



Wheatley Hill History Club

Volume 30 Issue 1

January 2026

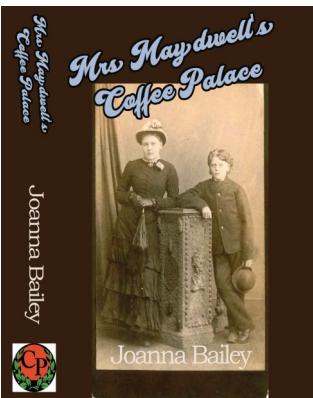
We Celebrate the Publishing Success of our Members

In one of the UK's most deprived areas—long associated with economic decline—as a small history group in East Durham, we have achieved something remarkable. Over the past few years, five of our members have become published authors, one regularly sharing his original work about our early local political leaders through our newsletter.

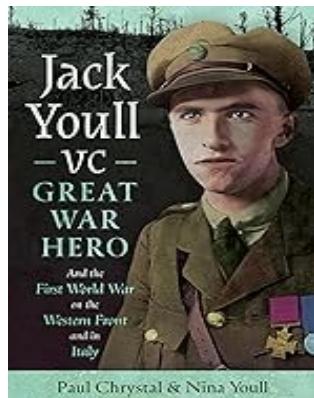
What began as a shared passion for local history and heritage has grown into a creative community that nurtures talent and connection. Some members joined while researching East Durham's rich history, but what makes this achievement truly special is their continued involvement. Even those who don't live locally remain active participants, a testament to the welcoming environment and sense of belonging we have built up.

This success story reflects more than literary accomplishment—it's about resilience, pride, and the power of community. In a region often defined by hardship, our History Club is rewriting the narrative, proving that creativity and collaboration can flourish anywhere.

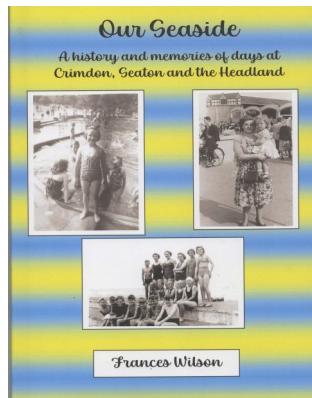
Wheatley Hill is not often recognised for positive achievement—but that's changing. Its History Club has become a source of inspiration and pride, proving that creativity and community spirit can flourish anywhere.



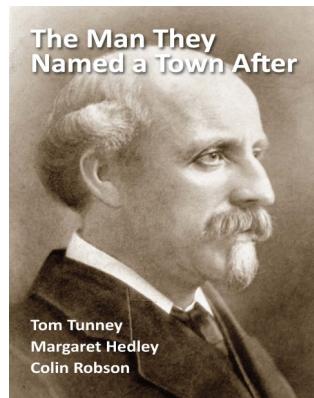
Joanna Bailey
Talk at History Club:
March 2027



Paul Chrystal
Talk at History Club:
February 2026



Frances Wilson
Talk at History Club:
July 2026



Margaret Hedley &
Tom Tunney
Talk at History Club:
August 2026

End of our History Year 2025

Our History Club closed its successful year in style at the November meeting with a truly memorable event: *A Tour Around the Lonsdales*, a captivating presentation by local historian John Heckels.

The talk explored the remarkable works of renowned sculptor **Ray Lonsdale**, whose art installations have become iconic landmarks across England, Scotland, and Ireland. John guided members through **36 installations**, each accompanied by Ray's distinctive poetry, which adds depth and emotion to his sculptures. From thought-provoking memorials to striking public art, the presentation offered a fascinating insight into the creative journey of one of the region's most celebrated artists.

The occasion was made even more special by the presence of **Ray Lonsdale and his wife Bev**, who joined the audience and graciously took part in a lively question-and-answer session. Ray's openness and warmth gave members a rare opportunity to hear firsthand about the inspiration behind his work.

The meeting concluded with a heartfelt vote of thanks delivered by club member **Frank Davison**, leaving everyone with a sense of pride and appreciation for the cultural richness of our area. It was, without doubt, a morning to remember.

Local Pioneers of the Labour Party: Louis Martin (1883-1953)

The Man who Replaced Peter Lee, part 2

by Tom Tunney

When Peter Lee made his surprise announcement that he would not be standing again for the DCC Thornley seat at the 1934 local elections, it seemed to be very much a two horse race to replace him, with Louis Martin a very weak third in the betting. This is how the *Hartlepool Mail* of 24/3/33 described the situation.

A situation of some interest is arising regarding the representation of Thornley Division on Durham County Council. Since Mr Peter Lee intimated some time ago that he would not stand again for Thornley at the election due next March of April, the mantle of succession has generally regarded as falling upon Councillor Hubert Tunney, Chairman of Thornley Miner's Lodge and a well known member of the Durham Miners' Executive and the Durham County Miners' Federation Board.

However, since Mr Will Lawther, ex-MP for Barnard Castle, came into the Division, on his being appointed checkweighman at Wheatley Hill Colliery some few weeks ago, a new situation has arisen through the announcement last week that Mr Lawther has been nominated by the Women's Section of Thornley Labour Party. Since then, Wheatley Hill Miners' Lodge and the local Labour Party at Wheatley Hill have decided to nominate Mr Lawther. Recently Mr Lawther has been touring the district giving a series of addresses on the means test and general political matters. While the Women's Section of Thornley Labour Party have nominated Mr Lawther, it is interesting to note that the Men's Section of the party have nominated Mr Tunney and Thornley Miners' Lodge have done the same.

Further interest is added to the situation because of the fact that Mr Louis Martin, of Wingate, has been nominated by Wingate Miners' Lodge. Deaf Hill Miner's Lodge and the other Labour sections not named above are apparently not bringing forward a candidate for nomination at the general party meeting of delegates which will decide next month who has to be the Labour candidate to go to the poll.

It will be somewhat difficult for the sections to decide who they will support. While Mr Lawther's Parliamentary experience and his previous work in the county will commend him to the sections, it will be agreed in the division that Mr Crackow's wide experience as an Easington Rural District councillor and as a member of practically every public body in the district, apart from his work as a miners' representative, will cause his claims to rival Mr Lawther's.

The composition of the body which will settle the manner of nomination is somewhat complicated, but, generally speaking, each men's or women's section of the Labour Party has one vote and each miner's lodge has one vote for every 500 members, or part of 500". (HM 24/3/33 p 6).

So how did the complete outsider Martin, who is hardly even mentioned in the above article, come through as the surprise winner? The answer lies partly in the voting system outlined above, but mostly in the devious machinations of Thornley school headmaster, Seaham Division Labour Party Secretary and all-round political puppet-master E F Peart.

Local Labour Party organisation in this period was moving from block union votes to a new structure which prized individual membership and members' sections. This new structure was very susceptible to vote-fixing and the 1933 Thornley Division selection process was almost a textbook example of this.

Very conveniently for Martin, four new small members sections were formed in Wingate in the immediate run up to the candidate selection--and all voted for Martin!

When the selection vote took place in August 1933, it was 11 votes for Martin and nine for Lawther, after Tunney withdrew from the contest and Thornley Miners' Lodge abstained from using its now measly three votes (SE 15/8/33 p 7.) Tunney made his feelings clear in the *Sunderland Echo* of 18/10/33:

Thornley Lodge paid £10.8s affiliation fees to the party, for which they had three votes, while four small sections at Wingate paid eight shillings and had four votes and two small sections at Wheatley Hill paid about 12s and had two votes.

A delegate conference was held on 22 April to receive nominations for the position of county councillor. After the business of nomination of three candidates--Mr Martin, Mr Lawther and myself--had been completed, the secretary (Mr C Frampton) reported that he had received applications for affiliation from four small Wingate sections--teachers, insurance agents, railwaymen and another section--but he had not accepted their fees, which amounted in all to 8s.

The fees were not accepted as there was apparently some doubt as to whether they should be, but the chairman (Mr E F Peart) ruled that the fees be accepted. Strong objections to these small sections having a vote was made by Wheatley Hill Miners' Lodge representatives, Wheatley Hill Labour Party and Deaf Hill Miners' Lodge. The Lodges felt that the small new sections should not have votes because they had not paid their affiliation fees before 31 December 1932.

The Lodges were also of the opinion that small sections were being formed for the express purpose of manufacturing votes.

Still, the result stood and Louis Martin was the surprise new Labour candidate for Peter Lee's old seat, which he subsequently gained comfortably (3,560 votes to 2,054), over the 'Moderate' candidate, Wheatley Hill Colliery Manager W A 'Big Joe' Simpson, in the local elections of March 1934.

Peter Lee had famously turned away from drink many years earlier in a sublime moment of revelation in a Wingate public house and now, in a strange turn of fate, a Wingate publican, the newly arrived landlord of the Railway Tavern no less, was to take his place on Durham County Council.

To Be Continued

History Club Membership

We thank everyone who continues to support us by paying an annual subscription to the History Club. It remains at £6.00 for 2026.

Membership is due on or before 25 March—the date of our March meeting.

MEETINGS IN WHEATLEY HOUSE

Start at 11.00am

25 March	George Stephenson Trials, Tribulations & Triumphs	D Williams
29 April	Treasured Photograph Memories	Beamish
27 May	Paton & Baldwins	C Lloyd Northern Echo

BACS PAYMENTS

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Account No: 60856762

CHEQUES PAYABLE TO:

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by post to:

The Chair

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DH6 3LJ

We will never refuse cash but would urge you to consider paying by another method

The Way We Were A Story of Growing up in Wheatley Hill, County Durham

By Edith Foster (nee Poulson) written when she was 92
Part 3



My mother was a trained dressmaker and qualified to do alterations on clothes and other garments. She trained under the guidance of a Miss Dewhurst. I think the name Dewhurst was to be found on reels of cotton. I was given the job of taking the garments back to the customers and collecting payment. Another thing we did was to make meat pies. I helped roll the pastry on the kitchen table and mam did the rest. She cooked the meat in a huge black cauldron on the kitchen fire and then we sold the pies from the house. Once again, thank goodness no health inspectors. My brother used to cycle to the next village for the meat and peas. I think they were a little cheaper there, and there hangs another tale in our kitchen.

Colliery house kitchens had enormous fireplaces which were usually polished every week and next to it was another monstrosity, the washing boiler. After boiling the clothes in the boiler, that was after posessing them in the poss tub every Monday morning, the boiler was cleaned thoroughly and the dried peas were put in to steep for 24 hours. When the peas were ready the boiler was washed out once more and then the peas were returned to clean water to boil. After it had done its duty with the peas, it was cleaned again, ready for washing our clothes. This was the procedure throughout the week with the use of the boiler.



At the age of 14 I left school and was growing up, maybe not in stature but certainly more worldly wise, so one day I joined a very long queue of girls to apply for a job in Moore's grocery store. I was interviewed and got the job. Whilst I was being interviewed one of the two men winked at me and I winked back, maybe it was the wink that did it, maybe not. I was told later that the poor mad had an eye problem!

Young Edith Poulson
I worked there for a while and it was pretty hard work, for all the dried goods had to be weighed and packed into bags of half pounds and four pounds. The food was delivered in sacks – rice, lentils, peas, sugar, barley and even flour which was tipped into a very big wooden box and when we were finished scooping it out, weighing it and packing it into half and quarter stone bags, we were like snowmen. What larks we had. We also worked overtime and Sundays when we were stock taking and we didn't receive any payment until the owner at Moore's stores found out and the manager was reprimanded.



Moore's Store, Wheatley Hill Front Street

Wheatley House Moving Forward

Wheatley House was formerly the men's hostel within the aged miners homes complex, opened in 1924. It is now a community hall managed by a committee to provide a gathering place for the people of Wheatley Hill and surrounding area to hold a range of functions

All types of functions

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