

25TH BIRTHDAY POSTPONED

By now we should have been looking at photos of our 25th birthday celebrations taken by Keith Gilson at our afternoon tea in Wheatley House on 18 March 2020. We should have been discussing the 20-page commemoration booklet we had all been presented with at the celebration, reminiscing on our achievements, the people in our photographs, where we had been, who had supported us etc. We should have been full of praise for our entertainers, Fools Gold and Mrs Baxter's Bakery for the catering.

We didn't get to the afternoon tea as it was cancelled for everyone's safety. We didn't receive the commemorative booklet or take part in the afternoon tea and we didn't see the entertainment or have our photos taken BUT, once this unique situation is resolved, whenever that might be, we will hold our afternoon tea and Fools Gold will entertain us and we'll do all the things the History Club committee had planned for our Big Day!! That's something to look forward to.

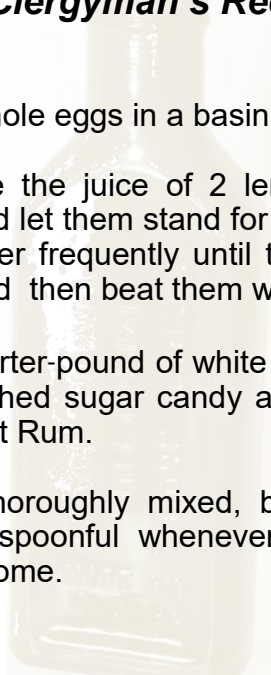
On the day of the celebration—Wednesday 18 March—I received a lovely surprise. The committee, Joan, George and Billy sent Sheila and I bouquets of flowers to thank us for keeping things going for the History Club over the years—me as Chair and Secretary and Sheila as Treasurer. We were both delighted with this very unexpected gift.

These are very strange times, never before has there been such a restriction on our movements, even during the two world wars but there's no doubt we will eventually be back together as a local history community. Stay safe everyone and look after yourselves.



Recipe for Cough Mixture (1910) *A Clergyman's Recipe*

- 1 Put 3 whole eggs in a basin
- 2 Squeeze the juice of 2 lemons over the eggs and let them stand for 3 days, turning them over frequently until the shells have dissolved then beat them well.
- 3 Add quarter-pound of white sugar or better still crushed sugar candy and a gill of the very best Rum.
- 4 When thoroughly mixed, bottle and take one teaspoonful whenever the cough is troublesome.



Wheatley Hill History Club



NEW POP UP BANNER

The last time we bought a pop-up banner for the History Club they were heavy and difficult to carry around, and whilst our old one is still very attractive, we decided to invest in a lightweight banner.

It got its first outing on Saturday 14 March and the local history fair at Bowburn Community Centre, and it looked very attractive.

Images have been placed around an 1840's map of the area but not in accurate locations. The map is just a backdrop.

CONTACT DETAILS

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W: wheatley-hill.org.uk



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ALL MEETINGS START AT 11.00AM

NO MORE MEETINGS UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE

History Club Annual Subscriptions for Membership **DUE AT THE NEXT MEETING** **£6.00**

Engel's England

By Matthew Engel, 2014

The following is an (edited) extract from the above book from the author's three-year travel through England. He travelled through thirty-nine counties and included Wheatley Hill in his final write-up in the County Durham section. The book was loaned to me by History Club member Brian Maddison, who felt it could be shared in this newsletter.

"The dog track was below the village, the other side from the closed-down pit, just below the closed-down pub. It comprised some of the ugliest buildings in the palatinate of Durham; a mixture of breeze-blocks and Meccano. The kennels looked as though they had burned down—and they had! Nearby were several tethered ponies, munching in reasonable contentment. Sometimes they get raced on a Sunday.

The greyhounds arrived in white vans. Nothing was fancy here except the mechanical hare that was covered in pink, green and blue and looked like a dead parrot. The prize money was £15 for the winner in most races and a fiver for second. Everyone knew everyone (except me). Everyone seemed to know what was going on (except me). Money changed hands but there were no receipts, everyone was known by their name or nickname, including me. By the end of the night I was the 'Welsh author'.

Since the pit closed, the population of Wheatley Hill has halved. The workingmens club and the Chonshie's Club have both faded, especially since the smoking ban. The bowling green was terminally vandalised long ago and the brass band packed up. Before electronic payouts, there was always a queue at the post office first thing for benefit payments. Many men are known to have been on the sick for years.

A villager told me that Wheatley Hill's decline began long before the pit closure. The Attlee government wanted to shift people into the new towns of Peterlee and Newton Aycliffe and banned expansion in villages like Wheatley Hill which were classed as Category D, a term still used casually in Durham. By 1964 121 of the country's villages were placed on the planning equivalent of Death Row—new developments banned, and property that did become available was subject of compulsory purchase and demolition.

Women went out to work in low-paid flexi-jobs like supermarkets or care homes so the old family life collapsed too—a more extreme version of what happened in households of Britain. There is not much left on Wheatley Hill's Front Street but there are plenty of takeaways. The old Miners Welfare has been converted into a community centre—the Greenhills Centre where they offer lunches, belly-dancing, boxercise and over-50's fitness classes with tai chi and aerobics".

I know some of you will be disappointed by Matthew Engel's account of our village, but I have provided only an edited version. He was advised to come here by Mike Amos, formerly of The Northern Echo. Matthew's experiences at the dog track formed a major part of the section on Wheatley Hill and it appears no-one he spoke to mentioned the community spirit that still exists here.

NOTEBOOK OF THOMAS T HARRISON OF SHERBURN, COUNTY DURHAM

Over the next few newsletters, I will be transcribing Mr Harrison's notebook. He is not from Wheatley Hill, and as far as I know, there aren't any reference to Wheatley Hill but the notebook is fascinating as it is set in the late 1800/early 1900's. It contains what Mr Harrison thought important at the time and for that reason I believe it is an important document in the history of our area. Mr Harrison appears to be a religious man, favouring the Methodist religion. I have made a direct copy of the text and haven't changed any spelling errors.

The Great Strike or lock out as it was called was in the year 1892 lasted from March until June. Masters asked at first for 10 per cent reduction, men refused to give it. Masters then asked for 5 per cent off in March and other 5 per cent to come off in May making 3 months between the two reductions or they would accept 7½ per cent reduction as a final rather than have the pits stopped and they gave us all our notices. There was a ballot which was returned by a great majority for a strike, we worked our notices up and all hands came out—miners, enginemen, mechanics, cokemen. We stood for 8 weeks before we would give the Federation Board any power to have an interview with the masters and the masters making no offer in the meantime. When the Federation Board (*Miners Federation of Great Britain*) met with the masters, the result was the masters asked for a 13½ per cent reduction and nothing less. They said this was because it would take investment to put the pits right. The Federation Board offered them 7½ percent but the masters refused to accept, they refused to accept a 10 per cent reduction—they would only accept a 13½ per cent reduction on our wages.

The Bishop of Durham became involved and invited the Federation and Owners to a meeting at Auckland Castle. The meeting was held on Wednesday 1 June 1892 and a settlement was agreed with the masters accepting the Federations offer of a 10 per cent reduction on the miners pay after a strike of 12 weeks.

Within three days the horses were put down the pit and work commenced on Whit Monday. Deputies went in on the Sunday night in the first shift to see if the pits were in good order.

Robert Houseman, colliery smith at Lady Durham Pit died very sudden on Tuesday in the forenoon the 19th October 1897. He had been at work on the previous day from 6 o'clock in the morning until 7 o'clock at night, he took an appoplexy (*sic*) fit in bed about 4 o'clock on the Tuesday morning and died before 12 o'clock. He was a bit strong man but had a slight stroke four years previous to his death.

Thomas Mustard and Richard Caldwell both died in March 1899

John Bennett, Engineman at Sherburn pit died Thursday 11th 1903 buried on Sunday at the Hallgarth, Pittington.

Jane Lowery, wife of John Lowery of Sherburn Station was killed on the NER near Durham Elvet Station on Saturday 10 September 1904.

Mr William Grayson commenced to travel for Taylor the Photographer on Monday 14 January 1901.

J E Newton Harrison commenced to travel for the P Insurance Society on Saturday 26 Jan 1901.

Joseph Harrison received his notice at Lady Durham pit on Wednesday 23 Jan 1901. He has removed to Craghead on Wednesday 27 February 1901.

Wednesday 6 February 1901. An opportunity afforded me and I made use of it by making myself known to Mr G H Hornsby.

Monday 2 October 1901 John Montrose, gamekeeper for Mr Coulson of Sherburn Hall was out shooting with other two young men when one of them, William Dickinson, after done shooting was unloading his gun, he slipped his thumb off the hammer of the gun and it went off and shot Montrose dead at his side. It was brought in accidentally which of course it was.

W Grayson commenced work as under keeker at Sherburn Hill West pit on Monday 7 July 1902. He also commenced shop keeping a week previous but is keeping the shop on.

The above came to be keeker at Sherburn House pit in place of J Adamson in 1908 or 1909.

Hugh Harper, a single man found hanging on a tree by the becksides near Sherburn House pit on Sunday 5 January 1908.



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