

September 2011

Transcript of recording and conversation with Mrs Maria Henderson Best, (nee Maughan)

Born:- May 1914

Age:- 97 Years

Father:- Robert Maughan (Also known as R. Robson due to the fact that he was born in his mother's parents farm at Old Penshaw. His mother died in childbirth and he was brought up by the Robsons on the farm. They moved to Small Farm at Moorsley, hence the connection with Moorsley.) He was born in 1874 and baptized at West Herrington.

Mother:- Harriet Maughan, born 1877. Married 1896.

Family:-

1. Elizabeth Jane Maughan b. 1898 at Low Moorsley
2. Joseph Maughan b. 1902 at Low Moorsley
3. George Frederick Maughan b. 1905 High Moorsley (First Row, probably No.6)
4. Robert Maughan b. 1910 High Moorsley High Moorsley (First Row, probably No.6)
5. William Maughan b. 1913 High Moorsley (First Row, probably No.6)
6. Maria Henderson Maughan b. 1914 High Moorsley (First Row, Number 1)
7. Iris Maughan b. 1920 High Moorsley (First Row, Number 1)

At some point in 1904 or 1905 it appears that the family left the farm and moved into a colliery house in First Row, High Moorsley, father Robert having obtained employment with the Hetton Coal Company as a horse keeper. Father kept in contact with the Swinburnes who owned the farm and did regular work for them throughout the year. Maria remembers the four farm cottages across the road from the farm. As a child she was made to drink warm milk brought home in a can by her father after he visited the farm. She didn't like it at the time and she has had an aversion to warm milk ever since.

No. 1 First Row was an officials house and larger than others in the street. It also had a water tap in the yard whereas the other houses in the street relied upon a stand pipe at the end of the street. In winter both taps often froze and Mrs Best remembers walking with her older brothers down the hill from the farm cottages for two field lengths to collect clear running water from a natural spring in the corner of a field. To make the job easier her father made a type of yolk which fitted over the shoulder and prevented the open pails from hitting the body and so spilling some of the precious liquid. The spring was known locally as the Bull Wells and still exists today although enclosed within a farmer's field.

Joseph, her oldest brother eventually became vicar at St. Pauls Church, Jarrow. In order to become a vicar he attended St. Johns College at Durham City. His interest in the church began because of his association with the small mission church, located in the field behind where the modern council bungalows are situated on the hill at High Moorsley. Receiving instruction from the vicar, he eventually became a lay preacher at the mission church which was an off shoot from St.

Oswald's church at West Rainton. While attending training at Durham he was a member of the college rowing team. He eventually became a Canon at the cathedral.

As a result of this connection with Durham, both William and Maria were christened at Durham cathedral whereas the other brothers and sisters were christened in the local church at West Rainton. William sang in the choir of the little mission church and it was a duty for all children in the family to attend church on a Sunday.

Maria remembers some very severe winters when snow falls were heavy. All the men in the village as well as some of the children turned out to make sure that passage to the colliery, the church and chapels and the school was always possible. The road at the time through the village was little more than a lane and this too was cleared for the most part.

She remembers going to Sunderland on the train from Hetton for 9d. return on a Saturday in order to attend the cinema. She would be about eighteen then but prior to that age she rarely left the village. She also recalled being taken a couple of times by her parents along with her brothers, to attend Houghton Feast. This was a rare treat and she was able to go on the shows which were held in the Lake area of Houghton.

Maria loved the house at No.1 First Row and having two storeys she could look out into the back street from the small ducket window in the roof space where she slept. There was always something going on in the street which entertained her. There were lovely views across the fields. from the top of Moorsley hill. She could look down into the valley along which the trains ran. She was under strict instructions from her father that she was not allowed to go down the hill unless accompanied by an older sibling or with an adult. She remembers that there was a fever hospital situated a short distance to the north of the Lecht Pit. It was not until she was about fourteen that she ventured beyond the confines of First Row apart from doing the odd message and going daily to school. Maria told of one day the body of a young girl called Sarah was brought into school having fallen into the reservoir on the hilltop beyond her house and drowned. Maria would have been about eight at the time and all the children in the school had to look the dead girl's body.

The only means of employment for most of the young people in the village was the pit and Maria's father encouraged her older brothers to seek alternative employment elsewhere. As a result her older brother Bob went as a male nurse to Brentwood in the south of England and he was soon followed by William who also entered nursing. The school, located a couple of hundred yards down the hill from First and Second Rows was built by the Hetton Coal Company. Maria remembers that the boys and girls were in separate classes and they also had separate yards for playtime. She doesn't think that the classes were overcrowded, probably about thirty pupils in each. The school hall was always warm because of the presence of a large black coal stove which was constantly lit during the colder months. She recalled that the Head Teacher was a Mr. Farnsworth who did not live in the village but lodged there during the week. A Scottish lady, Miss MacIntosh also taught at the school and she too lodged at a house close to the Grey Horse lower down the bank. There was also a Mr. Baldwin and one other, whose name escapes her. The children were drawn from High Moorsley and Low Moorsley including a street of houses called Low Row situated on the hillside close to the colliery. Most of the houses had a back yard with a toilet and coalhouse near the gate. Some had

walled gardens nearby and there were allotments nearby close to the colliery where vegetables were grown.

Every house had a water butt in the yard which collected rainwater run-off from the roof. This water was used for washing and bathing. None of the miner's houses had a bathroom and the kitchen /living room was entered directly from the yard. Next to this main living room was an adjoining walk-in pantry with a slatted window to keep it cool. In her living room was a big table with six chairs round it. There was a large black fireplace at one end of the room and she remembers the large pokers and other fire irons in front of it. On the floor were clippie mats which were always made by her mother. She remembers helping to make these mats as she grew older. She learned how to set up the frame and stretch the hessian before starting on the mat. When the room was cleaned the mats were taken outside and beaten before hung over the yard wall to air.

Maria's mother and father slept in the second downstairs room in what was called a desk bed. On one wall of the room was a cupboard with two doors which opened to allow the double bed to be pulled down into position. Stairs went straight up from the back door into the roof space. This space was reserved for the children and was where their beds could be found. In winter it was very cold although the fire chimney gave off some warmth.

She never saw her mother without an apron. There was a daily routine, one day for washing, one day for baking bread and buns, another for making cakes and scones. Cleaning days were always Friday and Tuesday. Saturdays were reserved for time with the children and Sundays routine included the making of a Sunday dinner and visits to the church. Maria's elder sister Elizabeth Jane was always expected to help with the chores as was Maria as soon as she was old enough. When not doing household chores her mother was engaged in sewing or knitting as well as crocheting and mat making.

Her father she recalls, was more often than not at work. Being the horse keeper at Hazard Colliery he was required to work on each of the seven days for the proper welfare of the horses. On summer evenings and occasionally at weekends he would work on the farm bringing home eggs and milk and the occasional vegetable. Even during strikes in the 1920s and 30s he went to work. On a Sunday lunchtime he would visit the local pub the Grey Horse just down the bank for a drink and a natter. He left the house bang on twelve-o'clock and would return an hour later on the dot. When he returned he expected that the dinner would be ready and everyone sitting in attendance at the table.

On his return mother would place the plate of meat in front of him which he would dutifully carve. The meat was then passed around followed by the vegetables. No speaking was allowed at the table during the meal except to allow the meal to proceed in the proper order. On one occasion Maria's brother Bob who was about fourteen at the time forgot the time while waiting for some of his pigeons to return to the loft and as a consequence was absent from the table at one o'clock. His absence was noted by father who on his return sent him straight to bed without any dinner. However older sister Elizabeth Jane manage to smuggle some food up to him later that day as she was helping out in the kitchen.

Sunday was an important day for the village. There were two chapels as well as the C.Of E. Mission church. The chapels were the Wesleyan Chapel and the other the Independent Methodist chapel nearby, both being located on the roadside down to Low Moorsley. Each of the chapels had a preacher who became well known in the village. Maria was often sent on messages to the Co-op store located below the school by her mother and she recalls doing the same for a number of neighbours when she was a young girl. As a consequence of these visits Maria longed to get a job when she left school in the drapery department of the Co-op store. Even though her father was President of the Co-op committee he would not allow her to go out to work.

At the age of fourteen Maria's father got a promotion in his job and became the Head Horse keeper for the Hetton Coal Company. The stables were based at the Lyons Colliery and as a consequence she went to live in close proximity to the Lyons Pit. She remembers moving to Lyons buildings which were set out in a square shape. On one side were two cottages and on another side was the hay loft and granary. The cottage that they moved into was much larger than the house in First Row and included a larder as well as a bathroom, mod cons which she had not experienced before.

The stables were an interesting place and she remembers the comings and goings of hay carts and bags of grain which were made up before being sent out to the various collieries in the Hetton Coal Company Group. She can remember lots of women working to fill the bags with oats and corn before sewing them up and dispatching them.

Her father still refused his daughters the opportunity to go to work and Maria was forced to remain at home helping with the housework. She hated this period in her life, getting the dust out of clothes, washing and ironing as well as cleaning muddy boots etc. She did however go out for walks with her friends around the countryside and into Hetton and Easington Lane. She eventually met her husband Les who at the time worked for the Sunderland and South Shields Water Company and this led to her marriage some months later.