

# 30 YEARS

## 30th Birthday Edition

# 1 YEAR

### LIGHT INSTALLATION ART

**For our 30th Birthday** The History Club will be taking part in creating a unique giant glass book telling our own stories working along-side a light installation artist.

The work we produce will be collated and illuminated as part of a much bigger installation resembling a book which will be displayed at The Story (new record office).

As well as our own session on Wednesday 29 January, the artist worked alongside primary school children in similar sessions on Monday 27 and Tuesday 28 January at Peterlee and St Godric's who are also contributing to the giant glass book.



What a great way to celebrate our 30th birthday

## 30TH BIRTHDAY CELEBRATION 1995—2025

On Wednesday, 26 March we will officially celebrate our 30th birthday.

We will be having a knife and fork buffet provided by The Ginger Dog, Coxhoe, in Wheatley House starting at **12.00 mid-day, NOT 11am as we usually do.**

After the meal we will be entertained by Fools Gold, a husband and wife acoustic music duo.

If you paid a 2024 membership to The History Club there will be no charge for this event. It is free as a thank you for your loyal support. If you were not a member but would still like to come along to join us, the cost will be £15.00 per head.

It is crucial that I hear from everyone whether they want to come to this event *or not*. Please don't assume that if you don't reply that you will be included. I need to hear from you.

I will also need to know if you have any special dietary requirements so that I can pass that information to the caterer.

**Contact me (Margaret) by:**

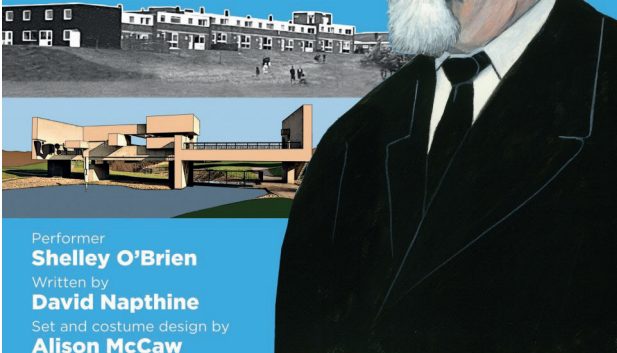
**Mobile: 07977 546 332**

**Email: [history.club2@btinternet.com](mailto:history.club2@btinternet.com)**

**Phone: 01429 820 813**



# THE MAN THEY NAMED A TOWN AFTER



Performer  
**Shelley O'Brien**  
Written by  
**David Napthine**  
Set and costume design by  
**Alison McCaw**

**Thursday 7 November, 6.30pm**

**Tickets £2** (children under 12 free when accompanied by an adult)

**The Lubetkin Theatre**

East Durham College, Willerby Grove, Peterlee SR8 2RN



Produced by Wheatley Hill History Club in association with Durham County Council Community Arts

## WOW!!

In our 30-year history, this was our biggest and most adventurous project yet!!

- £25,000 in funding from six different funders including HLF
- attracted a lot of media attention Including an interview on Radio Tees
- worked with six primary schools
- designed an exhibition about the Life and times of Peter Lee
- introduced children to Wheatley Heritage Centre, our exhibition and Peter Lee's grave
- planned and launched a new book about his life
- worked with a theatre company and a script writer to tell the story of Peter Lee
- attended three matinee performances at The Lubetkin Theatre, Peterlee to see the reaction of the children
- attended the evening performance on Thursday 7 November at 6.30



Actress Shelley O'Brien & Script Writer, David Napthine

## REVIEWS FROM THE AUDIENCE

*"I must say I didn't know what to expect from the play about Peter Lee. It turned out to be a spirited and uplifting monologue by the spirit of Peter Lee's wife, Alice Lee, (played by Shelley O'Brien), who talked to the audience whilst waiting for the return of her husband's spirit before they both returned to their grave. It was an entertaining and imaginative way of conveying the facts about Peter Lee's life, and hopefully enabled school children (and adults) to better understand his many achievements in improving the living standards of mining communities. He succeeded despite the many disadvantages of his early life, and the naming of Peterlee, the town, is a well deserved tribute to his memory".*

**Jan McGraw, History Club Member**

*"The performance centred upon a single female actor Shelley O'Brien, conducting a monologue encompassing Peter Lee's life experiences and great achievements as a Trade Union and Political Leader, in a most unique and very interesting manner.*

*The actor performed as the ghostly spirit of Alice Lee – Peter's wife – waiting for the return of Peter from one of his apparently ghostly wanderings around his "domain" away from the "family grave plot" in a most unique setting – Wheatley Hill Cemetery. This cemetery - the creation of which not surprisingly, can be attributed directly to Peter and where Peter Lee and his wife Alice chose to be interred - in the village of Wheatley Hill, the village and community which steadfastly and proudly claims him as its/their own and where Peter Lee's outstanding political career began quite humbly as a Parish Councillor and developed ultimately to become Chairman of Durham County Council – the first Labour Party controlled County Council in Britain.*

*Regarding the performance of Shelley O'Brien: She was word perfect, delivered her lines written for her in a most factual, informative and at times with just the correct balance of humour, in a what was a local dialect without it being too excessive, maintaining the interest of the audience throughout. As the performance developed, there was a feeling of anticipation that the focus of the theatrical play – Peter Lee – would make an appearance from the wings in answer to Alice's plaintiff calls but no doubt as intended, it wasn't to be!*

*This theatrical performance was most intriguing and proved to be a novel way of portraying the life of our Local Hero and dignitary – Peter Lee.*

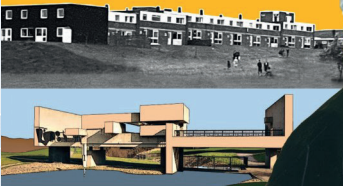
*We found it most informative and enjoyable and concluded the project of Peter Lee, the Man, the Town in a most professional and fitting accolade to all involved in what has been a most important heritage project in praise of an adopted son, a genuine "working class hero", of whom we are so proud. Kudos to all involved".* **Gordon Tempest & Jennifer Champley, History Club Members**

*Very cleverly done to get the aim of the story over. I was captivated from start to finish"* **Susan Furness Shadforth WI & History Club member**



You are cordially invited to join us for the premiere performance of

# THE MAN THEY NAMED A TOWN AFTER



a play about the life  
and times of Peter Lee

Performer  
**Shelley O'Brien**

Written by  
**David Napthine**

Set and costume design by  
**Alison McCaw**

**Thursday 7 November, 6.30pm**

**The Lubetkin Theatre**

East Durham College, Willerby Grove, Peterlee SR8 2RN



Produced by Wheatley Hill History Club in association with Durham County Council Community Arts

## MORE REVIEWS OF THE SHOW

"A very enjoyable evening was had at the Lubetkin Theatre in East Durham College watching a play produced as part of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peterlee new town. Peter Lee: The Man They Named a Town After is an important story to tell about the miners' leader and trade unionist, Peter Lee. This was done in an engaging, informative and entertaining way by the Mad Alice Theatre Company who developed the play in partnership with Wheatley Hill History Club, Durham County Council Community Arts and local primary schools.

The play was a 'one-woman show' with Alice Lee (Peter Lee's wife) telling the story of the life and career of her husband. The premise of the play was that on their wedding anniversary (every leap year) Peter and Alice are able to venture from their graves in Wheatley Hill cemetery and meet up. However, this time Peter had gone exploring and Alice spent the whole play trying to find him so they could enjoy their anniversary together. This set the scene for Alice to be able to tell the audience about various key events in Peter's life including his work in (numerous) pits in East Durham and beyond, his travels to many different countries, his determination to become educated and importantly the tireless work he did to improve the lives, and living conditions, of miners and families in some East Durham villages, which included building roads to connect villages and improving sanitation. Alice told us about the

challenges that he, and the family faced and the conviction and steely determination that Peter had in dealing with powerful coal owners. This required a strong character which meant he was not always an easy man to live with, or for others to deal with, but an essential attribute given the context he faced at that time. We learned about Peter's impressive political and trade union life from parish council to Chairman of Durham County Council, General Secretary of the Durham Miners Association and eventually President of the Miners Federation of Great Britain. Shelley O'Brien (as Alice Lee) was engaging and brilliant at telling the stories with both content and humour aplenty and the historical context provided throughout the play was both informative and interesting. Peter eventually returned after a bus journey to Peter Lee – the town named after him – and, after a scolding from Alice, they both returned to their graves until the next leap year.

The only downside to report was that this was a one-off evening performance. More people should get to see this play to know about the story of Peter Lee and the important contribution he made to social change in the East Durham coalfield and beyond".

**Dr Carol Devanney, University of Teesside and Wheatley Hill Heritage Centre Volunteer**

## *I believe it's appropriate to start Tom Tunney's political contribution here in view of his subject* **A Few More Words on Peter Lee's Legacy**

*By Tom Tunney*

*It's a shame that the published version of our Peter Lee booklet, **The Man They Named a Town After** deleted my concluding paragraphs to his life story. This also meant removing one of his most insightful quotes, which I believe is the key to understanding both his life and our own predicament as we continue to grapple with the bittersweet legacy of living in the ex-coliery villages of east Durham. The following is my original conclusion:*

Peter Lee's legacy is best summed up in his own words. The nondescript postwar new town named after him was hardly the best memorial to him. The new town was an attempted wholesale replacement and abolition of the past--wilfully neglecting the old colliery villages and starting anew on a greenfield site. Lee's view of social progress was much more nuanced.

Lee was a gradualist rather than a revolutionary: he wanted the working classes to assume dignity and prosperity *within* a modified and more equitable version of the existing order. His words from a 1925 address to the Sunderland Rotary Club have been much quoted in part since by learned academics. But it is the final paragraph, much less often cited, which is the essence both of the man and the Socialist movement he led.

Mr Lee referred to the many struggles of the Durham Miners in the last century for better conditions. He said no body of miners in the world was better organised and none had done more for the old and the young, as they saw in the Aged Miners' Homes movement and in the freeing of secondary education.

**BRAVO WHEATLEY HILL HISTORY CLUB, 30 YEARS STRONG!**  
**THANKS FOR LETTING US BE A PART OF IT!**

**MARIE & MARK**



**County Durham**  
**History & Heritage Forum**

Congratulations to our members,  
**Wheatley Hill History Club**

This moment needs celebrating



**Congratulations**  
**Wheatley Hill History Club**  
**on your**

*30th Birthday Milestone!*

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Well done  
Wheatley Hill History Club

Researching for  
30 years

**Wheatley Hill Heritage Society**



Congratulates  
Wheatley Hill History Club  
30 years

**Wheatley Hill**  
**Parish**  
**Council**

Thanking all the  
volunteers who have  
worked hard over the years  
to keep the history of  
Wheatley Hill alive

**01429 821999**

**Happy Birthday Wheatley Hill History Club**

**TAXIS**

**MAD**  
**ALICE**  
**THEATRE**  
**COMPANY**

**Shelley**  
**O'Brien**

Happy 30th Birthday  
To Wheatley Hill History Club  
It was an absolute pleasure to work  
alongside you on your project  
The Man They Named a Town After  
The story of Peter Lee



Wheatley Hill Mothers' Club  
would like to congratulate  
Wheatley Hill History Club  
on celebrating  
30 years of local history

**Well done History Club on your great**  
**achievement**



**Wheatley Hill Workingmens Club**



**Well done Wheatley Hill**  
**History Club**

Sincere congratulations on  
your 30th anniversary and  
very best wishes for the  
future



Congratulations on your 30th birthday  
Best wishes to all members

**NORTH EAST WAR MEMORIALS PROJECT**

Thank you also for your invaluable help with  
the North East War Memorials Project

**SAHOTA'S THE NEST FISHERIES**

**TEL: 0191 526 1932**

Wishing the history club  
a very happy 30th birthday  
from all of the staff at  
The Nest Fisheries SHOTTON

**Wheatley House**  
**Moving Forward**



You've worked hard over the years to put our  
local history on the map  
your efforts are appreciated



As the proud son of a coal miner and an artist who often draws on this theme for inspiration, I think the work Wheatley Hill History Club, to keep our heritage alive, is not just impressive, it is essential. Keep doing what you do and here's to the next 30 years.

Many thanks from Alfie Joey  
Broadcaster, Writer, Artist, Comedian





**Congratulations to  
Wheatley Hill History Club  
and thank you for all your  
support!**

*Glenda Young, Author*



## Flower & Gift Box

Alexandra Terrace  
01429 820800

**Fabulous Achievement  
Well Done  
Wheatley Hill History Club**

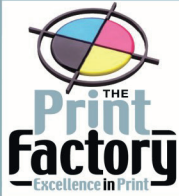
### Wheatley Hill Branch, Royal British Legion

Would like to convey our Congratulations on your 30th Anniversary since the start of the History Club, and would like to thank you for your continued support to us, wishing many more years of collecting our Village, Community and the people's History of past, present and future.

## The Northern Echo

**Congratulations to Wheatley Hill History Club** on making history & reaching your 30th anniversary. Congratulations also on the brilliant, valuable job you do on keeping our history alive—it is so important

*Chris Lloyd, The Northern Echo*



*Congratulations on achieving  
30 YEARS*

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DAVID NAPTHINE  
ACTOR & PLAYWRIGHT

WELL DONE WHEATLEY HILL HISTORY CLUB

I WONDER  
WHAT YOUR FUTURE BRINGS?

Mary and staff at  
Wheatley Hill Post Office

Congratulate  
The History Club  
For 30 years of dedication



**George Nairn, Postcard Collector  
Chester-le-Street**

*Always Wanted—Pre 1955 postcards of anything/anywhere  
FREE VALUATIONS GIVEN*

I've worked with Wheatley History Club over the years and wish them well for the future



Dovers Coaches, Unit 7  
Colliery Lane, Hetton-le-Hole  
0191 526 2887

Happy Birthday from all at  
Dovers Coaches  
Congratulations on such a great  
achievement

## Wheatley Hill Banner Group

Well Done  
Wheatley Hill History Club



graphic design | illustration | branding

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**30**  
Congratulations  
on thirty years of  
Wheatley Hill  
History Club  
1995 - 2025

Happy Birthday  
Wheatley Hill History Club  
from



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your collective talent  
and commitment

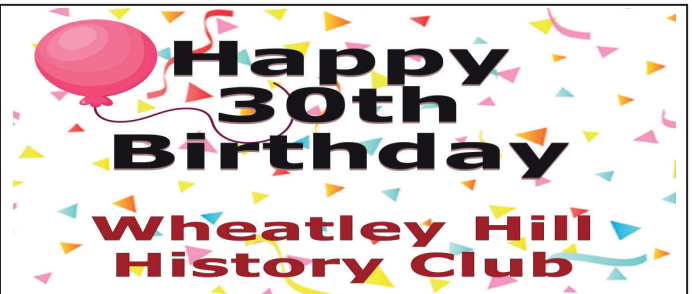
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The Sweep  
07963749732

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From Steve the Sweep

Well done History Club  
you do a great job  
from



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All Day Breakfasts & Lunchtimes Meals



It's been our honour to support your website  
for the last 15 years

Wishing you many more successful years



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**'Those who are inclined to blame us and say we are for class distinction should remember that it has been bred in us, not because our fathers had a desire for it, but because the educated and the rich left us very largely alone in our village life and, to say the least, did not make our houses and streets very beautiful.**

**'Durham miners and their wives love justice and fair play and if you watch our work very closely you will find we only seek to obtain a right standard of life, so that we may take our share and enjoy with others the full citizenship of county and country which we love so well.'**

(HM 15/5/25 p 5.)

That 'right standard of life' didn't require the wholesale destruction of the existing order, but rather its re-organisation on fairer lines.

Peterlee and the east Durham area still have some of the highest rates of child poverty, some of the lowest levels of social mobility and some of the lowest life chances in the country. Most people here are still effectively born as second class citizens, still left **'very largely alone in our village life.'**

Though huge improvements have been made since the truly grim days of his 1870s childhood, the new, better world Peter Lee fought for still needs some crucial finishing touches. His Labour Party successors, who, for the most of the last near-90 years since his death, seemed to have believed in destroying the past rather than preserving its best features, *thought* they were building it with the then shiny new town they named after him. Were they right?

Wander through the Peterlee town centre of 2024 and make up your own mind.

*This Afterword also failed to make the final cut:*

Most of the dates and details of Peter Lee's life story in *The Man They Named a Town After* are drawn from Jack Lawson's 1936 biography, **Peter Lee**. Lawson had access to Lee's diaries and notebooks and these are quoted at some length in his book.

Since no one since has come up with a complete published version of Peter Lee's diaries, we can assume that these must have been destroyed sometime after his death. This would be a tragedy given the quality of the extracts that have survived, but it's all too typical of what happens to the written archives of so many notable working class figures. The huge significance of the paperwork they leave behind is seldom recognised by their surviving families.

Lawson revised the book for its republication in 1948 and several significant passages were deleted. I would urge readers to seek out the slightly longer 1936 edition of the book if possible. This contains many detailed facts and figures relating to improvements in welfare between 1919 and 1936 which are removed from the later edition. Lawson's book is a very mixed blessing. There are many superbly written pages, passages of undoubted power and insight, but far too often he loses himself in long unctuous rhapsodies of eager admiration. For page after page of glowing prose, we're told again and again and again and again (and that's *still* not enough agains) of Peter Lee's extra-special, near-saintly qualities. As Lawson writes it, Peter Lee can't even saw a piece of wood without being presented as some kind of transcendent spiritual force.

Lawson was a close friend, so we can forgive his obvious love for the man, but all that cloying praise does make his book very hard work for the modern reader.

Also, what's almost completely missing in the book are the concrete details of Lee's political career, particularly during the 1920s and early 1930s when he and Tory grandee Cuthbert Headlam went at each other hammer and tongs in the local press over the way he was running Durham County Council.

In the book, Peter is a Jesus-like, angelic figure and others giants in the local Labour movement, if they're mentioned at all, are very much minor supporting players.

The purpose of this project is to correct this: **to firmly place Peter Lee within the brutal, unforgiving time in which he lived.** He wasn't the harmless Santa Claus figure of a children's play, living in a social and economic vacuum and dispensing sweetness and light to 'his people.'

Instead, he was at the very heart of the Labour Party's long and hard struggle to power in an age when the coal owners rules the roost and the miners were literally on their knees suffering atrocious working conditions, extended hours and savage wage cuts.

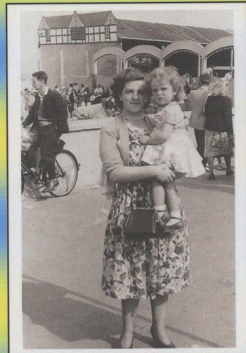
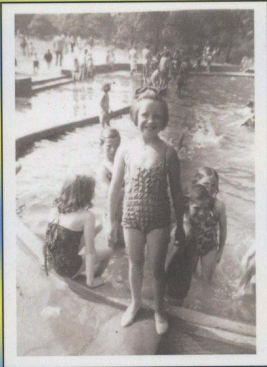
He was a devout Christian, but he was also a ruthless political operator: he had to be given the near-overwhelming power of the vested interests he faced.

He and his colleagues had to **fight** their way towards economic salvation. And they were opposed every single step of the way. The battles he fought are still being fought. And they will continue to be fought for as long as bad people rule and good people let them



## Our Seaside

*A history and memories of days at  
Crimdon, Seaton and the Headland*



*Frances Wilson*

This book has been written by History Club member Frances Wilson from Hartlepool.

She has researched the post World War 2 boom years of our local seaside areas when there wasn't much money and holidays abroad were something in the future so local people flocked to Crimdon, Seaton Carew and Hartlepool Headland either for their holidays or for days out.

Holidays and days out were taken, regardless of the weather and this book describes the story of the three areas as resorts and is packed with the memories of the many people who enjoyed simple but very happy and memorable seaside days out in the past.

The book is available from Frances at [wilsonfm895@gmail.com](mailto:wilsonfm895@gmail.com) or Meikle's chemist, Blackhall and the Hartlepool Hub (main library in York Road).

The cost is £6 (postage extra) and £1 from each sale will be donated to the Hartlepool and District Hospice.

## HISTORY CLUB MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL DUE ON OR BEFORE THE MARCH MEETING

We would ask members and advertisers to try and renew memberships and fees no later than the March meeting please

You may be aware that we are still operating without a Treasurer but switching to internet banking has made our banking much easier

### WE HAVE ALSO CHANGED OUR BANKERS

With this in mind, and whilst we would never refuse cash, we would ask you to consider paying by a bank transfer or cheque

We are very grateful to everyone who continues to support the History Club by paying an annual membership fee.

This is our only source of regular income and will remain at £6.00 per household.

*We are the only group that we know of who offer the 'per household' option.*

### BACS PAYMENTS

**Bank:** Lloyds plc  
**Account:** Wheatley Hill History Club  
**Sort Code:** 30-99-50  
**Account No:** 60856762

### CHEQUES PAYABLE TO:

Wheatley Hill History Club  
*by post to:*  
The Chair  
Broadmeadows, Durham Road  
WHEATLEY HILL



## History Club Re-Unites a War Medal with its Family

In the October 2023 newsletter, I reported that the History Club had been contacted by Ian Lofthouse, a descendant of the Atkinson Butcher family of Wheatley Hill. Ian told us that a medal awarded to Private Albert W Dove of the Yorkshire Hussars (Princess Alexandra, Princess of Wales' Own) was found amongst the possessions of his mother during a recent move of house, and raised questions within his family of why they had the medal.

Albert Dove was employed as a putter at Thornley pit at the time he enlisted into the war and living at Pyman Street, Wheatley Hill. He was killed in the First World War at the Battle of the Somme, in 1916 leaving wife Ada and daughter Elsie, born in 1915. His name appears on the Thiepval Memorial, a memorial for the thousands of men lost at the Battle of the Somme.

Members of the History Club carried out family history research on both families to try and establish a blood link between the Atkinson's and the Dove's, without success, whilst our military historians carried out research into Albert's war record.

Ian told us that his grandfather worked at Thornley pit before the First World War and was exempt from war duties as a result of an injury. With this information, we believe that Mr Atkinson probably worked with Albert Dove, the two families may even have British War medal, Mrs Dove appears to have given it to the Atkinson family. This could be for several reasons, she may have felt uneasy having the medal in the house as a constant reminder of her husband's death or Mr Atkinson could have told Albert how disappointed he was not being able to join the war with him, a conversation relayed to Mrs Dove, and she handed the medal to him after Albert's death, as a token of their friendship.



Pte 17766 Albert William Dove (left)



Gary Mains receiving Albert's medal

One of our military historians, Fred Bromilow, knew members of the Dove family in Thornley, and contacted them about the medal. One of them, Gary Mains, related to Albert through his mother's side of the family, was delighted to hear that the medal was returning to the family.

We presented the medal to Gary on the morning of 28 November at the War Memorial in Wheatley Hill Cemetery that bears Albert's name.

This story has attracted a lot of media attention from The Northern Echo, The Sunderland Echo, BBC online news, The Hartlepool Mail and The Journal who all ran features outlining this very unusual set of circumstances.

In Loving Memory  
OF

ALBERT WILLIAM DOVE.

(17766), Yorkshire Regiment,

Dearly Beloved Husband of Ada Dove, of 9 Pyman Street,  
Wheatley Hill,

Who was killed whilst fighting for his Country in  
France, on October 6th, 1916,

AGED 23 YEARS.

GOD GRANT TO HIM ETERNAL REST.

Oh, how my heart does ache,  
When I think of how you died,  
To think you could not speak to me  
Before you closed your eyes.

Although your face I cannot see,  
Your voice I cannot hear,  
I often sit and think of thee  
And shed many a silent tear.

How sadly I do miss you  
As I picture your dear face  
If I search this wide world over,  
There's none can fill your place.

Memoriam card in respect of Albert William Dove