hot and cold water and bathrooms. Of course it must ease the burden of the miners wives not having to deal with dirt and coal dust when their husbands return home from the mine. I was thinking of the time when the miner lived in his cottage where there was no hot or cold water laid on and no bathroom to wash in, but had to bathe in a tin bath in front of the living room fire and trudge home with his work clothes covered with dirt.

Nationalisation of the mines didn't solve all the miners grievances by any means. I cannot remember one year when the miner seemed to be satisfied with his wages and conditions. For the past 20 years it has been the aim of the miners to obtain a rise in their wages every year. Their Union leaders pressed for their men to be at the top of the wages league and they came out on strike in the middle of the 1970s to gain it, as a matter of fact they brought down a Conservative Government through their demand. They won their fight and since then have threatened on a number of occasions to strike unless they were given the rises they were seeking, but with sensible negotiations with the National Coal Board, the miners leaders have so far staved off more national strikes. It was estimated that in 1982 there was 50 million tons of coal stock-piled that the National Coal Board were unable to sell at the present time. The home demand for the use of coal has dropped considerably. Thousands of homes throughout the country are heated and cooking done by Gas, Electric or Oil.

The decline in coal mining especially in the Durham coal field is most alarming. On the 1st January 1947 when the coal mines were nationalised, there were 127 coal mines working in the County of Durham alone, employing 108,291 men and boys. The decline started in 1960 and by the year 1980 there were only 19 collieries left working and employing 23,970 men and boys.

Coal mining is the biggest business in the region still. It has a wealth of high quality off-shore reserves of coal under the North Sea. Most new capital flowing into the coalfield is being channelled into the big coastal pits to safeguard future capacity and jobs, to maintain traditional markets well into the next century. It is also vital to maintain the momentum in a forward looking industry which already in this part of the world has an annual turnover of £615 million and a wages bill from 250 to £300 million, this figure includes concessionary fuel and houses, travel allowances, pensions, national insurance and free workwear for every man on the Area's books.

Despite contraction of Coal mining in the Durham Coal field since the sixties, most of it due to exhaustion of economic reserves, the North East collieries produce above 14 million tons of coal a year, with another two million from opencast sites.

Radical changes of production have taken place in recent years in the industry, about 90 per cent of production is power loaded. The prime factor has been the mechanisation of coal face operations at such a pace that the worlds most advanced mining machinery has now revolutionised the industry's efficiency and competitiveness.

National contraction of the industry through the sixties, with the older collieries closing over the years has led to a gradual eastward "migration" and production becoming increasingly concentrated in the coastal belt. It is in these coastal pits, strung along the eastern Seaboard, that the future prosperity of the regions coalfields is based.

Blending deep mined coal to improve quality for specific markets also gives the regions opencast sites added impetus. Generally, opencast coals tend to be of high quality and act as what the National Coal Board refers to as a "sweetener", helping to produce a more saleable product.

Opencast mining is a sore point with the inhabitants around the West Rainton area. Having had to put up with the dust and grime and unsightly pits for 2 or 3 hundred years they now have to face more dirt and noise. Many of these opencast sites can take 10 or 12 years before all the coal has been taken out and restored to its original environment. I have got to admit the Durham County Council has been commended for their high standard of restoration of the early opencast sites that have been worked over the years in Durham County.

It is questionable if there are a dozen men living in the village of West Rainton who are employed in Coal mining industry in the nearest colliery three or four miles away from the

village. This situation has altered the whole life of the West Rainton. The population of West Rainton in the year 1801, approaching 200 years ago, was 435. We can see how the population grew with the developing and extension of coal mining. Twenty years later in 1821 it was 1160, in 1851 the number rose to 1509 until in 1881 it was 2,888. This was when coal mining in the area was at its height in the North East and the majority of working men and boys worked in the local pits. The life in the village then was greatly influenced by the miners and unfortunately the life of the miner, at least for a hundred years from 1800 to 1900, was hard and tragic.

It was a life of low wages and tyrannical conditions. It unfolds a story of victimisation that well might have broken the heart of the stoutest men. Their attempt to form a Union between the miners of Northumberland and Durham was broken up by the owners in 1832. On no account could the leading advocates of the Union get work at any of the collieries. A miner and his family were completely at the mercy of the colliery owners. There were establishments known as "Tommy Shops", generally kept by a relative of the Owner of the Colliery. The pitman was compelled to purchase his provisions there, and his wages were confiscated at the pay day to settle any balance there might be due to the "Tommy Shop" keeper.

There was the great strike of 1844. It was not only that their wages were reduced, and that they were cheated and defrauded at every turn. Matters had been pushed to such an extent that the cry for redress had become almost universal throughout Northumberland and Durham. The Strike was entered upon with great unanimity by the men, and with great determination to fight it out to the very last. The employers, seeing the men thus determined, drew all the horses out of the pits with the object of quietly awaiting the issue of the contest of starving them into compliance.

The miners were compelled to strike, for by the stipulations

of the masters they could not obtain a living. They wished to pay their way as honest men ought to do, but found they were unable to do this. In eight hours the best hewers down the mine could not earn more than 2 shillings 6 pence per shift. The average earnings of the miner, after taking off deductions for fines, doctor, picks etc. were not more than 11 shillings per week. The effect of this strike was severely felt, not only by those immediately concerned, but by all tradesmen in the locality.

The employers, seeing the miners still as determined as ever to go on striking, had the horses sent down the pit again, their object being to set them to work with off handed men and officials about the collieries together with a number of loafers and blackguards which they got together from large towns. Employers agents were dispatched all over England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland to recruit for men to take the places of the rebellious miners. The owners got together a sufficient number of men to set the mines going gain. As soon as the strangers began to arrive, the necessity for providing accommodation arose and as the men who were on strike occupied the miners cottages, the work of ejecting the strikers from their homes to provide accommodation for the "Blacklegs" commenced. This was performed by parties led by a large number of policeman, with low, mean, ragged fellows, who were ordered into the miners houses. Generally the resident Colliery Manager would go into the house and before touching the furniture, would ask "Will you go back to work under the owners conditions"? The answer from the pitmen being "No", the orders were given to remove all things out. The yelling and tinpanning together with the pitiful cries of the children, had no effect on those engaged in doing the work. The colliery carts were loaded with the furniture, taken out and dumped in the street. Pregnant women, bedridden men and women and innocent children in the cradle were ruthlessly and remorselessly turned out. Several colliery owners gave notice to parties who had shops on their estates that if they supplied the striking miners with any provisions, they could look for a notice to quit their places of

business. Any shopkeepers were threatened with ruin who offered bread or shelter. This particular strike lasted 20 weeks. The Union now became very weak and those strikers who had pawned their feather beds, watches, clocks, rings and every article they could conveniently dispose of, now found themselves placed in a critical position. The men who had been out on strike and those who had been at work during the strike as "Blacklegs" never met on friendly terms. The former gave indications that they would take the first opportunity to have a day of reckoning with the latter for their conduct while the strike was pending. Pitched battles were fought both in Northumberland and Durham mining areas. The rioting spread like an infection and the "Blacklegs" from Ireland, and Wales were left to the ill-treatment meted out by the miners who had been out on strike.

The disorganised state into which the miners were thrown, principally by the long protracted and severe struggle continued and numerous strikes, which sprang up like mushrooms all over the North-East, lasted right through into the twentieth century.

For well over 100 years speculators and adventurers leased most of the mines and, seeking to make as much out of the investments as possible, ground down their workmen in a shocking and inhuman manner. Not only did they refuse to pay them a fair wage for their laborious and dangerous work, but treated them as serfs. All ways of learning were positively discouraged amongst the lower ranks of society and under such circumstances it may readily be imagined that an educated pitman was an exception. Though a gradual improvement was taking place, still there was very great room for improvement in every respect. As we moved into the twentieth century, disputes in the mining industry continued, if a dispute arose at any colliery, the men would come out on strike and so it went on. There's always distrust and a division that has existed between the coal owner and the miner.

In the very early years of the twentieth century with the

restriction in travel and communications, the village life was far from being outward looking. The majority of those living in West Rainton were miners. They were a closely knit community, they didn't like changes, they were narrow in their thinking and many of them superstitious. Their conversation was limited, their main subject was their work in the mines. The coal hewer (that is the miner who worked at the coalface) had to draw lots every 3 months for the place in the coal seam where he had to hew the coal. There were some places better than others and naturally of course they would hope they would be lucky in getting a good place where they may be able to make a little more money. This they called drawing the "Cavels". Their applications were put into a cap with the rest and drawn out like a raffle. The hewer used to do some funny things to bring him luck. It has been known for him to put the cat into the warm oven at home for a few seconds the day before the "Cavels" were drawn, hoping that it would bring him good luck and he would draw a good place to work. It has been known for a miner if he met a woman who had a cross eye, he would turn round and go home, he wouldn't go down the mine that day, or if he saw a white cat, which he considered to be an omen, that would have a similar affect. I suppose through the work in the mines those days was very dangerous and laborious it could be partly responsible for him being superstitious.

As I look back and remember the old Colliery Rows built by the Marquis of Londonderry to house the miners working at his collieries, there were 149 of them, known locally as the "Freehold", built in 1865. There was West Row, Middle Row, Andersons Row, Drapers Row, Quarry Row and Cross Row. These Colliery houses consisted of two living rooms and pantry on the ground floor and two attic bedrooms on the first floor. When they were first built, the occupants were supplied with tap water from fixed stand pipes in the back streets, some years later the water was laid into their pantries. In the centre of the back streets were their coal houses and ash toilets for each house. Their

hot water was got from a set pot, part of their coal fire place fittings at one side of the fire, whilst on the opposite side of their fire was their round oven. It often surprised one to see how clean and cosy these old colliery houses could be made. However, in 1950 all these unsightly streets with their primitive conveniences were demolished and the Durham Rural District Council built a modern Council estate on the site of the old streets and adjoining land, providing the occupants with all modern conveniences and bathrooms with hot and cold water. Thank goodness the face of the village was rapidly changing, old and derelict properties were being demolished or rebuilt and new dwellings taking there place. There were 60 families rehoused by the Durham Rural District Council on the new modern Council estate. These families came from Cocken Terrace, built in the year 1873 and Grainger Terrace, built in 1878 to accommodate miners working in the surrounding area. This property was similar in every respect to the ones built by the Marquis of Londonderry at the "Freehold". Cocken Terrace and Grainger Terrace were situated in very pleasant surroundings, one and half miles from the centre of the village, on the Cocken road near to the approach of the steps leading over the river Wear to Finchale Abbey. All the houses in these two terraces were demolished, the site cleared and the land reverted to agriculture. Wood Row, Leamside, partly built of wood, very poor property, situated opposite the Leamside Farm, west of the Railway Station was demolished. So was Johnson's Buildings, 20 old houses, the site cleared and modern dwellings erected and named "Finchale Court".

Throughout the parish very few old properties remain and those that do have been altered and renovated and brought up to modern standards. The private builders over the past 20 years have built some very attractive and expensive dwellings, such as "The Dene", "Chancery Place", the "Lea Riggs" and new dwellings right along the old Durham and Sunderland Road as far as Rainton Gate. "Sheen Close" and Marks Lane Farm where Mr. Brian Bowden has built some very nice bungalows and dwellings

and Messrs. Leech built 50 on the Meadows estate. At Leamside there has been a transformation, practically all the old property has either been pulled down or altered and some very fine new dwellings erected which have improved the area immensely. The very first council houses and bungalows for the aged were built in the village in 1930 when the parish was under control of the Houghton Local Authority.

There were 12 aged persons bungalows in School Avenue and 20 houses in the Crescent. Since the parish was taken into the Durham Rural District Authority in the early 1930's they have built over 300 modern houses and 50 one bedroomed bungalows for the aged with a warden in attendance. The private development has attracted new people to come and reside in West Rainton and this has been beneficial to the village. They have brought new ideas and have a different outlook on life. Many of them who are working are in professional and executive jobs, still they find time to join in and support many activities in the village, active members of the church, chapel and community work and their contribution to life in the village is greatly appreciated. No coal mine remains in the village, the nearest being 3 1/2 miles away. The whole outlook of the village is completely different.

Looking Back

Looking back over the past 80 years there has never been such an exciting and interesting life presenting itself to any previous generation as has been presented to mine. The advance in science and technology in many fields has been quite phenomenal. It has changed the whole way of life and there is little to compare with the life we experienced in the 1900's to the life we are living today. It is called progress, but it hasn't been all joy by a long way, for life on this earth is not like that. My generation has been through two devastating wars, each time altering and affecting the whole course of life. Some have been welcome changes and others not so good. I should not like the

experience of going through another war in my lifetime.

Then in the 1950s the Welfare State was brought into being which changed the way of thinking and the whole outlook on life. It applies especially financially to the exemption from misfortune, sickness, calamity and the common blessings of life. Even to the extent in this day when there are approximately 3 and a half million unemployed in the Country through the depression of world trade, there is no poverty such as we experienced during the early years of this century.

I well recall in 1908 the first petrol driven motor car came through the village. They were different altogether to our modern motor car today. They were slower in movement and I don't think they travelled more than 15-20 miles an hour. Their fittings such as oil lamps, horn trimmings were all polished brass and the interior seating was all leather bound, their wheels had solid rubber tyres. They were not built like a saloon car, they were an open tourer with a canvas hood to pull up and fasten should it rain. They looked a very solid vehicle, but I am afraid not very reliable, for the first one I saw stopped on the road opposite the Workingmen's Club and it was having some engine trouble.

The first aeroplane I ever saw flying was in 1911. It was during the summer weather. We were sitting on chairs outside on the lawn for some hours watching for these Biplanes (very small one seater aeroplanes with twin wings) racing from London to Edinburgh doing about 50 miles an hour. We all thought what a wonderful achievement. Look at the terrific advance in flying, speed faster than sound, millions of people travelling every year by aeroplane, reaching the farthest points in the world within a few hours flying. Never did we think what devastation and destruction they could bring to mankind as we watched those tiny Biplanes peacefully making their journey to Edinburgh in 1911.

Medical science has advanced leaps and bounds. In 1900 Tuberculosis, Diptheria and Polio were dreaded diseases and

killers. They have either been mastered or controlled by the medical profession. Up and down the country special isolation hospitals were provided for patients suffering from Tuberculosis, today these isolation hospitals have been put to other use. Medical science has made great advances in dealing with cancer and heart conditions.

People are living much longer, in West Rainton there are a few people well into their 90's and quite a number in the middle of their 80's. In the home, drudgery has in the main been taken away. The women have benefited considerably now that modern machinery does the heavy work of washing, cleaning and cooking. No more scrubbing or mangling with a mangle that had wooden rollers and a heavy handle to turn, it was very hard work. There are now machines to suck up all the dust and dirt, cooking is done in modern cookers, heat being scientifically controlled, no need for the housewife to stoke up the coal fire to get the coal oven hot enough for cooking or to boil water. Hot water ready any time just by the turn of a tap with no extra effort. All are provided to give the women more leisure time. No trimming of oil lamps or snuffing out candles, all you have to do today is put up or down a small switch that is on the wall and you will get an excellent light any strength you want.

All hard hand work is taken out of farming. No more hand milking cows, even the milk is now treated and delivered to your door in glass bottles and sealed. All the ploughing, reaping of grass and corn, hedge cutting and heavy lifting done by machinery at last, saving expensive labour costs and time. Motor cars didn't come into general use until about 1920. They have now become the modern way to travel. New roads and motorways opening up towns, villages and places of interest throughout the country. All the coal mines in the vicinity are closed. There is cleaner air to breathe, less dirt. I am sure none of the villagers are sorry about the pits closing. The village of West Rainton has taken a new look and has become a much quieter and desirable place to live. There

are no works of any description in or near the village and those who are employed have to travel to the various factories or works a few miles away. There are a number of able-bodied men living in the village who are unemployed. The closing of the passenger travel by rail and the Railway Station doesn't appear to have caused the villagers much inconvenience. If you want to take a long train journey, then you have to go to Durham or Newcastle Railway Station to pick up your train.

It was 5 minutes to midnight on New Year's Eve 1982. I walked out of my front door into the street to keep up the very old custom of being our "First Foot". Waiting for the old church clock in the church tower to strike out with measured beat, twelve o'clock midnight. All is so still and quiet, very strange, no one to be seen or heard, just the wind blowing through the tall trees in the churchyard. We were nearly at the end of another year. My thoughts went back over seventy years when the village was alive approaching the hour of twelve on a New Year's Eve. At the first stroke of midnight from the church clock every colliery buzzer for miles around in their various tones, ships at Seaham, Sunderland and from the mouth of the Tyne up to Newcastle, blowing the ships hooters and steam whistles, all involved in signifying the end of the Old Year and proclaiming the beginning of a New Year. A large number of men of all ages waiting for the signal to re-enter their homes to carry out their special duty of being 'First Foot'. The choice of First Foot is, if possible, to have a dark person. Whoever was First Foot would carry something into the house, usually a piece of bright coal and, as he entered, he would wish the household a very Happy New Year and place the piece of coal on to open fire. They would be offered an appropriate drink, usually it was whisky and a piece of Christmas cake which had been specially kept for the occasion. The children, if they could keep their eyelids open would be given the special privilege of seeing the First Foot come in then off to bed they would go. People in the north east still have their First Foots but not on the scale as it was 70 years ago. This is understandable. There were

200 pits more in the county of Durham at the beginning of the century to what we have now and many more ships trading then than what we have today. There is also another reason, there are a good number of people have come to live in the village who don't belong to the north east. South of Durham county New Year wasn't recognised. As it happens we are so near Scotland which may have had an influence on this part of the country, for the Scots make more of the New Year than they do of Christmas. It appears we have got the best of both worlds, a good Christmas and an enjoyable New Year. Whilst I was waiting outside this last New Years Eve, I heard a few ships hooters in the distance and only about 3 colliery buzzers which tells us that New Years celebrations are not forgotten. On a New Years morning when I was a young boy, children from the village would call on various houses wishing the occupants prosperity and a happy New Year. The children very seldom went away empty handed, invariably each child would receive an apple and an orange. They were happy times and children were always appreciative for small gifts and presents they received, of course parents had not the money to spend on costly presents for their children.

After our marriage in December 1932 we went to live in our own home at 4, South Street, just opposite to the new Infants school and we lived in this house for 19 years. In 1951 we purchased 38, South Street, our present home. This block of property must be at least 150 years old. It was first used as the colliery office and a section of it used as a reading room for the men and boys who lived in the village and worked in the collieries owned and worked by the Marquis of Londonderry. There was a doorway leading from 38, South Street into North Sheen without having to go outside. North Sheen is at the west end of this block of property and occupied by the Colliery Manager of the Adventure Colliery up to 1895 when the Marquis closed the colliery. The Colliery Manager would have reason to go into the office frequently. After the colliery closed, Mr. Laverick the manager, left the village and North Sheen was sold to Dr. Charles

Sutherland. 38, South Street ceased to be an office and Reading room and was converted into a dwelling house and occupied by Mr. and Mrs. Pearson. Mr. Pearson was in charge and managed all the properties belonging to the Londonderry's of which they owned quite a number in the village at that time. For Mr. Pearson's valuable services to the Marquis, he and his wife were given the tenancy of 38, South Street free of rent for the rest of their lives. After the deaths of first Mr. Pearson and then Mrs. Pearson, their daughters and grandchildren bought the house in 1926. After purchasing 38, South Street, we also bought three cottages attached to the rear of the property, numbered 1, 2 and 3 Church View which had already been condemned by the Local Authority. These three cottages were built by the Marquis of Londonderry in 1860. Number 1, Church View had been occupied for many years by the Gibbney family. Mr. John Gibbney had been Verger and Sexton at the Parish Church, St. Mary's for many years and his second son Arnold followed his father in the work. It would be difficult to assess the amount of voluntary work this family had done for the benefit of the villagers and the Parish Church. When we were demolishing the three old cottages and clearing the site, whilst digging up the foundations, I came across a very old stone 4 inches square. It showed a cross in relief had been worked on one side of the stone. It could have come from the ancient chapel with chantry which stood near where the present church stands. It was a different kind of stone from that of the present church. This small stone is built into the front garden wall of "School House" and can be seen by anyone.

Below the foundations where these three cottages stood, there was evidence that it had been a farm yard. There was corn stuck on pieces of farming timber, likely from a stable. Small coal and ashes bedded in the soil, possibly from an old steam thrashing machine and there was lots of chaff. It could have been the farm yard belonging to the farm in the village which once stood at the entrance to the "Slacks" now the entrance to "Sheen Close". Thinking of farms that existed in the village when I was a very

young boy, there were five in number, plus a Dairy Farm. There are none of these farms left in the village today.

Starting at the west end of the village, there was 'High Blue House Farm', situated where now stands the new Infants School. This farm was occupied by Mr. Anthony Welsh. Walking up the village, there was 'Middle Farm' in North Street, opposite the Greyhound Pub. Mr. Edwin Welsh, son of Anthony farmed this one. The large old farm house was demolished and a fine modern dwelling house erected on the site. Behind this house there remains part of the farm out-buildings which are used by the farmer Mr. Walter Bell. A little further on there was 'Marks Lane Farm', occupied by Mr. Fred. Johnson. The old farm house remains and has been modernised and sold. The farm out-buildings have been demolished and cleared. Mr. Bryan Bowden the builder has developed this site by building two bedroomed houses, flats and bungalows and it is looking very attractive. The builder has named the site 'Roman Mews'. Then there is 'Hall Lane Farm' which was farmed by Mr. R. Colman, now occupied by Clarke Bros. The farm house and out-buildings still remain, but unfortunately the Local Authority has commandeered all the land for housing development apart from one field. The farm house and out-buildings at the entrance to Sheen Close was demolished and two modern houses erected on the site. The Dairy Farm stood on the site where now stands one to four Dene View in North Street.

There has been no development in the village that would provide employment for the inhabitants. The new factories that have started up on the small industrial estates some miles away, have not absorbed all the people that were employed in the mines.

I can never remember the village being so peaceful and quiet. Talking to a number of people who have come from various parts of the country including the far south, they like the quietness and are enjoying living in West Rainton. They are keen to learn as much as they can about the district.

History records that six persons from West Rainton joined the rebellion of 1569 when attempts were made to put Mary Queen of Scots on the English Throne. Two of the six were afterwards executed.

It is well to review the past in order that we may profit by its experience and receive fresh stimulus and courage from the lives and labours of those who have lived before us. Here we are in the year 1983, life in general much better than ever it was. A lot of the anxiety has disappeared. Poverty as we then knew it in the early part of the century removed. Hygiene both in and out of doors vastly improved. Freedom of travel, of speech and of liberty. I have been asked if I would have liked to live my life over again as it was in my childhood. I would not, yet the experience of life in those hard times had its compensations, we could enjoy ourselves with simple things in life. For a start, life was much slower than it is today. People those days seemed to be more concerned about your well being. They were ever ready to help you in all sorts of ways and your troubles were theirs as well and we appreciated and enjoyed our close associations.

In the cold dark winter nights, we did any amount of reading although artificial lighting in our homes was mostly restricted. Or we would get a few friends together and learn songs and sing them around a piano, perhaps we would learn little plays and sketches, so you were ready to perform at a concert at any given time.

In the summer you walked in the country lanes and paths, looked out for birds nesting, fished in the ponds and streams for small minnows and sticklebacks and keep them alive for weeks in glass jars. We played games which you very seldom see young people playing today, made bows and arrows or kites which used to fly. You didn't buy things to play with if you could make them yourselves, for in any case you hadn't the money to spend on such things. It is so different today. People seem to get all the entertainment they require by sitting at home and pressing a

button on a television set or listening to the wireless. I don't think everything that has changed has been for the better. Television has caused us problems, it has been responsible for the limiting of conversation in the home and from community activities. There is one thing that does upset me. The church and the chapels were the centres and foundation of family life. There you were taught the duty you owe to God and the duty you owe to your neighbour. It seems today that people have very little use for either church or chapel and this disturbs me greatly. There may be a number of reasons for this, people are taking every advantage of visiting and travelling to various parts of the country on a Sunday, this of course is encouraged by many of them owning their own cars. This is one of the reasons for not going to a place of worship on a Sunday. I believe that the greatest influence in ones life in the past 50 years has been the introduction of the Welfare State which has benefited greatly the living standards of the lower paid groups of people in the country. I sometimes wonder if it had taken some of the initiative and esteem out of people.

When I was a boy I knew everyone in the village from one end to the other. I hardly know a tenth of them today. This does not worry me unduly, I am one of those natives of the village who appreciates the influx of new people into the village. They have new ideas, many of them are interested in improving the amenity of the village and friendly relationships. The new dwellings they have had built are of a high standard and has made the area very attractive and a desirable place to live in. All the old colliery property that was built between 1800 and 1850 to house the coal miner has either been demolished or renovated and lessened the resemblance of the village as a coal mining village. This transformation has taken place over the past 30 years.

Councillor George Clarkson of 'Brooklyn', Leamside our local district representative on the Durham City Council is a lifelong sports orientated person, realising the complete absence of leisure facilities in the village, has been pursuing a plan for the past 2 years with Durham City Council with the aim in view of

developing a full scale recreation centre in the village. It will include one football pitch, with pavilion, apart from other sports facilities such as cricket, tennis, bowls and childrens play area. The Durham City Council has granted a sum of 43,500 pounds to develop the sports and recreation site in the Adventure Lane, West Rainton. It is hoped it will be a big boost to leisure and sporting facilities in the village. The recreation scheme was given the go-ahead and priority rating because of the lack of recreational facilities in the village. The villagers must be most grateful to Councillor Clarkson for the hard work he has done in trying to improve the village. Councillor George Clarkson had only lived in the village for the past few years. The prospects in the village look bright for the future. The West Rainton and Leamside Community Association is going strongly, promoting a number of activities which are successful and popular, catering for all types of people. The West Rainton Scouts group are flourishing, even to the extent of them purchasing their own headquarters in Station Road, Leamside, where a great deal of hard work and planning has gone into the renovation of the building. The Cubs and Girl Guides are well established. There are childrens playgroups, the West Rainton Folk Club enjoying success. Many of the new people who have come to reside in the village are full of enthusiasm and hard work, have done and are doing all they can in assisting in the running and organising of these projects successfully and we older and natives of the village are most grateful for their contribution and may their work continue for a long time.

My working life began when I was quite young at the age of 10 and a half years at Stables farm, situated due north of the village in Marks Lane, a peaceful country lane leading you from West Rainton to Pit House Lane. I did all sorts of jobs, but mainly milking cows and delivering milk every day in the week and attending the village school in between work. It was all hard work on a farm in those days, very hard work indeed, yet I loved every minute of it. I stayed on the farm until I was 15 and a half years of

age, having left school when I was 14. Owing to domestic problems at Stables farm my parents took me away. In 1916 I found work in the Colliery office at the 'Adventure' pit, and remained there for 17 years, much to my regret, and I loathed it as much as I had loathed my school days. However, I was sacked at the colliery to make way for the company secretary's two sons to take my job. My wife and I had been married for 9 months when I became unemployed during the country's deep depression, for close on four years. Work was very difficult to obtain. I even took a job as a navvy in Guildford, Surrey where there were 5,000 unemployed in this little town, but who wouldn't take on such a dirty and strenuous work, circumstances forced me to leave Guildford and return home after working there for about 6 months. Work was still difficult to get when I got home and had to be content with temporary work from time to time for many months until I was successful in getting a permanent job as an audit clerk in the offices of Durham Rural District Council in 1937.

In February 1947 I was appointed Housing Manager for the Durham City Corporation. I was the first Housing Manager the Durham City Corporation had and I remained as their Housing Manager until I retired in 1965, after serving in this capacity for 18 years. Apart from the 6 months I spent in Guildford, I have been very much involved, first as an active chorister in the Parish church from 1907, later on organising concerts and acting in numerous plays and in 1924 I organised a very good village Male Voice Choir. We gave many concerts in various parts of the county in aid of various charities. The villagers appreciated and enjoyed many concerts we gave. The Male Voice Choir had to be abandoned in 1934 owing to many of the members having to leave the district for work elsewhere.

From 1926 I was a member of the Parish Council for a number of years and chairman of the council for 11 years and the first chairman of the New Burial Board from 1935 for three years.

All the time I was very much involved in church work. I am the first Reader in the Parish Church and passed my entrance examinations in 1928 and three years later I was appointed Diocesan and I have been a Reader in the Church of England for nearly 55 years. This has enabled me to take church services all over the county, as far away as Northumberland and North Yorkshire. I have had the pleasure of taking services in 80 different Parish churches apart from chapels and Salvation Army services. I took the last service in the Leamside Chapelry in May 1948 after keeping it open for Sunday Services for some years. I was leader for many years of a church Boys Club at Chilton Moor, now many of those boys of course are Grandparents. I have taken many parts in religious plays. I was privileged to be Narrator at *The Son et Lumiere* in St. Michael's and All Angels Church, Houghton, which was performed every night from the 28th September to the 3rd October 1968 to a packed church every night.

In the 2nd. world war I was exempt from active service as I was a lecturer in Civil Defence and had been a year before the outbreak of war. All through the war I had the added responsibility of Head Warden for West Rainton and at the same time following my employment as an Audit Clerk with the Durham Rural District Council at their offices in Byland Lodge, Durham. I have had some wonderful and interesting times and associated with many wonderful people. We hear many times of people being bored, I can never remember being bored in my life. The only regret I have is that my time hasn't been long enough to do all that I would like to have done. It has been my privilege on a number of occasions to give talks to various organisations on the history of the village and I have been pleasantly surprised at the interest shown by those present and especially those people who have lived in the village for just a short time. I find that those people who are not natives of the village are very keen to learn as much as they can about the area they have come to reside in. I

have been approached many times and requested to put into writing a narrative of events, especially in the development of the village over the past 83 years, so that the information would be available at any time. This I have done and it has afforded me great pleasure and satisfaction. If you enjoy reading it as much as I have enjoyed writing it, then it has been worth all the effort and research I have put into it.

I am greatly indebted to many residents of the village for the help and guidance they have given me, especially Mrs. Lavina Pearson, Mr. Robert Hall, Mrs. Lowrie, not forgetting the Rector Revd. L. Welsh and Mrs. Welsh for all the help and assistance they have given me.

Philip Ronan.

April 1983