

# Wheatley Hill History Club

Volume 14 Issue 3

July 2011

## JOIN QUEEN VICTORIA FOR TEA

Queen Victoria will be attending our Family History Day in September. She will arrive in her horse-drawn carriage at about 10.30am together with her friends, including John Brown.

They will look around our exhibitions before taking tea at about 11.00am.

If you would like to meet the Queen, make sure you are at this event.

## LIMESTONE LANDSCAPES

Wheatley Hill and Thornley will be taking part in preparing a Village Atlas, which involves exploring the landscape before coal-mining, taking an overview of existing buildings and previous settlements etc.

The Mother's Club will be hosting an introduction to the Limestone Landscape project at their meeting on 10 August - everyone is welcome - it will be very exciting for local historians - keep up to date - regular updates will appear in this newsletter.

## WHEATLEY HILL BOYS SCHOOL CYCLING CLUB MEMBERS

John Purvis	Edward Fulcher
Edward Lawson	Les Alderton
Robert Dawson	Willi Lincoln
Ken Barker	Alan Muir
Alex Forbes	Tony Carr
John Carr	Derek Hall
Les Barker	Joe Bell
Barry Dixon	George Battye
Les Charlton	Bob Gutcher
G Tupling	

**LEADER: Mr V Brown**

## LOCAL FAMILY HISTORY DAY 24 SEPTEMBER 9.30am - 1.30pm

Arrangements are progressing well for the above event. We have a number of local families who are keen to show their family history research and a number of organisations who are willing to be represented. These include Durham County Records Office, The Cleveland Family History Society, Northumberland & Durham Family History Society, Durham Records Online, Clayport Library, The North East War Memorials Project and The Durham Mining Museum.

This will be a unique event - a first for East Durham - an opportunity to look at records which have previously never been in the public domain and also an opportunity to make contact at first hand with families in your family tree.

Among the records which have not previously been available for public scrutiny are: A list of Marriages, Baptisms and Burials that took place at St Bartholomews Church, Thornley between 1890 and 1912. Together with burial information from Wheatley Hill Cemetery, War Casualties, Absent Voters, Gallantry Awards, Colliery Fatalities and School Registers from Wheatley Hill School, this will be a great day for family historians.

See our leaflet with this newsletter for more details.

## OPENING OF INFANTS SCHOOL 1912

Next year is the 100th anniversary of the opening of the infants school by Peter Lee. The Heritage Centre have managed to acquire the brass plaque which announced the opening ceremony in 1912.

In order to recognise this important occasion in the history of our village, the Heritage Centre will be organising an exhibition of Education in Wheatley Hill and should like to display a range of memorabilia related to education.

The cycling club log book will be included in the exhibition along with the 8mm film mentioned later in this newsletter. If you have items which you feel would be interesting regarding your own (or your parents/grandparents) education, please let someone at the Heritage Centre know.

## ARTICLES FROM THE THORNLEY PARISH MAGAZINE NOVEMBER 1899

We are thankful to possess a band of willing workers who give so much time to the distribution of pure, sound literature in the shape of our Parish Magazine. Our circulation is improving but it is not half of what it ought to be. We give one of the best printed, illustrated and papered magazines produced for a penny, and until our sales are as large as the trashy novelette papers that are turned out by the ton, we, who believe in pure literature, should not fold our hands and say, "enough".

Magazines may be had from the following at 1d per month: Mrs Barker, Miss Golightly, Thornley; Mrs Bickerton, Mrs Ware, Miss Watson, Mrs Atkinson, Mrs Richardson, Mrs Barber, Mrs J and Mrs M Lonsdale, Wheatley Hill, Mrs Hutchinson, Wingate Lane.

## MAY 1899

The ladies of the Sewing Meetings at Wheatley Hill had a very pleasant trip to Jesmond on Monday. The day was delightfully fine and the Dene, even at this early season, looked lovely. The magnificent Church of St George's was also visited and greatly admired; and of course the Newcastle shops were not forgotten.

The next sewing meetings will be given by Mrs Robert Armstrong of 7 Grainger Street, Mrs McBriar of Wolmerhausen Street and Mrs White of Ford Street.

### CONTACT DETAILS

**Chair:** 01429 821820

**Treasurer:** 01429 823198

**E:** history.club2@btinternet.com

**Web Site:** wheatley-hill.org.uk

### ACQUISITIONS

Photograph negatives from Wheatley Hill Boys' School

8mm film from School Camp 1951 - Wheatley Hill Boy's School

### DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

27 July The British Steel Archive

**SATURDAY 17 SEPTEMBER 2.30**

**Gilesgate Parish Centre - Railway Bridges**

28 September My House - The Final Chapter

26 October Brancepeth Castle

**SATURDAY 24 SEPTEMBER**

**Local Family History Day - Wheatley Hill WMC**

### WHEATLEY HILL HERITAGE CENTRE

Thanks to the magnificent efforts of the village and matched funding from a funding agency, the £10,000 necessary to carry out urgent repairs to the 1937 banner has been raised and the banner is now with the restorer in Stoke.

The efforts of groups and individuals in Wheatley Hill who have made this necessary will be documented and left in the archives in The Heritage Centre so that future generations can see how proud the people of Wheatley Hill still are about their mining heritage.

### WHEATLEY HILL AND ITS COLLIERY

Wheatley Hill Colliery saw a boom-time in trade during the First World War and the colliery developed rapidly. The pit's Low Main 'best' was judged the equal of any coal in the country and was always in demand on the London Coal Market for steam and domestic purposes. High wages were earned at Wheatley Hill pit in the immediate post-war years and more men taken on. The village began to grow rapidly and extended westward away from the pithead and the grime.

To provide accommodation for their workmen, the owners, the Weardale Coal Company, sponsored and subsidised a house-purchasing scheme. They built 72 neat and trim terraced houses on what was then the complete extremity of the village - known now as South View and East View. These were offered to their workmen at a very advantageous rate. A weekly sum was to be kept off the prospective owners' wages for a period of 14 years.

Interestingly, there was no rush to take advantage of the scheme. The miners' inbred suspicion of the owners caused them to be cautious. However the 'scheme houses' as they became known, proved to be a wonderful investment for those that took the plunge.

Easington Rural District Council also embarked upon an ambitious building programme during this period and together with a spate of private building, within a decade of the First World War, Wheatley Hill had taken on a completely new appearance, and had also practically doubled both in size and population.

The village at this time took a strong pride in itself. There was great support for football and cricket teams and a keen interest was shown by all in the activities of the colliery band and the male voice choir. The colliery management, particularly Mr Joe Simpson, the manager, had a benevolent attitude towards all village affairs and any sportsman or instrumentalist was always assured of a job at Wheatley Hill pit!

During the early 1920's the village also began to earn the reputation for being 'red'. Several of our more prominent Lodge Officials were noted for the extreme political views. The Daily Worker was sold from door and Wheatley Hill began to be spoken of in the same breath as Chopwell, a village which was known as 'Little Moscow'. In order to enhance its left-wing image the Wheatley Hill Miners' Lodge invited Will Lawther from Chopwell, to be their checkweighman. Lawther would later be knighted, but at this time had been unseated as MP for Barnard Castle in the 1931 General Election, and at the time he was offered the Wheatley Hill job, was unemployed. Will Lawther was regarded as one of the most militant members of the Labour Party's left wing, and this, coupled with the fact that he had served a prison sentence for his activities during the General Strike, made him doubly acceptable to the Wheatley Hill miners.

However, Will Lawther failed to make any impression at all upon this village. He evidently considered a cabin on Wheatley Hill pit heap a poor exchange for seat in Westminster, and remained disinterested in the men and the village. His expected drive and dynamism didn't materialise and many were disappointed in him. There was also a clash of personalities - his co-checkweighman, Teddy Cain, was secretary of the Miners' Lodge, and was not a man to play second fiddle to anyone. Teddy knew the local ground and in the frequent clashes between the two, the local man inevitably came out on top.

Lawther stayed at Wheatley Hill for about two years and departed to an unremarkable agent's job at Durham.

**WHEATLEY HILL BOYS SCHOOL  
CYCLING CLUB TRIP TO YORK - DECEMBER 1951**

**By A Muir**

On Saturday 22 December the school cycling club started out on its Christmas Tour. There were six of us. When we set off, at half past seven it was quite dark so we had to use our lights, it was just starting to rain so we donned our capes. The first six or seven miles passed uneventful and we switched off our lights. It was still raining and we had a slight head-wind against us. We passed on through Wolviston and then onto Norton and then, our first resting, Stockton. Even if we had not wanted to stop we would have had to, for coming through the outskirts of Stockton Mr Brown had a crash with Barry, through no fault of his own, a bus approaching the stops, instead of slowing down to allow them to go ahead, speeding speeded up, cut in front of them and stopped dead. The result, Batty (me) pulled up dead. Mr Brown hadn't a chance, his cyclometer in Batty's back wheel ripping out the eight spokes and the cyclometer itself was smashed beyond repair. We stopped to repair the damage as well as we could, and also for a cup of tea to warm us up, for in the constant rain it was pretty cold. We passed on through Yarm then onto Thirsk. Five miles past Yarm Batty thought that he could not proceed any farther so Mr Brown had to turn back with him. At Thirsk we had a hot meal which cost 2/6 but was worth it for it warmed us thoroughly. Again we set off, this time for York. It was still raining but the dinner had put new life into us and we had had a good rest. After leaving Thirsk we rode onto Easingwold. It was then a straight run to York. We arrived at York roundabout at five o'clock, just in nice time for the hostel opening. The rain had practically petered out with no wind. We unloaded our bikes of their kit and went in. We booked four beds then went up and made them. Then we prepared tea, we had a grand time with a couple of Christmas puddings with custard to finish off with. It had stopped raining after tea and I had a parcel to deliver to relatives so off we went, Les and I. We hadn't the foggiest idea where to look and had to ask our way there. Finally after about one hour of twisting narrow streets and a maze of one way streets, we found the house only to find the occupants out. We returned to the hostel and after a bit fun on an old piano and a couple of games of table tennis, we went to bed thoroughly tired.

Next morning we arose to find a ground frost and a little mist. We got out our steeds checked them over the then set out; Les and I to deliver the parcel and Bob and Jack to explore. This time, as we knew the way, we had little trouble finding the house for which we were looking. We were asked to stay to dinner and we readily agreed for it was very cold outside. My cousin Garry supplied us with a pile of comics to read and a couple of games to play. About 3 o'clock we had a cup of tea and a pile of egg sandwiches, then they gave us a few more sandwiches for afterwards and also a couple of tins of cherries, sardines and beans. The mist had lifted now and we decided to do a little sight seeing. We visited the museum, the castle, the city walls, the Minster and had a look at the racecourse. At the museum we we learned and saw many things such as a collection of Roman relics including a statue of a Roman soldier. The castle was built in 1068/69. The remains today consists of two motte mounds. On one is built Cliffords Tower built in the 14th century. Parts of the city wall still stands today. There's 200 yards of it near the castle. Many treasures, books and manuscripts are shown at the Minster including The Horn of Ulphas. The coloured glass windows are gradually being replaced after removal during the war. This old glass, the greatest amount in one building, is contained in about 120 windows.

The racecourse on The Knaves Mire has been used for more than two centuries. It is situated about a mile from the centre of the town. The grandstand was built in 1731.

Next day we set off for home. Just as I led my bike out of the shed I ran one tyre over a thorn causing a puncture. I took my bike back into the shed and set about mending the puncture. When I had fixed it Jack offered to blow it up for me. He blew it up so hard that in the end he blew a hole straight through the patch. About 11.30 we set off from York after mending the two punctures. It was again raining, with a slight wind against us. We went back the way we came passing through Thirsk and Stockton. Before we got to Stockton, Bob had a puncture which proved very troublesome. About 4.15 we rolled into Wingate. The rain was pouring down it was dark. Bob who was leading us single-file had a nasty accident when he collided with a woman who had stepped straight in front of him. The result was Bob had to go to hospital for a week and the woman longer. I came up for Mr Brown who set off for Wingate at once. I then went home very tired and more than a bit shaken by the accident.

*This is the final entry in the log book of the cycling club. I would be interested in your comments about the articles which have appeared in the newsletter regarding these first-hand experiences of school boys in another world. A world in which pre-16 years olds took a great deal of responsibility for themselves and where a single teacher was given the responsibility for their well-being away from home and was willing to give up his free time to offer these opportunities. The experiences given to these young men from a colliery village were potentially life-changing. Throughout the articles there is evidence of strong camaraderie and taking individual and group responsibility, which is highlighted in the way these boys took responsibility for 'leading' the group when their teacher was forced to return home. There is no sign of the "I'm All Right Jack" attitude which inflicts many of our young people today. The simple pleasures of playing table tennis, reading comics etc was taken for granted and had a part to play in building up relationships which would last a life-time. The very fact that six of them set off three days before Christmas on a bike ride, is testimony to their commitment to a hobby. It would be interesting to meet one of these boys in order to find out what lasting effect these experiences had on them and their lives.*

*Thanks to Vic Brown (History Club Member) and leader of the Cycling Club for bringing this very important document to our notice. It will now be kept for future generations in our History Club archives.*

# ADVERTISING

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