Extract from DCLHS Bulletin 14 1972

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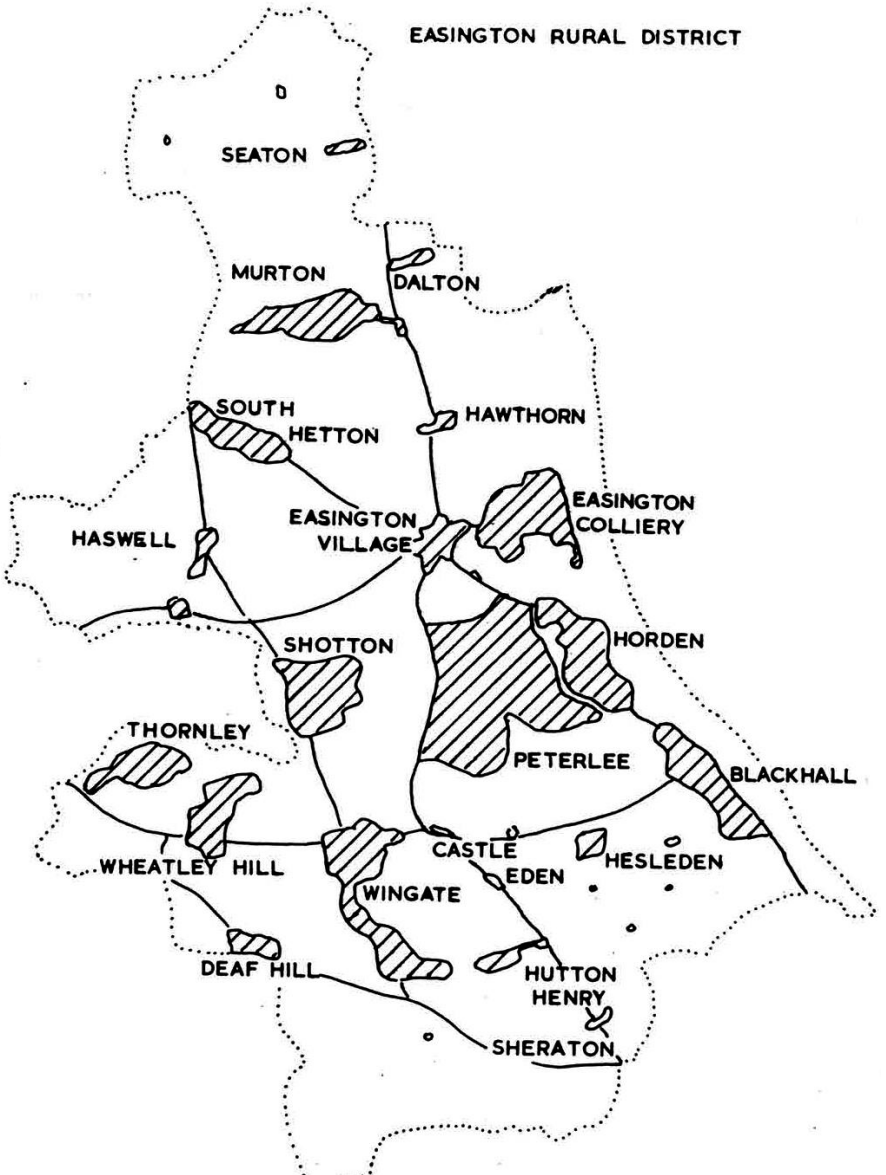
EASINGTON RURAL DISTRICT


EASINGTON RURAL DISTRICT
SEATON
MURTON
DALTON
SOUTH HETTON
HAWTHORN
EASINGTON COLLIERY
EASINGTON VILLAGE
HASWELL
SHOTTON
HORDEN
THORNLEY
PETERLEE
BLACKHALL
CASTLE EDEN
HESLEDEN
WHEATLEY HILL
WINGATE
DEAF HILL
HUTTON HENRY
SHERATON

EASINGTON RURAL DISTRICT

The Rural District of Easington occupies an area lying south of Sunderland, north of the Hartlepools and east of the escarpment of magnesian limestone. It is an area which is roughly triangular in shape, tapering towards the north. The rolling plateau surface slopes from about 450 feet at the escarpment to terminate in coastal cliffs of 100 feet or more. This general undulation is incised by numerous deep clefts from west to east as the denes cut through the Limestone to the sea.

In 1963 the Excepted District of Easington was created and it is generally considered for financial purposes that the region represents one tenth of County Durham. Within the Excepted District there are 85,000 people living in 30,000 houses which belong to 24 settlements as diverse as the village and parish of Nesbit with 10 inhabitants, and the New Town of Peterlee with 20,000 urban dwellers. These two communities are exceptional for the typical unit of settlement is the colliery village containing 4,000 - 5,000 people.

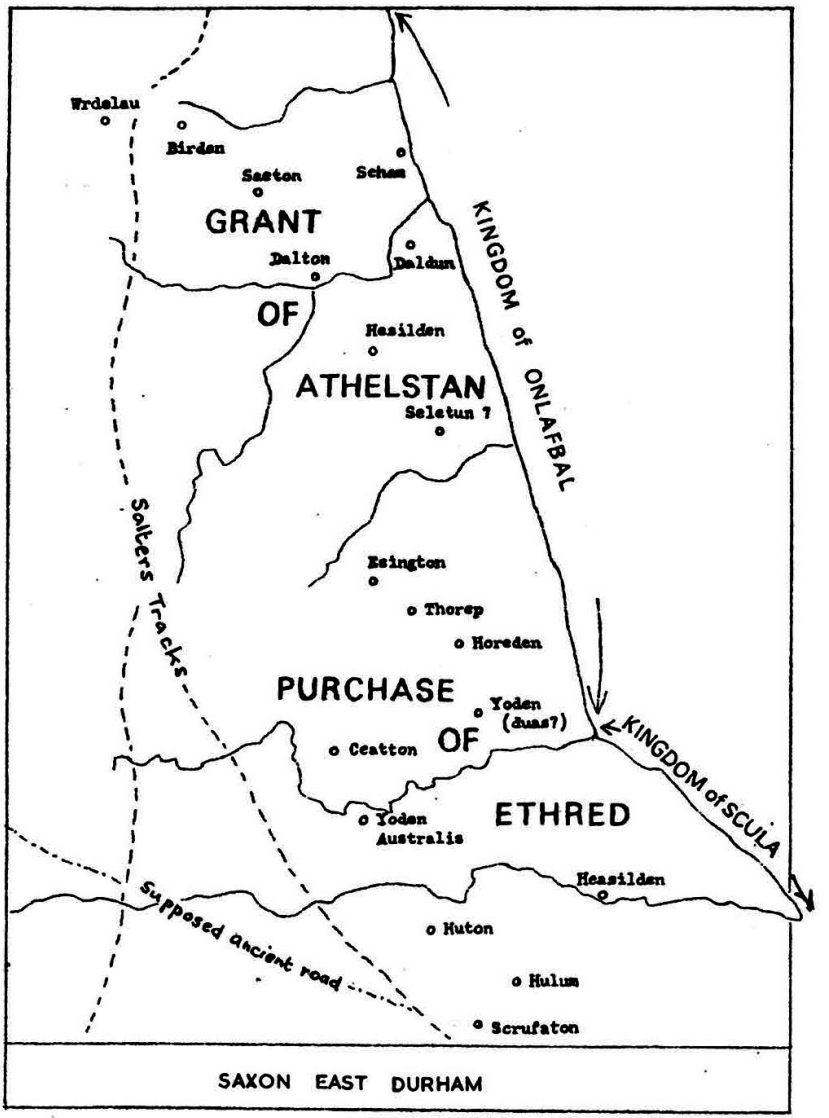
The area is little known and seemingly neglected by county historians. Perhaps this is because the historical prospect is not especially attractive. No ancient town or city compels archaeological investigation. Until 20 years ago there was no urban settlement at all. No convincing Roman remains have been found. The coins at Seaton, an armlet at Shotton Hall and the Lower part of an early Roman quern constitute the only Roman associations. There is no monastic ruin or religious centre. Despite the delightful name 'Monk Hesleden' for one of the villages, records contain merely the briefest mention of the 'Hall of Lesser Hesleden' in the 12th century. No one more exalted than upper middle class chose to settle here. Such castles as existed were purely domestic buildings or of recent construction. The area's most famous citizen, Rowland Burdon, was never knighted. There is no famous battle site. It would appear that the Scottish army marched across one corner of the region during the Civil War but without incident worthy of further

record. Until the recent visit of the present monarch the area had never been graced by any royal personage. To these contra indications of historical interest Bailey adds his overgeneralised description of the area as 'poor unfertile clay' and Surtees his 'bare and dreary aspect'. Nevertheless, detailed study is most rewarding.

The population seems to have been relatively dense in Neolithic times. No fewer than 10 burial grounds or flint chipping sites have been investigated (mainly by the late Dr. Trechmann of Castle Eden) and these have yielded many hundreds of flints, chips, knives, arrowheads and scrapers as well as bones and pottery and two very fine polished hand axes. The latter have been dated between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B.C. and have been identified as examples from Tievebulliagh Hill (Antrim) and Great Langdale (in Westmorland.)

There appears to be no relationship between neolithic sites and the present settlement pattern which consists of the agricultural hamlets probably dating back to Saxon times and certainly bearing Saxon names, with the superimposition of nineteenth century colliery villages and the twentieth century planned urban development of Peterlee. In 915 A.D. land grants to Elfred named Easington, Thorpe, Horden, Two Yodens (now Peterlee) Shotton, Castle Eden, Hulam, Hutton and Sheraton as well as two unidentifiable villages.

The Boldon book enables a fair picture of the Bishop's Norman villages of Burdon, Warden, Easington, and Shotton to be built up. There were chief villagers who held their land by rent and select services (e.g., Elfer of Burdon paid 8/- for two oxgangs of land and went on embassy service or delegations when required), villeins who held their land by a combination of cash dues, work on demesne land and communal contributions and cottagers who were of a slightly lower order holding less land but paying fewer services. The parishes of Dalton and Monk Hesleden were held by the Prior and subject to his Courts. These Court Rolls are especially interesting because they give very detailed accounts of feudal life.


Wrdelau
Birden
Saeton
Scham
GRANT
Dalton
Daldun
OF
Hesilden
ATHELSTAN
Seletun ?
KINGDOM of ONLAFBAL
Salters Tracks
Esington
Thorep
Horeden
PURCHASE
Yoden (duas?)
OF
Ceatton
KINGDOM of SCUILA
Yoden Australis
ETHRED
Hesilden
Supposed ancient road
Huton
Hulum
Scrufaton
SAXON EAST DURHAM

Tenants were bound to meet when summoned and a series of injunctions regulated communal affairs and the relationships of villagers to each other as well as to the Prior. There were provisions for the maintenance of soil, cultivation of crops, repair of buildings, protection of the mill, forge, pinfold, bakehouse, and brewery. There were fines for overburdening the land with cattle, trespassing, fighting, contempt of court, selling beer or poor-quality bread, playing ball, poaching and sexual misconduct. The village parson did not necessarily show a good example. "Margaret Calverd fined 12d. for misconduct with the chaplain". It is further recorded that "William de Marton, Vicar of Hesleden went into the Lord's Warren and took many hares". Fines were also paid for privileges or liberties, to be excused forest duties, to encroach upon the Lord's forest, to confirm charters, to recover land, to obtain judgements, for licence to trade, and to marry or remarry.

The deterioration of arable farming and the depopulation of the 14th century in consequence of Scottish wars and the Black Death are likewise illustrated by Court Rolls. In 1337 the Vicar of Dalton said his parish had been wasted by the Scots. Previously 15 villagers and 15 cottagers paid tithes; now only 5 villagers and 6 cottagers - all in a state of near beggary and unable to pay anything to the vicar. The Prior granted him 40/- annually for life.

The Black Death is pinpointed by the Bishop's Halmote records. At the Summer court at Easington in 1349 it was impossible for the Bishop's Steward to obtain tenants for the vacant holdings. Three holdings were let at ridiculously low prices because no man could take the land on any other terms. Large rent remissions were made in 1350 and because of extreme poverty no tenants were fined at the Easington Halmote that year. 12 deaths were recorded at Dalton and 18 at Hesleden.

It is recorded in Dalton in 1358 that the Husbandmen "were not to pasture any more cattle on the land of the cotmen than they did before the plague" but such

instructions failed in their purpose. The Hatfield Survey in 1380 showed for Easington a deficiency of 20 acres of demesne ''the windmill used to pay £13. 6s. 8d. now only £6. 13s. 4d … 140 acres in Newmore used to pay £4. 5s. 0d. is now just waste … 5 cottages in Thorpe are without tenants ... 16 cottages in Easington are without tenants … Radulph de Beaufo pays 20/- for land let in grass until someone comes to take it over".

Pasture farming was taking over, and this tendency had increased by the time of the Langley Survey in 1415. “Of 16 cottages in Thorpe which used to be worth £4. 19s. 0d. a year in rent 13 are used as herbage and rented for only 6/8d. a year; the other 3 lie waste. There is a certain place formerly in the tenure of Sibille which used to render 18d. per annum of which the investigators are ignorant. At Shotton the windmill used to render £6. 13s. 4d. afterwards £5. 13s. 4d.and now £3. 6s. 8d."

The 16th century was a time when land holding became more complicated. After the dissolution of the monasteries several large tracts of land were retained by the monarch for private distribution and many absentee landlords resulted in the fragmentation of estates. The political and religious disturbances of the 16th century to 18th century accentuated this and resulted in the impoverishment of several prominent families including the Trollops of Thornley, Conyers of Horden, the Maires of Hardwick and Hartbushes and the Davisons of Wingate. The senior branch of the Maires at Hardwick Hall has left us with one of the best priests hides in the North of England as well as direct links with the present Roman Catholic community at Hutton Henry.

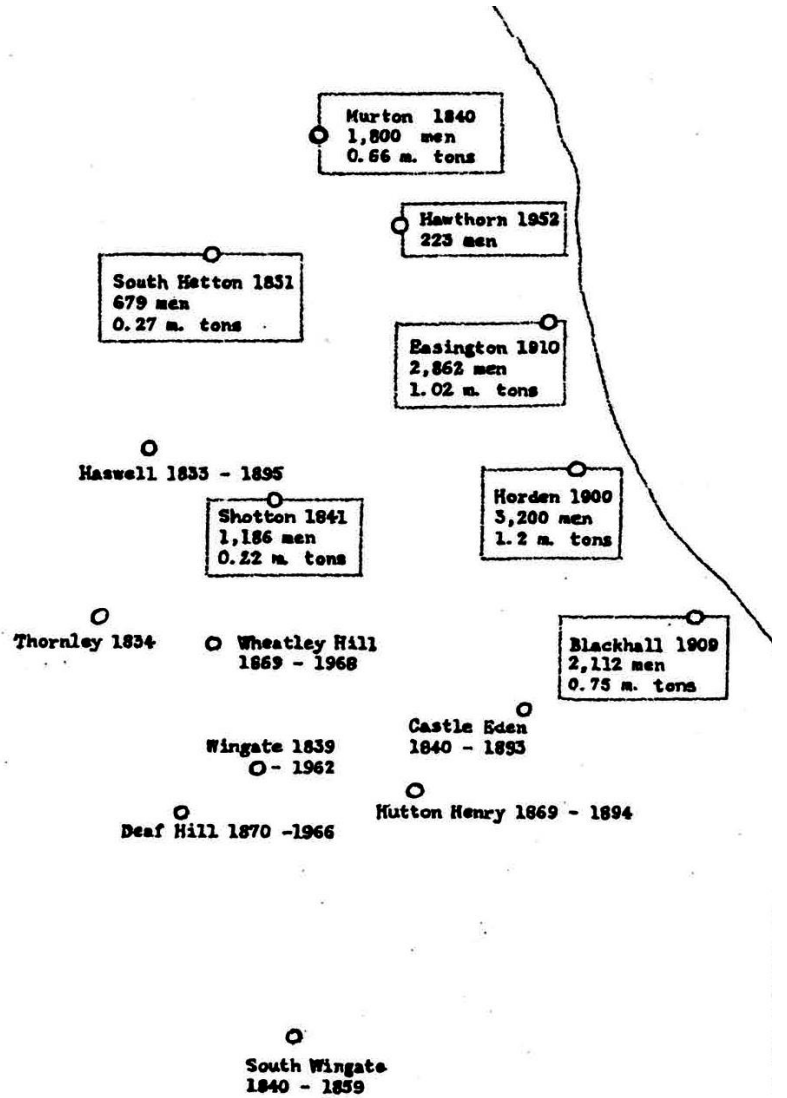
The first signs of industrial revolution did not take the form of coal mining. Some forty or fifty years before mining was introduced, the parish records of Castle Eden show a change to industrial activity and in 1798 nine out of eighteen births registrations which mentioned fathers' occupations were connected with a cotton factory. Bankruptcy due to the French Revolution closed the factory but a pattern of

dispersed settlement in the parish of Castle Eden was set and “the factory” and “the bleachery” are districts of the parish today.

It was long considered that, as the coal-bearing strata dipped under the magnesian limestone, the coal must deteriorate or nip out altogether, but as the better seams of the exposed coalfield in mid-Durham and on Teesside were being worked out, new ventures were sought. John Buddie proved the coal in the Hetton area in 1822 and Robert Stephenson became Hetton pit's engineer. The quantity and quality of coal in Hetton encouraged sinkings at South Hetton, Haswell, Murton, Seaton, Shotton, Thornley, Wingate, South Wingate and Castle Eden in the decade from 1830 to 1840.

Deeper shafts meant hotter working conditions. Foul air and explosions resulted from ventilation difficulties, but the main sinking problem was the water which seeped from the limestone creating feeders capable of delivering thousands of gallons per minute which had to be stemmed back with tubbing or pumped out. Nothing was certain. Bore holes put down close to each other produced quite different results. A shaft might cost £20,000 or £200,000 depending on particular difficulties. The critical depths were in the region of 50 fathoms with much less trouble above or below that depth. Murton Colliery became famous for the difficulty of its sinking, which was to take a total of 5 years to reach Main Coal. Its cost was about 5 times that of any other sinking in the area. By contrast the nearby colliery at Seaton encountered no difficulty and was quickly and cheaply sunk.

The colliery villages grew up alongside the older pattern of agricultural settlements, borrowed their names, then expanded to a size previously unknown in the area. An interesting aspect of research into the period concerns the places of origin of the miners which can be gleaned from the 1851 census enumerators' notebooks. South Wingate, a small colliery village in the south of the area had 618 inhabitants. Of these the birth places of 15 were not known. Of the rest 323 were from County


Murton 1840
1,800 men
0.66 m. tons
Hawthorn 1952
223 men
South Hetton 1851
679 men
0.27 m. tons
Easington 1910
2,862 men
1.02 m. tons
Haswell 1833 - 1895
Shotton 1841
1,186 men
0.22 m. tons
Horden 1900
5,200 men
1.2 m. tons
Thornley 1834
Wheatley Hill
1869 - 1968
Blackhall 1909
2,112 men
0.75 m. tons
Castle Eden
1840 - 1893
Wingate 1839
- 1962
Hutton Henry 1869 - 1894
Deaf Hill 1870 -1966
South Wingate
1840 - 1859

Durham. The majority of these were from the east, centre, and north of the county, especially Chester le Street, but 119 different places of origin are mentioned suggesting a widely spread, constantly shifting movement of people rather than a specific regional migration.

Of those born outside the County 120 (20% of the total population) were Northumbrian. 51 came from Yorkshire, 34 from Ireland, 23 from Cumberland, 11 from Scotland. No other region reached double figures. The absence of any Cornishman suggests that 1851 predates the mass exodus from the South-West which characterises some other settlements.

A debt book of Wingate Colliery dates the Cornish invasion with some accuracy. This book is a collection of 47 legal agreements between individual miners and the company concerning the debts incurred to bring wives and families from Cornwall in the late 1860's. A Transcription of one of these reads:

“Ralph Henderson agrees on the part of the owners of the Wingate Grange Colliery to advance to William Spears Four pounds for he conveying of his wife and family from Gunnerslake in Cornwall to Wingate and the said William Spears agrees to allow the said Ralph Henderson to deduct and retain from out of any wages due or to become due to the said William Spears the said sum of Four pounds so advanced and in default of him not having wages to the amount due to proceed against him according to Law”.

The book further records repayments at the rate of 10/- per pay.

The Cornishmen were eventually absorbed into the community, but Wingate had a Cornish chapel until recently and a large part of Murton Colliery is still known as 'Cornwall'. Immigrations such as these were usually associated with periods of prosperity. During the 1870's and 80's considerable expansion of existing villages

took place and new mines were sunk at Wheatley Hill, Deaf Hill, Station Town. Some collieries declined, were laid in, or closed permanently, but ample evidence for general expansion can be obtained by a comparison of the 1854 edition of the Ordnance Survey Map with that of 1898. When walking around these villages the buildings of this expansion can be distinguished from the original colliery dwellings by their construction of brick and slate rather than stone and tile.

At the beginning of the present century the shift of emphasis was eastwards. The coastal collieries of Easington, Horden and Blackhall had the benefit of technological advances so that water was controlled during sinking by cementation of freezing rather than by the more mechanical tubbing of years ago. Nevertheless, sinking was still protracted and difficult because these mines are the deepest in the coal field.

The present pattern of colliery villages was well established by 1914 and this period is fruitful for the consideration of some social and domestic aspects of life in the area. By 1905 every house in the district had some sort of sanitary convenience though many required improvement. The inferior, monotonously uniform houses faced onto unmade streets with little or no space at the back except for that allotted to privy or earth closet and coal house. Kitchen and human waste were collected by cart, at first by farmers who only came when no other tasks required their attention and later by more regular 'midden men'. Obnoxious smells were cloaked by ashes.

Ashes, post stone, or coal duff were used to fill ruts and potholes. Flies, mice and rats abounded - it was not yet universally recognised that they brought disease and death. Each summer had its epidemic of scarlet fever, diphtheria or occasionally typhoid. The wooden-slatted pantry ventilators opened on to back streets where, in the germ-laden air, bread and 'stotty cakes' cooled on windowsills or door steps.

The houses themselves could be spotless with ochre or red stepstone liberally applied to the entrance. The black leaded range, the gleaming brass of rails and candlesticks, and the shining steel of the heavy fender and fire irons all bore testimony to the slavish devotion of the women folk. The water supply - or lack of it - was a factor of prime importance. Private wells and water carts supplied this need at first, and for many years before each house had its own piped supply, the communal standpipe - as few in number as two to a village - served an essential purpose. water was carried in pails and the water pail always stood on the pantry shelf in readiness for domestic use. In the absence of children for water carrying, the lifting and carting of heavy pails was women's work. The rain butt, fed from the gutters, collected a welcome supply of soft water in this 'hard' area and was used for woollens and hair washing.

Essential furniture included the square deal table, centrally placed in the room with a wooden form standing behind it for the use of the children, two or three wooden chairs with a 'cracket' or stool, and a rocking chair. A large press, set of drawers or desk bed completed the heavy furniture of this room. The heavy mantel shelf, with its brass or tasselled border hiding an extra airing rail, would be decorated with photographs, candlesticks, china dogs, pottery souvenirs or other knick-knackery. The floor, scrubbed clean, was covered with homemade mats - 'clippy' or 'hooky' according to the preference of the housewife or the ability of her helpers. The wooden mat frames would perhaps stand in the corner, or if there was 'a mat in' the assembled construction would be poised across two chair backs with a supply of clippings and a number of wooden handled, shining steel proggers ready for anyone who wished to give assistance. Reward for this endeavour was a supply of home-made toffee already broken up in its tray.

The home was very much the women's world and work was not often undertaken by women outside the home. Families were large and took some looking after. The men of the house came home black with coaldust, tired and ravenously hungry. While they washed in front of the fire, their pit clothes would be 'dadded' against the wall outside in readiness for the next day. Cooking without modern aids was almost a continuous process as menfolk came for their main meal at different times and traditionally did not lift a finger to help until fed and washed. To its eternal shame, Murton Colliery takes credit for the introduction of the night shift to this coal field, to recoup some of the £500,000 lost during its sinking.

The men folk spent most of their off-duty time talking about, thinking about, and dreaming about the pit. This was very natural, as the chances were very high that every male companion was similarly employed. The knocker-up was the first of the fraternity to rise each morning. The other village dignitary was the crakeman who wandered the rows later in the day announcing colliery news or union meetings. There was not a lot of spare time and each man spent his according to his tastes - it might be over drinks at the club or pub or playing fives, football, quoits or billiards; the less energetic hobby of pigeon keeping attracted groups of men around the landing area in front of the “crees”, some leaning against the wooden supports but more, by habit, on their “hunkers”, a pose adopted of necessity when resting from their daily work. If men “were chapel” then bible class, playing in the. brass band, or membership of the ambulance team would be more likely to appeal as a pastime. Otherwise gambling at pitch and toss, racing whippets or greyhounds, or poaching with tamed ferrets were the only possible activities.

Children did not remain young and irresponsible for long. Unlike their modern counterparts, the least sophisticated activities seemed to keep them absorbed for long periods. They played games, romped the woods and scrambled over the tips: boys bowled girths and made “titchy burners”, girls played at houses and at infinite

varieties of hopscotch: holidays away from home were unknown and the larger part of a child's programme would be filled by helping father and mother or working for someone else who might be prepared to give them coppers in exchange. Cavilling day at the pit and Royal Oak Day were single holidays perhaps enlivened as a treat by a visit to the magic lantern show or, later, to the “penny gaff”. The short childhood terminated abruptly with the labour exam where a minimum literacy test was a premature passport to an adult world of toil. This was a school leaving certificate of a special kind. The cleverer the child the sooner he could dispense with his education. Apart from such amusement as could be obtained within the family group, entertainment of a spectacular nature tended to be infrequent; there were occasional visits to town - by train or on foot; travelling theatres and circuses and shows called at all but the tiniest of hamlets; village flower and vegetable exhibitions were annual events which evoked keen competition and much interest.

Such were the conditions of the closed society of the mining community at the dawn of the twentieth century. Improvements in health, sanitation, communications, entertainment, recreational facilities, housing and education were vitally necessary but almost entirely dependent upon the philanthropy or conscience of the mine owners, the local gentry, the Sanitary Committee and the Medical Officers.

W.A. MOYES