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**ABSTRACT**

FOR M.A. THESIS, UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM, 1990

WILLINGTON: A STUDY OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION OF A  
DURHAM MINING VILLAGE 1840-1914

BY VANESSA QUINN

This dissertation is a case study of the impact industrialization had on Willington, a pit village, in County Durham. The economy, which Brancepeth Colliery dominated, is analyzed. Willington's social conditions, housing and sanitation were all heavily affected by the village's rapid industrialization. The social forces of the village -- Straker and Love (the colliery owners), religious groups, class groups and ethnic groups each tried to mould Willington into a certain shape. The question as to how these conflicting groups acted and reacted to one another is examined. The extent to which Willington was a company town is also raised.

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**WILLINGTON : A STUDY OF THE INDUSTRIALIZATION  
OF A DURHAM MINING VILLAGE 1840-1914**

**M.A. THESIS  
UNIVERSITY OF DURHAM 1990**

**BY VANESSA QUINN**

Submitted for fulfilment of  
a Master of Arts Higher Degree  
Faculty of Social Sciences  
Department of History



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## **FORWARD**

The material for this dissertation is largely based on contemporary documents and newspaper articles. Although much care has been taken to compile this analysis of Willington, minor errors and omissions may occur due to faults in the contemporary documents. The Durham Chronicle is referred to by the abbreviation DC in the endnotes.

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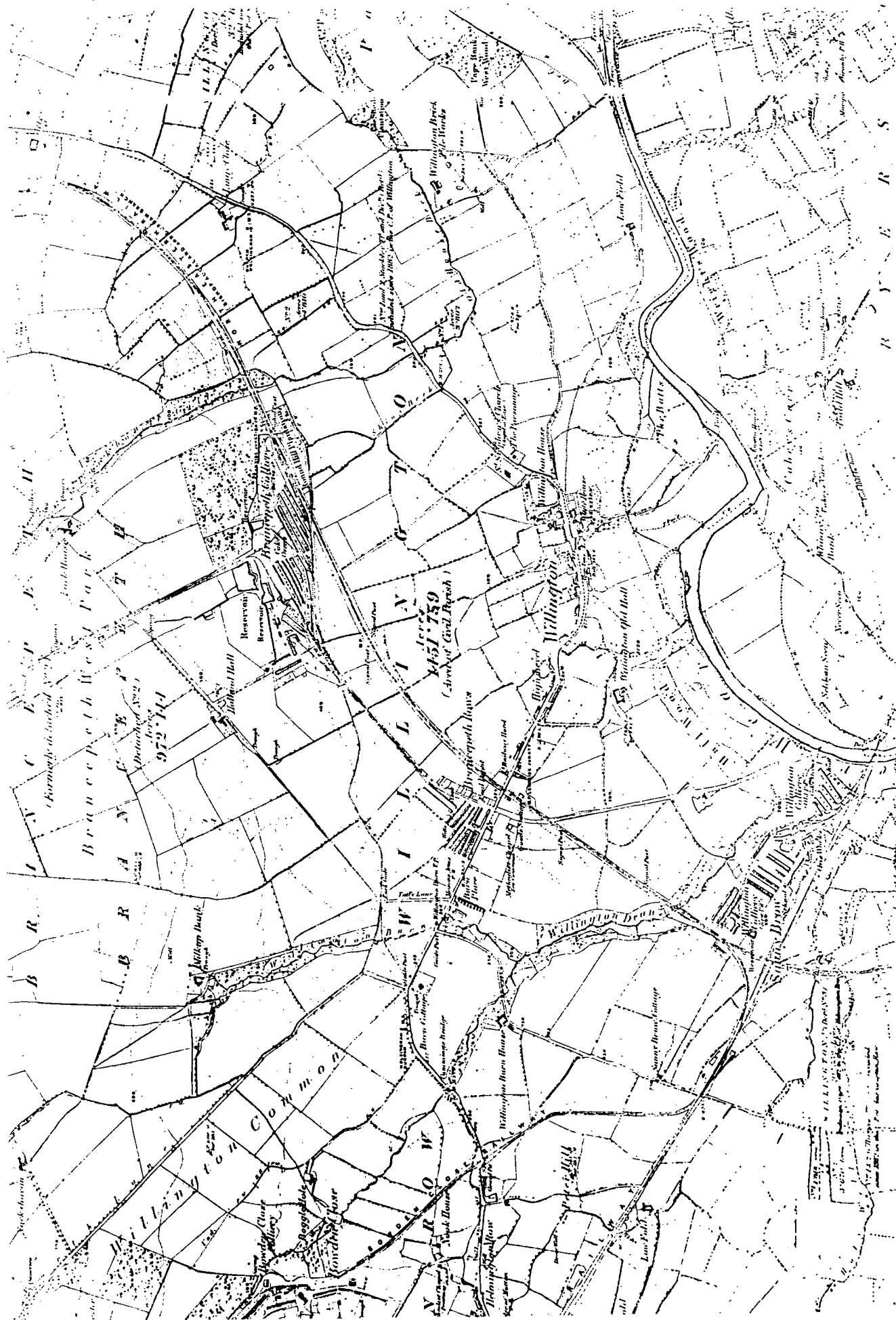
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"I have the misfortune to live in  
Willington, which I believe is  
celebrated for its active coal  
pits and coking works."

Grumbler in Letters to the Editor  
Durham Chronicle  
13 December 1872



Source: Ordnance Survey Map, 1st Edition, 1854-7





Source: Ordnance Survey Map, 2nd Edition, 1898



Source: Ordnance Survey Map, 3rd Edition, 1924

## INTRODUCTION

The Industrial Revolution profoundly altered Victorian society and its after-effects are still being felt today. Industrialization did not merely mechanize production, but it brought a tremendous amount of social change and in some cases social disaster to Victorian society. Coal was the base of the industrial process and without it many industries could not function. As coastal coal mines went out of production, industrialists looked inland for their coal supplies. The invention of the locomotive revolutionized the coal industry, for it created a way to transport inland coal to market. The rising demand for manufactured products generated an increased demand for coal which created a coal mining boom. New collieries opened in Britain at a rapid pace and the number of mineworkers grew yearly from just over one hundred thousand in 1831 to over one million by the beginning of the First World War.<sup>1</sup>

Miners were at the heart of the entire capitalist system, as Friederich Engels observed in 1844.<sup>2</sup> For without miners there would be no coal and without coal industrialization was impossible. Surprisingly, little has been written on the social changes mineworkers experienced due to the rapid industrialization of the nineteenth century. The term mineworkers here is used to denote both underground and aboveground colliery workers. Historians have tended to concentrate their research primarily on mining production and the role of miners' trade unions within the labour movement. None of which really gives a complete picture of a mineworker's life in a pit village.

The history of Willington, County Durham, is really that of Brancepeth Colliery and its owners, Straker and Love. Willington was an insignificant pit village, but without it and many villages like it, Britain would have been unable to sustain its industrial revolution. Using Willington as a case study for all Durham villages, that became urbanized due to the coal mining industry, this work analyzes the concurrent social revolution, which affected all areas of Willington life; a revolution that altered Victorian society as a whole to its very core.

\*\*\*

Willington is a small town seven miles south west of Durham City and four miles north of Bishop Auckland, situated in County Durham in the north east of England. Before 1840, Willington resembled many English farm villages in the North East. It was a collection of cottages and farmsteads housing a small population -- 216 people in 1831. Of the forty-five families that lived in Willington that year, twenty were occupied in agriculture and seventeen in trade and manufacturing.<sup>3</sup> The trade and manufacturing industries comprised two inns, shops, a smithy, a butcher's and even a school according to the 1839 tithe. Willington, therefore, was a mainly agricultural village with service industries catering to the farmers and their families. The village was unimportant and relied heavily on Brancepeth village (two miles to the east) the home of the lord of the manor and the parish church.

William Russell (1735-1817) purchased the Brancepeth estate (including most of Willington) in 1797 from the Bowes family. The Russells resided at Brancepeth Castle and maintained a

position in the community as paternal landlords. William (1798-1850), named after his grandfather, died leaving no heir. His sister, Emma Maria (1809-1870), and her husband, Gustavus Frederick Hamilton (1792-1872), Viscount Boyne and Baron of Stackallan, Meath in Ireland, came to live at the castle. They adopted the name Hamilton-Russell by royal licence in 1850. The Hamilton-Russells continued the family tradition in Willington as paternalistic landlords.

St Brandon's Church, located next to Brancepeth Castle, was Willington's nearest place of worship. The vicar of Brancepeth parish, Rev A.D. Shafto (rector 1854-1900), held his influence over the community by his position as Justice of the Peace in the local courts. Eventually, Willington became large enough to constitute its own parish in 1858 due to its expanding population.

In the early nineteenth century speculators discovered that south west Durham was in the midst of a large coalfield. Entrepreneurs began to buy coal rights in the county and sink collieries. In 1840, the Northern Coal Mining Company found coal at Sunnybrow and named the site Willington Colliery. Within the same year coal was discovered to the north of Willington in Brancepeth West Park. To avoid confusion with Willington, or Sunnybrow Colliery, this new mine was called Brancepeth Colliery. Unfortunately, the company lost a lot of money for Brancepeth Colliery was, "a white elephant, notorious for its high working costs and poor returns."<sup>4</sup> The Northern Coal Mining Company abandoned its interest in Willington but it was not long before other entrepreneurs took over their business. A consortium

comprising Joseph Love (timber merchant), Joseph and John Straker (shipbuilders and timber merchants), Thomas Love (colliery viewer), John Appleton (shipowner), Robert Kendall (corn merchant) and Robert Thwaites (spirit merchant) signed a forty-two year lease with William Russell for the rights to all seams of coal under Brancepeth West Park. William Russell in return received a yearly rent and coal provision (£6,500, 200 chaldrons round coals and 100 chaldrons small coals in 1853).<sup>5</sup>

Joseph Love (1796-1875), a self-made man and former miner, suspected that Brancepeth coal was the right quality for coke. Samples sent to London confirmed that the coking potential of the coal was excellent. Almost immediately, Love installed a large number of coke ovens, and the venture became a great success. Joseph Love, and Joseph and John Straker formed the partnership (Straker and Love) and the other members of the consortium disappeared. At what date and for what reasons they left is not known. Straker and Love in all controlled three collieries -- Brancepeth, Willington (Sunnybrow) and Brandon.

As production increased at Brancepeth colliery, more labour was needed. Despite its technology, early coalmining was labour intensive. As the colliery expanded, so did the population of the village.

#### Willington Population Statistics

1801	169	1861	2,393
1811	185	1871	4,392
1821	221	1881	5,006
1831	216*	1891	5,107
1841	258	1901	5,220
1851	965	1911	5,962

\*Decrease in population due to cholera epidemic  
Source: Census

The rise from 258 residents in 1841, one year after coal was discovered in Willington, to 965 residents ten years later indicates the rapid expansion of the colliery. Farmers who constituted the majority of the population in the early century became a small minority by the 1850s.

The question then arises as to where this increase in population originated. Obviously there were not enough residents in Willington in 1840 to fully man Brancepeth Colliery, so heavy migration into the village helped the colliery to function until the 1870s, when the village through natural increase slowed the tide of migration. A rough calculation of Willingtonians places of birth confirms the above statement.

#### Origin of Willington Residents

Place of Birth	Approx. % of Population			
	1851	1861	1871	1881
Co. Durham (ex.Willington)	18	46	43	42
Willington	11	16	20	29
Northern Counties*	60	26	17	15
Ireland	6	5	10	6
Rest of England/Wales	2	4	6	6
Scotland	1	2	2	1
Foreign Lands	1	.5	1	1
N.K.	2	.5	1	-

\*Northern counties include Northumberland, Cumberland, Yorkshire, Westmorland and Lancashire

Source: Census

Less than one third of all people living in Willington by 1881 were actually born in the village. The high percentage of residents born in County Durham illustrates that migration was centred locally, which was common throughout the county.<sup>6</sup> The high percentage of longer distance migrants in 1851 is understandable considering Durham was sparsely populated prior to the arrival of coal mining industrialists in the late 1830s.

Migration was not only common in the Durham coalfield, but all over Britain, since migration was the only solution to unemployment in the nineteenth century. It was not unusual for individual members of a family to be born in different villages, as the breadwinner moved around in search of work. Within the mining population, mobility was very high, since mines and the mineral market fluctuated constantly and often unpredictably. The census is a key gauge of movement. In the census, it is common to see a mining family with young children born in Willington and older children born elsewhere in the county. By the next census, many families were no longer resident in the village at all. The high rate of mobility among the working classes only slackened in the twentieth century, when families planted firm roots in villages.

Willington was not unusual in its high rate of mobility and the varied number of migrants into the village. Migrants, on the whole, did not like to venture far and looking at the birth places of the residents of County Durham, we can see that northerners preferred to stay in the north.

#### Origin of the Residents of Co. Durham

Place of Birth	Approx. % of the Population			
	1851	1861	1871	1881
Northumberland/Durham	78	77	73	76
Elsewhere	22	23	27	24

Places Elsewhere	Approx. % of foreign born			
	1851	1861	1871	1881
Northern Cos. (ex. Northum.)	52	40	43	36
Ireland	20	23	20	17
Scotland	9	12	12	12
Rest of England/Wales	9	9	15	12
Others	10	16	15	13

Source: J.W. House, North-Eastern England, p.62

It is easy to understand why northerners preferred to stay in a region where they knew the customs, geography, dialect and of course, probably had relatives not far away. The heavy migration into Durham of the Irish and Scottish was purely an economic move into an area that could offer work and decent wages. The Scottish coalfield was notorious for its exploitation of the workers, both down the mine and in the villages. Roughly ninety percent of Willingtonians were born in coal mining counties, which proves that miners migrated in search of similar work. The majority of these mining families were from the Northern coalfield, but surprisingly, a large number of migrants were from the distant mining counties of Derbyshire, Staffordshire, Cornwall, and South Wales (to a lesser extent). At times of economic distress in other regions, it was not uncommon for young men to travel north to find work in the coalfield. Two examples of men moving north to find work in the mines, without any mining experience, are the East Anglia labourers fleeing from the 1880s agricultural depression and the highly publicized flight of the Irish fleeing from their native land in the 1840s.

The Irish were a noticable minority in Willington because of their nationality and religion as they were in other areas of Britain. Most Irish migrants in Willington were young, single men who worked in mostly unskilled trades -- as labourers, especially in the coke works. Roman Catholicism isolated the Irish from Willingtonians and other migrants. The Irish as a result became an inward-looking community. Their religion provided them with their own festivals and holidays. Their

celtic nationality gave them a political point of view alien to most people in England. The necessity of "sticking together" in a strange country with strange customs made the Irish community very strong. Irishmen tended to marry only Irish women and the number of Irish families only accepting Irish lodgers is proof of a close-knit community. P. Norris maintains that Irish families took in Irish lodgers not for profit (for why did they not take in English lodgers?) but out of obligation toward their fellow Irishmen.<sup>7</sup> The heavy Irish migration to Willington increased as Brancepeth Colliery needed more labour. Second generation Irish maintained the social culture of their parents and the community strengthened in size.

When the coalfields experienced a general depression and work was very difficult to find, miners were forced to emigrate. The most likely chosen destinations were Australia and North America. After the 1892 strike, Irish cokeyard workers from Brancepeth Colliery emigrated to America. The large New England and Pennsylvanian coalfields attracted great numbers of Irish labour. There is also an indication that some miners took the Canadian government's offer of cheap land and tried their hand at prairie farming. Many miners' unions including the Durham Miners' Association financially supported emigration schemes. A surplus labour force in Britain caused the unions great worry, for it gave employers the opportunity to lower wages.

In contrast to the wide migration practised by the miners, there was little immigration into Willington. Of the twelve foreign born residents in Willington in 1881, only seven came from coalmining countries. Unfortunately, it is not possible to

determine if these people had moved to Willington because they had relatives in the area or immigrated for employment.

The influx of people moving into Willington generated a housing boom and the village began to grow westwards. Tradesmen began to move into the village to service the mining workforce. The boom in Willington continued throughout the nineteenth century, despite depressions in the coal market. The growth of Brancepeth Colliery was so great that it prompted the Durham Chronicle in 1840 to remark:

A few years ago this neighbourhood, with the exception of a farm house was comparatively a wilderness, now all is activity and life, and so great has been the increased demand for the Brancepeth Coke, that the spirited owners have determined to increase their number of ovens to 420 -- which will be a larger number of coke ovens, connected with one colliery, than is to be found in the Kingdom.<sup>8</sup>

This tremendous growth of the village over such a short period of time created many problems. Willington's local administration was simply unfit and totally unprepared to deal effectively with the village's sanitation and planning problems. Village politics (especially between the miners and the farmers) further divided the community from agreement on most major social issues. As a result, important social issues (i.e. street drainage, erection of an isolation hospital), although debated at length, took years to remedy, or to the village's detriment were never resolved.

The religious groups in the village tried to sway the population to their ways of thinking, but were often hostile to one another (for example debate over the cemetery question). The churches were also eager to interfere with the education offered

to Willington children, but the growing secularism of the country soon relegated their educational sphere of influence to the Sunday schools. Rev Ruxton's fight to maintain the Anglican church's hold over local politics was doomed to failure, as the church gradually lost a great deal of its influence over the secular policies of the country. To make matters worse, the cultural mosaic in Willington was very fragile and there was much resentment and prejudice not only between the English and the Irish, but between the social classes living in the village. This social tension surfaced at political meetings, street brawls, strikes, and a program of propaganda through religious groups, recreational groups, clubs and even sporting events. By far the most noticable and threatening form of coercion (or intimidation) was directed from the colliery offices of Straker and Love. The isolation of the colliery from other centres of industry meant that mineworkers had no other real opportunities of employment unless they moved to another village. Straker and Love, as Willington's major employer, held a very influential position; which Joseph Love exploited to conform his workers to the Methodist New Connexion and intimidate them from joining any trades union. His involvement in local affairs on the surface appears purely philanthropic, but one wonders if any person could be that pure of heart.

The uniqueness of Willington and other mining communities in Britain is that they do not fit into a convenient mould that history texts would have one believe. First of all mining communities were not constituted solely of the working classes, but of other classes as well. They were removed from large

centres, but were not totally isolated from market towns and certainly not from the railway. Mining communities were both towns and villages because of the strange situation of being both rural yet urban at the same time. It is no wonder that mining communities had severe social problems. They had no real administrative structure which accommodated their type of community. Willington could not be administered like Durham City, yet governing it like a small agricultural village was not satisfactory either. The wonderful characteristic of Willington and villages like it in Britain, was that despite its awkwardness and falling through the gaps, as it were, Willington was a lively and warm community.

Roy Gregory's description of a mining village is a stereotypical view that has been maintained by many historians over the years.

The typical mining village was a dreary collection of box-like cottages, arranged in monotonous rows, each identical with the next. Almost everyone was related in some degree to everyone else, and physically and psychologically these intensely close-knit societies tended to be cut off from the rest of the world.<sup>9</sup>

Willington in no way typifies Gregory's statement. True, mining cottages could be termed "box-like", but that term can be applied to English council houses of the 1950s. It is erroneous to suggest that the whole village was related to one another. Economic conditions determined the composition of Willington's population. In depressed times, people moved away and in prosperous times, they moved into the village. The constant movement of peoples in the Northern coalfield meant that no one

village was static. Willington was not isolated from the rest of the world, for newspapers, the railway and migration made it outward looking. By 1866, Willington was a bustling town which afforded residents all kinds of facilities and entertainment.

You pass shops of all kinds and character, where you can be supplied with anything, either new or second hand, either to eat, drink (for there are about 30 public houses), clothes, or furnish your house or amuse your children, if you have any.<sup>10</sup>

Willington was a vibrant community, not only of mineworkers but tradesmen, farmers and professionals as well. The community, though, had to overcome severe social problems. Willington's lack of planning created bad sanitation and health problems. Rapid industrialization brought new social problems never experienced previously in Willington and the surrounding area. And by 1914, residents were still complaining about these problems raised in the mid-nineteenth century. Despite the enormous task of resolving Willington's social problems, residents did try earnestly to make a better environment for themselves. Local community groups, churches, politicians, and more importantly, Straker and Love exerted pressure on Willington to form it into a cohesive society. It is these pressures on Willington society and how Willingtonians reacted, that is crucial to the understanding of the social dynamics in a Victorian pit village. The divisions in Willington in relation to class, nationality, religion and politics did not create a unified village as Gregory suggests. On the contrary, various social forces were working against one another; sometimes in harmony, but at other times in violent conflict. Yet, despite its social problems and divisions, Willington did

exist as a vibrant and prosperous Victorian village. To understand how it achieved this, one must understand the social magnetism of Willington in its economy, religion, education, politics, living conditions and leisure activities.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Roy Church, *The History of the British Coal Industry*, Vol.3 (Oxford, 1986), p.189
- 2 Friederich Engels, *The Condition of the Working Class in England* trans. ed. (Oxford. 1971), p.9-26
- 3 1831 Census
- 4 E. Welbourne, *The Miners' Unions of Northumberland and Durham* (Cambridge, 1923), p.115
- 5 DCRO, Brancepeth Estate Records
- 6 see J.W. House, *North-Eastern England. Population Movements and the Landscape since the early Nineteenth Century* (Durham, 1954)
- 7 P. Norris, "The Irish in Tow Law, Co. Durham 1851 and 1871", *Durham County Local History Society, Bulletin* 33, Dec. 1984
- 8 DC, 20 February 1852
- 9 Roy Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914* (London, 1968), p.2
- 10 DC, 6 February 1866

## CHAPTER ONE: THE WILLINGTON ECONOMY

That coal was Britain's major industry in the nineteenth century, there can be no doubt. The coal industry supplied the necessary fuel to operate heavy industry and even to maintain life. Britain had ten coalfield regions -- Scotland, the North East, Yorkshire, South Wales (the principal fields) and Cumberland, Lancashire/Cheshire, North Wales, the South West, West Midlands and East Midlands (the lesser fields). The railway (itself powered by coal) and shipping carried coal and coke to markets within and outside of Britain. Exports began to increase from .5 to 98 million tons from 1830 to 1913 comprising in the latter instance twenty-seven percent of UK production.<sup>1</sup> The insatiable demand for coal in northern Europe to fuel their industrial revolution only slackened when the European and American coalfields began mass mining.

Coal is a very versatile product and can be used for many purposes. The British used coal as fuel both domestic and industrial. Coal was also a major ingredient in the smelting of iron and other metals. The byproducts of coal included coke, gas, firebrick and petroleum. Not all mining areas could produce all these products, for coal varied in its consistency throughout the country. Brancepeth Colliery however was very fortunate. It produced coal, firebrick, gas and most importantly coke. South Durham coke was very high quality and sold well on the coke market. Therefore, Willington benefitted from a colliery that produced a superior and demanded product. The Willington economy centred around the colliery and its related industries. Even trades claiming to be independent of the colliery were affected

by its success. A successful colliery meant a prosperous town. A depressed colliery however meant a village in recession.

## **THE COAL INDUSTRY**

### **Production**

Straker and Love acquired Brancepeth Colliery in 1840, and it is probable that A Pit was sunk that year. The Northern Coal Mining Company was unsuccessful in making Brancepeth Colliery profitable in spite of the fact that the colliery was a relatively rich pit. Brancepeth coal consisted of small pieces no larger than four and a half inches and it was Joseph Love who realized that the colliery would be more profitable if it concentrated on manufacturing coke. He expanded the number of coke ovens on a large scale making coke the major product of Brancepeth Colliery. As soon as the coke ovens went into operation, Brancepeth Colliery made substantial profits. The success of the colliery was entirely due to Joseph Love's management, for he turned Brancepeth Colliery from a money loser into a profitable venture.

Coke was Brancepeth Colliery's main output and its coal, known as Brancepeth Wallsend, was sold on a smaller scale. Bricks, tiles, drainage pipes and gas were manufactured at the colliery from coal byproducts. The Brancepeth Coke, Brick, and Gas Works will each be discussed individually following this section on the coal industry.

The success of Brancepeth Colliery led to the development of new seams in the colliery. B Pit, sometimes known as Oakenshaw Pit or Oakenshaw Colliery, was sunk in 1850 at

Oakenshaw, a tiny village north of Brancepeth Colliery. A drift, opened in 1865, connected to B Pit. C Pit, or New Pit, started operation a year later. All the pits were interconnected underground to various seams of coal. The seams worked through the nineteenth century were the Hutton, Seggar (or "B"), Jet, 3/4, Ballarat, Harvey, and Brockwell in descending order. In addition to their expansion of Brancepeth Colliery, Straker and Love sank a second pit at Sunnybrow (B pit) and opened a drift. In the mid-nineteenth century, they developed Brandon Colliery.

According to Roy Church's estimate, Straker and Love ranked sixth in the North East as one of the largest coal producers.<sup>2</sup> The rapid development of the coal industry in the North East corresponded to the general trend of the UK's increasing coal production.

Table 1.1 Estimates of UK Coal Production (in million tons)

1840	46.2	1880	147.1
1850	62.5	1890	181.7
1860	87.9	1900	225.3
1870	115.5	1910	264.5

Source: Roy Church, The History of the British Coal Industry, p.86

Brancepeth Colliery's coal production seems, on the surface, to be erratic if one does not take into consideration factors affecting coal production. The Durham Coal Owners' Association (DCOA) regulated the amount of coal each individual colliery produced. The association fined any mining firm that surpassed its coal quota for the year. By establishing quotas, the DCOA effectively controlled production and market prices. Collieries did not have to worry about glutting the market and undercutting the price of coals. So that even if Brancepeth Colliery could produce five times its 1871 amount of coal, the management was

restrained by its quotas from doing so. Strikes and disputes disrupted coalmining by enforcing work stoppages. The 1863, 1879, 1892 and 1911 strikes stopped Brancepeth Colliery's production in all areas for several weeks, thereby resulting in poor annual productivity rates for those years. The mine itself often played a major role in determining how much coal was hewed. Unforeseen seam irregularities, water, and dangerous gases in the pit prevented hewers from entering suspicious areas. Human error and occupational hazards, such as the Brancepeth A pit disaster, halted production for days and weeks.

Table 1.2 Brancepeth Colliery Coal Production (in tons)

	A Pit	B Pit	C Pit	Total
1871	187,000	180,000	190,000	557,000
1872	166,141	137,612	194,566	498,319
1873	134,273	122,036	173,304	429,613
1874	124,277	136,512	144,432	405,221
1875	129,283	153,341	149,634	432,258
1877	124,819	151,029	38,619	311,467
1878	122,926	106,700	26,672	256,298
1879	136,435	idle	25,573	162,008
1880	169,619	128,039	161,781	459,439
1881	138,308	104,460	194,129	436,897
1882	113,119	138,078	191,918	443,115
1883	124,636	127,546	188,071	440,253
1884	145,998	142,468	213,962	502,428
1885	142,710	121,670	192,865	427,245
1886	127,451	122,932	188,483	438,866
1887	135,651	132,862	205,681	474,194
1892	97,173	103,370	151,066	351,609
1893	138,030	130,732	182,141	450,903
1894	124,192	131,416	214,574	470,182
1895	120,473	127,073	188,866	436,412
1896	127,197	145,496	184,851	457,544
1897	143,374	137,627	186,060	467,061
1898	144,957	134,458	187,898	467,313
1899	143,293	137,227	164,317	444,837
1900	144,242	128,670	146,441	419,353
1901	141,093	123,704	142,957	407,754
1902	141,272	134,161	135,143	410,576
1903	145,659	137,382	142,246	425,287
1904	112,437	125,036	138,307	375,780
1905	144,193	141,786	152,044	438,023
1906	147,163	130,930	162,161	440,254

1907	132,775	134,719	163,868	431,362
1908	106,299	121,422	159,788	387,509
1909	123,279	131,217	182,664	437,160
1910	138,959	117,761	168,564	425,284
1911	151,351	150,723	171,302	473,376
1912	125,706	147,656	158,404	431,766
1913	92,747	176,408	220,839	489,994

Source: NCB Statistics

The fact that A, B, and C pits produced different amounts of coal indicates the variation of the seams in each pit. B Pit was idle in 1879, no doubt, due to a general economic depression, which later led to a county-wide miners' strike. One can see similar low production figures for years involving strikes. When the coal market underwent a depression, astute colliery managers halted production by closing down the pit for long periods. Straker and Love was under no obligation to pay workers when pits became idle. Under their agreement with the miners, which each man signed, workers received their wages for work done. If no work was done, regardless of how such a state was created, no money was paid to the men. Therefore Straker and Love cut their costs in economic depressions by laying off the workforce, a tactic still used by modern industrialists. If one looks at the average number of days worked each year, it is possible to see how the owners and the men (through strikes) controlled production.

Table 1.3 Brancepeth Colliery Average Number of Days Worked

	A Pit	B Pit	C Pit
1885	288	288	286
1886	259	257	281
1887	287-1/4	289	300
1892*	208	215	199
1893	274	265	262
1894	273	281	272-1/2
1895	258	255-1/2	257
1896	280	292	285-1/2

1897	290-1/2	290	292
1898	295-1/2	296	299
1899	297-1/2	300	303
1900	294	296	299
1901	276	277	287
1902	274-1/4	277-1/2	279
1903	288	284	283
1904	241-1/2	248	258-1/2
1905	303	302	302
1906	303	302-1/2	304
1907	302	301-1/2	302
1908	263	263-1/2	265
1909	281	278	274-3/4
1910	273	260	270
1911	286	286	287
1912	257	258	256
1913	260	287	286

\*does not include 1892 strike

Source: NCB Statistics

If one looks at tables 1.2 and 1.3, the overall pattern of coal production at Brancepeth Colliery is quite clear and one can see the outside influences which affected it at work. Through an analysis of the colliery's coal output, the average number of days worked, and the number of hewers employed each year it is possible to view the real productivity of Brancepeth Colliery.

Table 1.4 Brancepeth Colliery Productivity 1893-1914  
Amount of Coal produced per hewer (in tons)

	A Pit	B Pit	C Pit	Colliery Average
1893	3.2	3.2	2.8	3
1894	3	3.2	2.9	3
1895	2.9	3.4	2.8	3
1896	2.4	3.1	2.4	2.6
1897	2.5	3.1	2.3	2.6
1898	2.5	3	2.4	2.6
1899	2.4	3	2.3	2.6
1900	2.5	2.9	2.3	2.6
1901	2.5	3	2.2	2.6
1902	2.5	3	2.2	2.6
1903	2.5	2.8	2.2	2.5
1904	2.5	2.9	2.2	2.5
1905	2.5	2.6	2.2	2.4
1906	2.6	2.5	2.3	2.5
1907	2.5	2.7	2.2	2.5
1908	2.3	2.8	2.4	2.5
1909	2.3	2.6	2.6	2.5
1910	2.5	2.3	2.8	2.5
1911	2.7	2.7	3	2.8
1912	3.8	3	2.7	3.2

1913            3.1            3            4            3.4  
Source: Calculated from NCB Statistics

Surprisingly, we see that productivity was relatively stable and escalated sharply in the first three years before World War I, when the country was preparing for war. The consistency of the colliery's productivity does suggest that a quota system was in force and that the hewers fulfilled this quota quite efficiently, despite their numbers which varied considerably from year to year. We can conclude therefore that Brancepeth Colliery was a stable, profit-making mine, which enabled Straker and Love to be a leading coal producer of the North East.

#### Management

The firm Straker and Love, formed in 1841, consisted of three men -- Joseph Straker (1784-1867), his son John Coppin Straker (1815-1885) and Joseph Love (1796-1875). Joseph Straker managed the financial interests of the company from his home in Northumberland. He was an ex-seaman and had risen to become a large shipbuilder and timber merchant. His son, John Coppin Straker inherited the firm after Joseph's death, but was not made a senior partner until after Love died in 1875. John's son, Joseph Henry Straker (b.1850) joined the business and took over his father's affairs upon his death. The Strakers safeguarded the firm's interests by being a member of the coal owners' cartel, located at Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The cartel, which angered London for its price fixing, became a formal organization in 1872 with the establishment of the Durham Coal Owners' Association (DCOA). By controlling production and price fixing, the DCOA sought to stabilize the coal market. Straker and Love

had five votes on the coal board of the DCOA. John C. Straker exercised three votes, Joseph H. Straker had one and their viewer, William Heppell (after 1881 Richard LLeuwyan Weeks) had one.

Joseph Love was the acting manager of the Straker and Love collieries. It was his task to see that production ran smoothly. In order to oversee his operations, Love moved to Willington Hall in 1850, where he remained until 1858. His move to his mansion, Mount Beulah, in Durham City did not interfere in colliery management, for his son-in-law and partner, Robinson Ferens (1822-1890) remained in Willington. Love was an ex-pitman and self-made man (see Appendix A for his biography). His estate was rumoured at £1 million on his death.<sup>3</sup> Love had very set ideas on the operation of his collieries. By actually living in Willington, he exerted tremendous control over his workers, even after their shifts had finished. His liberality to the Methodist New Connexion and to other churches and organizations won him praise among his peers. To view Love purely as a philanthropist, however, is erroneous. Love believed that only his views of society were correct. He used his power as an employer and his money as an industrialist to force people to conform to his ideas. His use of power was sharply illustrated in the 1863 Rocking Strike, when he evicted families at all Straker and Love collieries in order to crush the strike, which the media and public felt was justified.

To say the least, Messrs Straker and Love have exhibited throughout the differences which we now deplore a harsh, unyielding and unbending spirit; for if they believed that their men were aching under sinister influences, they ought, at all events, to have made some effort to disabuse their

minds of the erroneous impressions under which they were labouring, before resorting to the extreme, and we may even say inhuman, alternative which they have adopted of turning whole families out into the open air at this inclement season of the year.<sup>4</sup>

It was Joseph Love who forced pitmen to avoid combination, join the New Connexionists and show deference to Straker and Love. By contributing his money in vast quantities to the churches and institutions of which he approved, as well as forcing his men to join them, he hoped to suppress any opposition. Non-approved groups faced financial ruin and dwindling membership. Only extremely strong opposition groups managed to survive Love's attack, and eventually prospered after his death.

The hold that Love had over Willington did not ease once he moved to Durham City. Robinson Ferens simply took over, although he does not appear to be as ruthless as Love. Ferens, by being a Poor Law Guardian, a member of the Rural Sanitary Authority and a prominent Liberal, used his political power to shape Willington into his idea of a community. This chain of control was further carried on by Love's grandson, Joseph Horatio Love (b.1853), but to a lesser extent.

Joseph Love enjoyed using patronage. His own family benefitted enormously from his business. Robinson Ferens was appointed surface manager at Brancepeth, Brandon, Sunnybrow and Bitchburn collieries, when he married into the family. Thomas Love, Joseph's brother, who had withdrawn from the 1840 consortium, maintained a post at Willington Colliery. Anthony Love was overman at Brancepeth Colliery, and John Love became a resident viewer. Love's officials were long serving, dedicated

men, like W.L. Gott (viewer, Willington), R.L. Weeks (viewer, Brancepeth and agent), D. Grieves (manager, Brancepeth A, B, C) and John Rutherford (engineer). The officials, not surprisingly, conformed to Love's views of society and were major community figures. Their position as the first chain of command to Straker and Love's offices guaranteed them an amount of deference. W.L. Gott's wedding in 1865 was applauded with cannons at Brancepeth and Willington collieries.

Although both the Straker and Love families owned the collieries, their roles in the business were quite different. The Strakers had little contact with Willington. Both John C. Straker and Joseph H. Straker lived a few years at Willington House, but their family ties were in Northumberland. Joseph Straker, himself, never lived in Durham. Yet, the Strakers did support philanthropic endeavours in Willington out of a sense of responsibility. Their influence on village life, however, was minimal compared to that of Joseph Love's. Love virtually dominated Willington, and it would be very difficult to write a history of the village without mentioning his name. Nearly all Willington's churches and organizations owed their existence to his generosity. Love's involvement in the life of his workers was not unusual in Victorian England, but his devotion to the New Connexion and his fervour in pushing it onto the workers was quite extraordinary. Love became a "missionary" and was applauded as such by the Methodists. His method of introducing the New Connexion was highly irregular and took on the appearance, at least in the early nineteenth century, of a fanatical obsession.

## Occupational Hazards and Disasters

It was custom in mining areas that owners gave the workers some form of protection from occupational hazards by providing for men who had the misfortune to have an accident at work. Brancepeth Colliery was a relatively safe pit, for it was not gaseous. In fact, naked lights were used in the pit until 1882 without any disastrous consequences. The pit was well ventilated as a result of its numerous entrances. Miners working in the Drift and B Pit could simply walk down into the mine. Workers in A and C Pits had to use a shaft to reach the works. Brancepeth, Willington and Oakenshaw Collieries were interconnected and it was possible to walk from one pit to another underground. Despite its safe conditions, Brancepeth Colliery still witnessed many occupational accidents.

In 1889, six men were assigned to clean out a coal hopper. As soon as the men commenced the task, the hopper exploded and three men died. The coroner's inquest found that oil lamps, used by the men, had ignited coal dust causing the explosion.<sup>5</sup> The 1896 Brancepeth A Pit Disaster caused a great amount of concern (see Appendix B). The authorities felt that Straker and Love's relatively safe record had made them lax in enforcing safety. More men, however, died as a result of individual accidents, rather than large disasters. Thomas Hinds, a fourteen year old driver was crushed by tubs in 1858. A locomotive ran over bank inspector William Adams in 1875. John Cluskey, a collier, was crushed by falling stone two years later. He died of severe back injuries after three months. In addition to fatalities were a

large number of accidents which severely crippled men or forced them off work for several days.

The risks involved in mining created a set of myths and beliefs. It was considered bad luck to change shifts with one's 'marra' in mid-week. If a man did so, he would not go to work the next day. A miner on his way to work would return home if he met a squinting woman. If a worker was killed in the pit, his 'marra' would not work in the same place. Owners often had to recruit men who knew nothing of the fatality to work there.<sup>6</sup> Men stopped work as soon as a fatality occurred. In 1905, 460 men walked out of the pit at Willington Colliery when a man was killed. Straker and Love was unable to seek redress through the DCOA, as the committee accepted the work stoppage as customary. For good luck, hewers always gave their putters a treat at Christmas. Putters at Willington Colliery expecting their annual treat in 1912 refused to work until they had received their gifts.<sup>7</sup>

Straker and Love sought to protect their men through the North of England Coal Owners' Mutual Protection Association. In 1883 at Brancepeth A Pit, Straker and Love insured 427 men and 38 boys (under sixteen years of age) with the association. Although employment records were not officially recorded until 1892, it is probable that the number of men and boys insured equalled the total number of workers at Brancepeth A Pit. "Smart money", the name given to the owners' accident fund, was set up to provide funds for accident, death and burials. The fund was not large enough to encompass the whole workforce and many workers had to stay off work without any compensation. In 1863,

it was discovered that smart money at Straker and Love was not a contribution from the employers, but a fund made up of workers' fines. The company imposed fines for shortages and defaults by the workmen. Rev F.W. Ruxton accused Straker and Love of deliberately favouring New Connexionists with money from the fund, while excluding all others. Through a bitter exchange of letters in the Durham Chronicle with Robinson Ferens, Ruxton stated that he was not satisfied that the fund was being used wisely. Ferens answered that Straker and Love was not biased. In 1862, the firm had paid seventeen people from the fund and only one person was a New Connexionist. Ferens did not explain, however, why the fund in October 1863 stood at £231, with only £11 being already distributed in smart money. Ruxton fervently believed that the majority of accident cases at the colliery received no compensation whatsoever.<sup>8</sup>

Smart money was inadequate to meet the needs of workers who had suffered accidents at work. Trade unions, apart from their function as a collective association of workers, offered their own sick, accident and burial funds. Because of legislation banning combination, several trade unions established themselves first as friendly societies. The Northumberland and Durham Permanent Relief Fund formed a branch at Willington in 1867, when seventy men joined. The Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund also established a branch at Willington. The latter fund only provided death benefits at first, but expanded to include a fund for disabled, sick, and aged miners. The Durham Cokemen and Labourers and Byeproduct Workers' Association and the Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens'

Association all had similar accident and burial funds. Members and half members paid a monthly contribution to the burial, accident or sick fund(s). After a certain period of membership, members and half members could start to receive compensation. Sick fund contributions usually varied according to the age of the member. Members were refused entry into the fund after the age of forty. In 1881, the Durham Colliery Enginemens's Mutual Protection Association provided £6 upon the death of a member, £3 upon his wife's, and £1 upon each of his children's.<sup>9</sup> Members received 6s per week in the case of accident or sickness. The workers' friendly societies were not welcomed by the colliery. When William Patterson, agent of the Durham Miners' Confident Association, held a meeting at Brancepeth Colliery to discuss membership, interested spectators received notice from the colliery offices the next morning. Straker and Love felt that the miners' friendly societies disguised their real nature as trade unions.

(The Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund)...had to run the gauntlet between the blinded prejudices of working pitmen and the equally unfounded suspicions of coal-owners. The former denounced the movement as a scheme of the owners to get the men into their power, and free themselves from the liabilities of paying money to those who might happen an accident in the pits; while the latter stigmatised it as a device of the men to raise a fund for union and strike purposes.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the efforts made by the owners and the unions, several men still received either no provision or not enough. It was only at the turn of the century that the British government started to construct the Welfare State.

Besides trade unions, friendly societies gave people the opportunity to join a sick, accident or burial fund. In

Willington many of these societies were connected to inns -- Queen's Head Inn Yearly Fund, Brancepeth Colliery Hotel Yearly Fund, Burn Hotel Yearly Fund, and the Edinburgh Castle Yearly Fund. The yearly fund societies collected contributions from the members and distributed a dividend at the end of the year, after deductions for accidents and deaths. Often the dividend was awarded at annual suppers. The Brancepeth Colliery Yearly Fund, which had 120 members in 1909, the Brancepeth Colliery Bank Fund and the Brancepeth A Pit Yearly Fund represented surface workers, many of whom were non-unionized.<sup>11</sup> Religious affiliated friendly societies such as Our Blessed Lady's Temperance, Sick and Burial Society (Roman Catholic) and the Willington Parish Church Sick and Poor Fund enabled their congregations to join a fund, regardless of their work or trade.

National friendly societies such as the International Equalised Druids' Society, the Ancient Order of Foresters and the Independent Order of Oddfellows, Manchester Unity, had large memberships in Willington. The societies were not merely an accident and burial fund, but active men's clubs. The Foresters' branch Court Anna Maria no. 2,654, and the Oddfellows' branch Loyal Mills Lodge were established in 1864 and 1840 respectively. The lodges hired the services of a surgeon, so that members could have easy access to medical treatment if sick or injured. Membership of the lodges was quite large -- Loyal Mills Lodge had 350 members in 1890.<sup>12</sup> Most of the members were colliery workers, which is strongly illustrated by the occupations of the officers -- John Dunn (engineer) and R. Hall (cashier, Brancepeth Colliery). Anniversary parades invariably marched past Robinson

Feren's and John Straker's residences to show respect. At the Anna Maria Lodge's anniversary in 1860, members toasted the coal trade and the firm of Strakers and Love.<sup>13</sup> Apart from providing funeral expenses and death benefits, the Oddfellows paid travel expenses for those members who had to migrate to find employment.

### Workforce

Straker and Love workmen constituted the majority of the population in Willington. The owners and their officials only made up a small proportion of those people involved in coal production. Most people working at the colliery were miners, mechanics, enginemen, cokeyard men, brick and tile makers and other surface and underground labourers. Each of these occupations within mining were part of a promotion system. Underground workers earned more than surface workers, due to their increased risk of accident or death. Since most surface workers were unskilled, it was very difficult for them to get a job underground.

These unskilled men were often referred to as labourers. In times of depression, labourers were the first group of men targeted for dismissal. Since miners and surface tradesmen kept their posts for friends and relatives, new men and boys, unfamiliar to coal mining, found work more easily as surface labourers.<sup>14</sup> Adult labourers received the lowest wages of all adults working at the colliery.<sup>15</sup> As a result, labourers tended to be the poor of the working classes. Irish workers were particularly strong at Brancepeth Coke Works, which employed a large unskilled labour force.<sup>16</sup> Men in other areas of the mine who

Date	Hewers	Deputies	Mechanics	Surface Enginemen	Cokemen	Surface Others Over 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	Surface Others Under 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	TOTAL
1893	156	12	30	6	44	57	109	20	35	469
1894	150	13	23	7	46	66	96	19	41	461
1895	159	15	27	7	44	62	99	16	41	470
1896	190	12	28	7	47	68	100	13	43	508
1897	198	13	30	7	45	75	92	11	57	523
1898	199	12	28	7	64	60	97	12	48	527
1899	200	12	30	7	62	55	94	15	45	520
1900	197	12	33	7	62	51	90	16	48	517
1901	202	13	32	7	62	51	88	15	44	514
1902	209	13	30	8	50	50	91	15	36	507
1903	201	13	32	7	50	56	89	13	35	496
1904	185	13	27	6	42	83	78	15	37	481
1905	193	12	31	6	53	70	93	9	31	478
1906	187	14	31	6	51	81	93	9	26	491
1907	175	12	30	7	44	87	98	11	30	490
1908	173	12	26	6	31	112	87	7	28	487
1909	189	12	26	6	36	61	117	7	42	496
1910	200	17	33	7	47	62	158	6	54	584
1911	198	15	40	7	60	71	185	7	40	623
1912	130	11	30	7	60	41	121	9	21	430
1913	113	11	39	6	50	53	125	8	20	425

Source: NCB Statistics

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED

BRANCEPETH A PIT

Date	Hewers	Deputies	Mechanics	Surface Enginemen	Cokemen	Surface Others Over 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	Surface Others Under 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	TOTAL
1893	153	9	29	11*	43	53	95	14	30	437
1894	144	11	22	11*	46	63	96	9	31	433
1895	145	13	26	9	43	61	96	6	32	431
1896	162	11	24	11	47	65	102	5	38	465
1897	152	10	26	11	43	71	98	8	25	424
1898	152	10	26	11	55	60	94	13	33	454
1899	150	10	29	10	55	56	93	14	34	451
1900	151	11	29	10	50	61	90	14	36	452
1901	147	11	28	10	50	62	89	11	32	440
1902	163	11	28	10	48	50	90	10	34	444
1903	171	12	29	9	49	52	96	11	31	460
1904	173	12	30	9	46	58	116	13	29	486
1905	181	13	30	9	50	62	103	9	28	485
1906	172	13	28	9	46	77	98	10	20	473
1907	163	14	31	8	45	75	98	12	24	470
1908	167	13	32	11	34	83	89	15	24	468
1909	182	14	29	11	37	54	116	8	31	482
1910	194	18	28	9	37	54	146	5	30	521
1911	196	14	40	9	60	79	189	8	29	624
1912	194	18	40	9	68	78	223	2	24	656
1913	203	19	20	8	24	66	240	15	29	614

\*includes two underground workers  
Source: NCB Statistics

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED

BRANCEPETH B PIT

Date	Hewers	Deputies	Mechanics	Surface Enginemen	Cokemen	Surface Others Over 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	Surface Others Under 16 yrs.	Undergr. Others	TOTAL
1893	248	14	40	8	44	104	114	6	39	617
1894	268	16	32	10	46	79	115	13	41	620
1895	267	18	40	10	43	73	119	10	45	625
1896	268	17	38	9	48	57	112	15	50	614
1897	269	16	41	9	52	59	110	10	53	619
1898	258	16	33	9	56	62	104	12	51	602
1899	234	14	37	9	51	64	98	10	50	567
1900	206	15	34	8	48	68	89	11	38	517
1901	218	13	33	8	48	67	91	12	40	530
1902	205	13	20	8	48	57	95	14	30	500
1903	222	13	31	9	49	58	96	15	34	527
1904	235	13	33	10	51	54	106	15	32	579
1905	234	13	22	10	54	66	105	16	27	578
1906	235	13	35	10	51	70	109	11	28	589
1907	242	12	36	10	55	66	111	7	19	583
1908	252	13	38	7	45	81	110	9	26	615
1909	253	13	39	7	37	89	132	9	30	623
1910	226	18	41	8	59	83	186	6	30	674
1911	199	16	43	8	69	76	211	7	17	678
1912	229	20	50	8	76	70	290	5	36	809
1913	190	23	89	8	88	98	405	17	55	1,000

Source: NCB Statistics

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PERSONS EMPLOYED

BRANCEPETH C PIT

became crippled or elderly often transferred to easier labouring jobs on the bank at a reduced wage, rather than being forced to retire. The records of the Durham Cokemen and Labourers and Byeproduct Workers' Association which represented a large proportion of these labourers, have unfortunately not survived.

Only a small number of tradesmen (enginemen, mechanics, joiners, masons, etc.) worked underground to maintain and erect mine equipment and they received a higher wage than their co-workers on the surface.<sup>17</sup> The surface tradesmen, like the guilds centuries earlier, implemented an apprentice system. In order to move up to a skilled position, men had to provide a certificate of competence obtained through their union. The Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens' Association was inundated with requests to learn skills such as hauling and winding. Candidates had to prove through their lodge to DCCEFA head office that they should be accepted as apprentices. If accepted, the candidate paid a sum of money, which varied according to his length of membership in the union and the skill to be learned. In 1895, it cost 30s to learn how to haul. This sum was large because it went to pay the loss in wages that a hauler would incur while teaching an apprentice. The colliery management did not finance a worker apprentice system, but naturally approved of skilled workers free of cost. The workmen did not create apprentice systems for the owners' benefit, but to eliminate horrific accidents that occurred from young and untrained workers. By controlling the number of apprentices, trade unions prevented a surplus of skilled men in one particular area.

Underground workers also had an apprentice system, although it was very informal. Boys started as trappers underground and could, with maturity, strength, and skill move upwards to putter, driver and finally hewer. Hewers were the most respected and vocal members of the colliery workforce. The Durham Miners' Association was the strongest miners' union in County Durham. Miners were well protected by their union and could rely upon it for adequate benefits and strike pay. With some education, hewers were able to sit a mining examination to certify competency as an official. Straker and Love sponsored a night school so that candidates could learn the material necessary for the mining official examinations. Overmen, deputies and viewers were often men who had started colliery life at the bottom. Charles Wilson (1891-1967) is a prime example of a Willington pitman who rose up the ranks. He went down the pit at age thirteen. While working his way up to hewer, he attended night school. At eighteen, he was elected treasurer to the DMA local lodge and at twenty-one, he was chosen assistant checkweighman at Brancepeth Colliery.

Parliament began to grow concerned about the miners and their conditions in the nineteenth century. From 1842 onwards, Parliament passed acts regulating the operation of coal mines. The upper and lower house were concerned with three main evils -- pit disasters, child labour and female labour. The Brancepeth A Pit Disaster was fully investigated by the House of Commons Select Committee. Child labour was a source of cheap labour for colliery owners. Working class parents who could not afford school pence and needed an extra income, no matter how small,

willingly sent their children to work at the pit. As one exasperated teacher wrote in 1875:

I have received notice about John Horler from his father about leaving school to go down the pit, he is not eleven years of age till next weekend. I went up and spoke to the father about him to try and let him continue at school till next examination but I am afraid the father will send him to work.<sup>18</sup>

Parliament continually legislated minimum working ages and hours for underground workers. In 1861 no boy under twelve years old could work down the pit if he could not read nor write. In 1873 boys aged ten to twelve years could not work more than six hours per day; boys aged twelve to sixteen years no more than fifty-four hours weekly. By 1887, boys under twelve years old were banned completely from working in the pit.

Only boys were expected to work in industry. Girls had little chance of finding employment due to local attitudes, lack of employment opportunities and government legislation. Parliament banned the underground employment of women in 1842, as a result of horrendous reports of the exploitation of women in mines, especially in Scotland. Very few women worked in the Durham coalfield anyway, even on the surface. Brancepeth A Pit did hire two women to work in the granary. The earliest mention of the women is in 1882 and the last in 1909.<sup>19</sup> It is unknown whether other women worked previously at the colliery. Straker and Love probably wanted to keep the fact that they hired women workers as quiet as possible.

Many historians have dismissed women in pit villages as happy homemakers who attended to their families and households.<sup>20</sup> Nothing could be further from the truth. If we look at the statistics below, it seems that very few women worked in the

public sector.

Table 1.6 Women's Occupations (Wellington)

	Pop. of Women	Number of Working Women			% of Working Women
		Married	Widowed	Single	
1841	127	4	3	26	26
1911	2,847	26	33	287	12

Source: Census

It is extremely difficult to estimate how many women actually worked. The statistics above represent women who had full time employment, but there were many women who worked part-time. Cleaning, laundry, baby-minding, sewing, handicrafts, tutoring and similar types of jobs were never officially recorded, because government statisticians did not consider these occupations true jobs. According to the 1911 census, twenty-six married women worked and we can assume that at least one of them had a child, yet there is no record of any women employed as baby-minders. For many women with children, a full time job, although needed was impossible. Therefore these women had to find jobs that they could do at home or near their home for short periods of time per day. It is interesting to note that although women had branched into clerical employment by 1911, all the jobs listed in the census were female dominated or, with one exception, acceptable women's occupations in Victorian society.

Table 1.7 Type of Women's Employment (Wellington)

	Type of Employment	Number of Women Occupied
1841	domestics	17
	dressmakers	11
	teacher	1
	grocer	1
	proprietor brick and tile works	1
	innkeeper	1
	1911	domestics
dressmakers & seamstresses		44
food & drink industries		41
teachers		36

milliners	10
drapers	15
charwomen	8
clerks	6
nurses/midwives	4
textiles manufacturing	2
stationer	1
laundry	1
others	20

Source: Census

More research needs to be done in this field to accurately analyze women's contributions to the Victorian economy.

### Wages and Discipline

It is generally agreed that pitmen received a higher wage than their comrades in manufacturing and agriculture. Within the coal mining industry wages varied enormously. Deputies, for example, earned much more than labourers. Underground workers were generally paid by piece, so that each worker was encouraged to produce more to earn higher wages. Aboveground workers were paid according to the task performed, and as a result they earned a lot less than their co-workers underground. Unfortunately, little has survived of Straker and Love's pays previous to 1914. Below is an example of the differences in wages from various sources and a comparison of county mining wages in example (E).

Table 1.8 Brancepeth Colliery Wages

A) 1863 Fortnightly Pay		
hewer for 21 tubs (8 cwt, 2 qrs)		7s 8d
hewer for out of broken (same weight)		6s 6d
hand putting per score		1s 4d

Source: Northern Daily Express

B) 1872 C Pit		
Hewers net average earnings whole	7s 1/4d	per shift
"  "	broken	7s 7-1/4d

Source: NCB Statistics

C) 1873 C Pit		
Hand putter net average earnings	4s 9d	per shift

Winding enginemen	"	5s 6d	"
Banksmen	"	6s	"
<u>Source: NCB Statistics</u>			
D) 1886 Pay No. 2 (Low Field Sinking)*			
Joiners:	Adamson		1s 10d
	Cooper		5s 4d
	G. Graham	f1	3s 7d
	G. Pears		3s 9d
	G. Brown	f1	3s 3d
	A. Snowdon		5s 8d
Smiths:	Halliday		3s
	Stephinson		3s 4d
Labourers:	Atkinson		1s 7d
	Bailey		1s 6d
Carter:	One man		17s 9d

Source: 1886 Notebook (DCRO)

\*Pay period -- one fortnight?

E) Collier's Daily Wages in England 1871-1891

Year	Northum.	Durham	Staffs.	Lancs.	Yorks.	S.Wales
1871	5s 5d	4s 10d	4s 2d	4s 6d	5s	3s4d-4s11d
1886	5s 5d	4s 7d*	3s 4d	4s 9d	5s 2d	4s 7-1/2d
1891	6s 10d'	6s'	6s	7s	6s 9d	6s 6d

\*figure for 1885

'figure for 1890

Source: Wages in the UK in the 19th Century, p.108

Brancepeth Colliery workmen received their pay fortnightly until 1912, when it was distributed weekly. A miner rarely received his gross wage. Straker and Love had a set of rules and regulations which regulated one's working conduct at the pit. Fines were imposed on miscreants of varying expense depending on the severity of the offense. Swearing, fighting, drinking, neglect, disobedience or quota shortages were all punishable by fines or even dismissal. Viewers determined fines up to 10s, after which a magistrate decided the case. A driver charged with cruelty to a pony in 1898 had to pay a 10s fine plus 18s court costs.<sup>21</sup> Straker and Love expected all workers to obey the rules, and each person was provided with his own copy. Loss of the rule book was punishable by a fine.

Pitmen were unique from other workers because they had a contract with their employers. The bond, which officially ended in 1872 required men to sign a yearly contract with Straker and Love. In the bond, workers were bound to set wages and conditions for a year. The first man to sign the bond was usually rewarded with a bonus. The bonus incentive encouraged reluctant workers to sign, or make their mark. The Master and Servants Act which regulated the bond, was biased in favour of the owners. If the employer broke the contract, he was only liable to pay a fine, but if the employee did the same he was liable criminally. This act created much bitterness during strikes, when employers tried to use the law to imprison suspected strike ringleaders.

It is unknown when Straker and Love replaced the Bond with an Agreement. Unlike the bond, agreements did not bind workers for twelve months, but allowed both sides to terminate the contract upon fourteen days' notice in writing. The 1863 Straker and Love agreement only allowed men to take time off work due to sickness or an "unavoidable cause."<sup>22</sup> Hewers had to do a full day's work (six to eight hours) or pay a 2s6d fine. Putters and drivers had to work no less than twelve hours. The company provided each hewer with a shovel, maul, wedge and set of tokens, for which he was accountable. Putters received their tokens from Straker and Love as well. Any tub up to a quarter cubic weight short of 8 cwt 2 qrs was fined 3d; tubs below that weight were confiscated entirely. The injustice of confiscated tubs led to the 1863 Rocking Strike.

Wages set out in the agreement were established locally and

then county wide when the DMA and the DCOA established a Joint Committee to hear disputes and set wages. Trade unions agreed with coal owners that wages should be indexed to the selling price of coal. An increase in the price of coal meant higher wages; a decrease though meant wage reductions. The sliding scale arrangement usually fell apart when pitmen refused too drastic a reduction in wages. A miners' minimum wage was not legislated until 1912, after a bitter national strike. Part of the workmen's wages was a coal allowance and free colliery house. Not all workers were entitled to these benefits. Most married men at the top end of the wage scale received a colliery cottage (see Chapter 2).

Straker and Love did not operate the pits everyday, but often closed them during times of economic depression as explained at the beginning of this chapter. Mineworkers never knew if the pit would be idle or not, and to inform the men, Straker and Love erected a shift board in the High Street. The board listed the state of all the pits and was changed daily to keep the mineworkers up to date. Since wages were tied to the number of days worked, idle pits meant a loss in family income. If a depression lasted too long, mineworkers moved on to another colliery in the hopes of earning a living.

The length of hours spent at work differed, like wages and colliery benefits, according to the type of worker. Surfacemen agitated for an eight hour day, which would lessen their work load. Most aboveground workers spent over ten hours a day at work. Durham miners, on the other hand, felt threatened by an eight hour day, which they thought would result in a three shift

colliery with longer hewing hours. Brancepeth Colliery had two main shifts -- the foreshift which descended at 4am (putters, drivers, etc. at 6am) and the backshift which descended at 9.30am. The foreshift ascended after the backshift arrived to take their place, so work never stopped. The nightshift, which descended at 4pm, comprised a small group of men and only two hewers. An eight hour day meant that hewers would have to work eight hours, not including the time to descend and ascend the pit. The DMA was strongly against the Eight Hour Bill, and as a result refused to join the Miners Federation of Great Britain, which supported it. (Hewers in other counties had to work long hours at the pit face and were anxious to restrict their total hours down the mine to only eight).

Table 1.9 Hours of Labour (bank to bank)

Underground Workers	1890	1892
hewers	7-1/2	7
deputies	8	7-1/2
wastemen, stonemen, shifters	8	8
waggonwaymen, onsetters	11	10
boys over 16	11	10
boys under 16	10	10

Source: NCB Statistics

Hours Worked for Hewers (bank to bank)

County	1890		1906	
North and East Lancashire	9hrs	12min	9hrs	10min
West Lancashire	9	18	9	39
North Wales	8	54	9	6
Yorkshire	8	48	8	29
Staffordshire	8	54	9	6
Rest of Midlands	9	24	9	18
Somerset and Forest	8	30	8	32
Lanarkshire	9	18	8	34

Source: Wages in the Coal Industry, J.W.F. Rowe, p.160

#### Mineworkers' Organizations

In Brancepeth Colliery's early years, trade unions had a hard time establishing a foothold. Joseph Love abhorred unions, which he felt tried to intimidate owners to pay higher wages.

Straker and Love's work agreement made it quite clear that trade unionism was unwelcome at their collieries:

Any man connecting himself with or advocating the principles of the miners' union, shall be liable to be discharged without notice.<sup>23</sup>

Love dismissed an Irish worker in October 1863 when he was caught reading The Miners' Advocate, a union newspaper. When one hundred and twenty workmen attended a meeting held by William Patterson of the Durham Miners' Mutual Confident Association in 1870, several men received notice the next day.

Notice: A Pit, Brancepeth Colliery, October 19 To  
Mr Robert Grieveson  
I hereby give you notice that from this date your services will not be required at this colliery, for connecting yourself with and for advocating the principles of the Miners' Union. William Smailes, Overman.<sup>24</sup>

Despite Love's persecution of the unions, unionism did eventually come to Brancepeth Colliery. The 1863 Rocking Strike was instigated by the miners' union in the face of Love's attempts at eliminating unions from his collieries.

The acceptance of trade unions as legitimate organizations representing the interest of the workers allowed the unions to become more overt in Willington. No less than five unions were formed in County Durham to represent colliery workers, which illustrates the fragmentation and insularity of each group of workers. The Durham Miners' Association (1869), which represented the majority of mineworkers, had two lodges at Willington. Brancepeth Lodge No. 1 consisted of the shaft workers at A and C pits; Lodge No. 2 consisted of drift workers at B pit and the drift. In 1872 membership in each was 420 and 380 respectively.<sup>25</sup> The mechanics split from the DMA in 1879 to

form the Durham Colliery Mechanics' Association, which had a Willington lodge. The Durham Cokemen, Labourers and Byeproduct Workers' Association (1874) represented the vast majority of surface workers. The cokemen's association overlapped in representation with the Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens' Association (1872). The Willington Lodge No. 29 had 58 members in 1892.<sup>26</sup> The Durham County Federation Board linked all these unions together into one body, which made them more effective against the DCOA.

Trade unions provided the men with a sick, accident and burial fund, protection against wrongful dismissal and a powerful body to lobby for advances in wages and working conditions. The highlight of the Durham miners' union movement was the Durham Miners' Gala celebrated every July from 1871. Thousands of miners poured into Durham City from every union in the county to celebrate trade unionism and its achievements. A parade with banners marked the opening of the festivities. Brancepeth Colliery's banner depicted a court of arbitration on the front with the words, "The allied Union causeth the death of the bond, and freedom is sweet to all workmen." On the reverse was a portrait of the labour leader, Alexander McDonald, with "Behold how pleasant it is for brethren to live together in love and unity."

The importance of the miners' unions on the workmen should not be underestimated. Without the intervention of the unions, many disputes could have erupted into strikes, resulting in dismissals. Disputes occurred very irregularly at Brancepeth Colliery. Minor disagreements often involved a change in work

conditions or a dispute among the men themselves. Union workers refused to ride in the same cage with non-union workers in 1886. The manager, D. Grieves, would not allow the unionmen to go down alone. The DMA intervened and settled the dispute immediately. When putters asked for a helper-up in 1892 and received a negative reply, they refused to work. The hewers promised not to punish them if they went back to work, which they did. But in 1911, when putters disagreed about their places of work, Brancepeth Colliery office fined them each 3s6d for the work stoppage. Cokemen and boys were also unsuccessful in their 1913 strike, which lasted for eleven days. Fines ranged from 11s to 15s each. By far the most damaging disputes were strikes in which the whole workforce stopped production. The 1863, 1879, 1882, 1892, and 1912 strikes involved the entire Straker and Love labour force.

## Industrial Disputes

### 1863 and 1882 Strikes

Both the 1863 and 1882 strikes originated from disputes at Brancepeth Colliery. Dissatisfaction then spread to the other Straker and Love collieries, while other non-affiliated pits involved themselves in sympathy strikes. The 1863 Rocking Strike erupted due to the unfairness of rocking tubs. In 1855, Joseph Love gathered his men in Willington's New Connexion Chapel for a meeting. He offered a bonus to the hewer who could send the fullest tubs to bank every fortnight. The bonus scheme lasted a short period of time, but Love still expected his men to send

full tubs to bank. This demand caused serious problems. The seams of Willington and Brancepeth Collieries were low and coal fell off the tubs when they were jolted by low roofs. By the time the tubs reached the bank, the coal had settled and the tub was no longer full. To add to the hewers' frustration, banksmen, who judged the tubs, received 6d per score on all confiscated tubs. Banksmen, being human, were all too eager to find tubs under measure. Hewers, on the other hand, received no wages for the coal sitting in a confiscated tub. The unfortunate hewer therefore had worked free of charge. If the tubs were overfull, hewers received no remuneration. In order to save their wages, hewers rocked tubs to settle the coal before they set off to bank. The rocking of tubs cost the hewer in lost wages, since he had to stop hewing. In October 1863, Brancepeth Colliery and the other Straker and Love collieries walked out in protest. Love tested the legality of the strike by issuing warrants to several men at Brandon Colliery. The case was thrown out of court.

The workmen did not want higher wages but fairer wages. They felt that tubs should be weighed and hewers be paid by weight and not measure. The measure system meant that hewers lost an average of nine tubs every fortnight (each tub weighed 8 cwt 2 qrs). This Rocking Strike was the first miners' strike defended by the media. The ferocious attack on the inhumanity and injustice of Straker and Love's tactics, put the company on the defensive. Joseph Love, Robinson Ferens, and W.O. Wood (viewer, Brancepeth Colliery) wrote to the newspapers defending their actions. Love and Ferens maintained that the proceeds from

confiscated tubs went to the colliery accident fund (smart money) and colliery schoolchildren's fees. Workers, therefore, benefitted greatly from the measure system. Local newspapers were cynical of this supposed altruism. It was discovered that confiscated tubs did not appear on the company's records, but went to pay Lord Boyne's rent. Rev F.W. Ruxton, as mentioned above, disagreed that everyone benefitted from the colliery fund.

Love was bitterly determined not to have union men employed at his collieries. He generously agreed to forgive the men if they abandoned the principle of combination, but no one accepted his offer. He then began to evict workmen at Brandon, Oakenshaw, Sunnybrow and finally Willington. Evictions occurred in November, causing great hardship for families with nowhere to go. Furniture and household belongings rested in fields open to the elements. Love used his influence among Willington tradesmen to stop them from extending credit to the strikers. Publicans were encouraged not to house strikers. Without money and shelter, men started drifting back to work. Cokeburners, who were striking at the same time for an end to the subcontracting system Straker and Love employed at the coke works, felt neglected by the public and the miners. A large group of Irish cokemen emigrated to the United States.

Although the miners presented a good front, with mass meetings and political speeches, they were not strong enough to last long. The increasing distress in the neighbourhood forced men gradually back to work. Love brought in blacklegs from Cumberland and many strikers found their jobs already filled. In March 1864 amidst growing starvation and near eminent

ruination of the Miners Union of Great Britain and Ireland, the strike ended. The practice of measuring minerals was abolished by Parliament in 1873.

The 1882 strike started at Brancepeth A Pit when four men were drafted to work in the Jet seam. The Jet had lain idle since 1874, and the owners wanted to pay the men 1874 score prices for hewing. The men refused to work at those prices and the rest of the Straker and Love collieries walked out in sympathy. Straker and Love served summonses on the men for leaving work without giving proper notice. Before the strike developed into a prolonged battle, the DMA began arbitration with the owners and reached a compromise. Like the 1863 strike, Straker and Love employees supported one another when part of the workforce suffered grave injustice.

#### 1879, 1892 and 1912 Strikes

These three strikes affected the whole of County Durham. Owners locked out the men in 1879, when they tried to negotiate the DCOA's proposal to cut underground wages 20% and aboveground wages 12-1/2%. After six weeks both parties reached a compromise. The 1892 strike lasted twelve weeks and was a source of great hardship for the men. Officials kept necessary machinery operating at Brancepeth Colliery, but Willington Colliery shut down completely. Left unattended, the latter flooded and Straker and Love cut its work strength there drastically. Brancepeth Gas Works, the main source of lighting for Willington and Oakenshaw stayed in operation, although the gas supply was cut off from strikers' houses. Police barricaded

the collieries to protect them from vandalism and sabotage. Coal deliveries to striking workers halted. Colliery ashpits overflowed as no one dared collect refuse, for it was a union job. The Salvation Army, churches and schools set up soup kitchens and recreational activities to feed and amuse the men on strike. A.W. Elliott, grocer, draper and councillor, continued to accept credit from the miners during the strike, unlike his counterparts thirty years earlier. The strike was finally ended by the Bishop of Durham. The 1912 National Strike, begun to establish a minimum wage for mineworkers, created as much hardship as residents felt in 1892. After five and a half weeks, Parliament promptly ended the strike by legislating The Miners (Minimum Wage) Act (1912).

#### **THE COKE INDUSTRY**

The Northern Coal Mining Company abandoned Brancepeth Colliery when its operation costs made it unworkable. It was Joseph Love who realized the potential of the coal for coking purposes. He converted the mine to a coking colliery after mineralists in London made tests to confirm his suspicions of its quality. Almost all of the colliery's coal was converted to coke. Brancepeth coke was high in quality and much in demand. The increase in coke ovens from 420 in 1852 to 1700 in 1894 reflects the increased demand for coke.<sup>7</sup> The coking collieries board of the DCOA controlled coke production. Straker and Love's viewer, R.L. Weeks, attended the board meetings and cast the colliery's six votes on behalf of the company.

Table 1.10 Brancepeth Colliery Coke Manufactured 1872-1913

1872	198,100	1889	233,041	1902	202,006
1873	162,988	1890	176,003	1903	194,254
1874	152,334	1891	189,900	1904	171,749
1875	160,687	1892	149,323	1905	208,737
		1893	175,623	1906	195,869
1877	111,486	1894	201,500	1907	186,320
1878	86,425	1895	198,497	1908	138,119
		1896	211,688	1909	137,034
1884	236,446	1897	226,107	1910	146,943
1885	219,387	1898	231,437	1911	214,862
		1899	230,187	1912	248,046
1887	68,174	1900	218,310	1913	286,107
1888	239,495	1901	194,622		

Source: NCB Statistics

Coke is manufactured by heating small coals, finely ground (known as slack) and washed in a washery, in an airtight chamber or oven. The most popular type of ovens used in the industry were beehive ovens, so called because of their shape. Brancepeth Coke Works only used ten and eleven foot beehive ovens, until 1907 when Straker and Love introduced semet solvay ovens to recover tar and ammonium sulphate from the coking process. In 1907 the company signed a contract for the erection of 120 of these new ovens and a new byproducts recovery plant. Straker and Love wanted the ovens to coke 6,000 tons of slack per week. The company used gases from the ovens to produce steam for working colliery machinery.

Table 1.11 Number of Coke Ovens at Work

Beehive Ovens					
1884	766	1894	580	1904	586
1885	765	1895	715	1905	630
		1896	638	1906	611
1887	782	1897	723	1907	498
1888	781	1898	731	1908	399
1889	710	1899	731	1909	402
1890	619	1900	617	1910	235
1891	642	1901	677	1911	144
1892	642	1902	650	1912	170
1893	588	1903	562	1913	214

Semet Solvay Ovens			
1910	60	1912	120
1911	120	1913	120
<u>Source: NCB Statistics</u>			

Brancepeth Coke Works employed roughly two hundred men, most of whom were Irish. It is difficult to get an accurate estimate of the exact numbers, since a large number of workers were boys and labourers, who were not recorded as coke workers. The 1911 census indicates that 178 cokeburners lived at Willington yet the 1911 DCOA figure for Brancepeth coke workers that year is 199. Coke workers in all accounted for only roughly ten percent of the entire colliery workforce (see Figure 1.5).

Straker and Love subcontracted coke production to a third (unknown) party. The subcontractor received a fixed price per ton on manufactured coke. It was therefore in the subcontractor's interest to manufacture coke and obtain labour as cheaply as possible. In 1863, Straker and Love cokeburners went on strike to protest this system at the same time hewers walked out in defiance over the rocking tubs system. The coke workers received no public support for their strike (the hewers received it because of the publicity) and were forced back to work. No further evidence exists of the subcontracting system and whether it was abolished before 1914.

Cokeburners were entitled to colliery cottages and coals, but other cokeyard workers only received a coal allowance.

#### 1.12 1896 Housing Allotments

Employment	married	single	house	no house
Cokeburner	7		7	
Coke filler	20	15		35
Cokeyard labs.	1	1		2
Coke Drawers	63	8		71

Source: NCB Statistics

By observing the above housing allotment in 1896, we can see that of a total of one hundred and fifteen coke workers, only seven received a cottage as part of their wage. Therefore, we can conclude that the majority of coke workers lived in lodgings or private accommodation.

**BRICK AND TILE INDUSTRY**

Both Willington and Brancepeth collieries had large brick and tile works. Brancepeth Brick Works manufactured firebrick, drainage pipe, and gamster brick out of blue clay or fireclay retrieved from the pit. The majority of the clay used came from Brancepeth C Pit, although small quantities were found in A Pit and the Drift.

Very little has been documented about Willington's brick industry. A small private brick and tile works located just outside the village at Tile Sheds existed concurrently to the colliery's works, but no information about its operations and ownership exists in any great detail. Even on a national level, there is hardly any evidence of the brick and tile trade recorded. In 1858, Hunt made an effort to compile national statistics for this industry, which was really a byproduct of coal mining. In 1858, Durham and Northumberland produced roughly 96 million tons of brick, tiles and pipes from clay manufacturing.<sup>28</sup> This figure represented twenty-six percent of Great Britain's total output of over 2,000 million tons that year. The manufactured products were then shipped to market from Middlesborough. Unfortunately, Hunt did not record clay

manufacturing after his 1858 report. Production figures of clay from Brancepeth Colliery were recorded from 1872.

Table 1.13 Brancepeth Colliery Clay Production (in tons)

1872	20,000	1885	13,049	1901	7,283
1873	26,500	1886	13,743	1902	23,259
1874	20,000	1887	6,824	1903	27,774
1875	14,709			1904	17,481
		1892	5,166	1905	11,442
1877	13,635	1893	7,487	1906	13,294
1878	10,102	1894	8,604	1907	14,322
1879	7,378	1895	4,384	1908	22,877
1880	17,510	1896	7,403	1909	18,936
1881	8,443	1897	21,003	1910	11,273
1882	12,664	1898	11,315	1911	14,525
1883	10,294	1899	11,716	1912	13,931
1884	14,554	1900	8,909	1913	14,302

Source: NCB Statistics

The variances in clay production probably was dependent on two factors -- the amount of clay found in the mine and the state of the economy. Clay products could only be manufactured if clay was available and the pit was working. Fluctuations in the clay products market, as in the coal and coke markets, directly affected clay manufacturing. In 1886, the brick and pipe trade suffered a depression. Willington Colliery Brick Works shut down completely for six months. When trade revived, the great demand for clay products created a boom at Brancepeth Brick Works. The works had to employ more men, in addition to working day and night.

As an industry, the brick works employed only a handful of men. The largest number of employees recorded at the works is fifty-three in 1884. Below is a table illustrating the size of the workforce.

Table 1.14 Brancepeth Brick Works Employees

1884	53 (12 boys)	1905	21	1910	17
1885	26 (7 boys)	1906	22	1911	32
		1907	34	1912	25



## **GAS INDUSTRY**

Virtually no evidence remains of Brancepeth Colliery Gas Works, yet it supplied Willington and Oakenshaw with its main source of lighting. Brancepeth coal had a high yield of gas and was excellent for producing light. Straker and Love had a contract with Willington local authorities to supply the village with street lighting from 1865. A new gas works was erected in 1881 and provided the village with a good source of light. During strikes, Straker and Love cut off the gas supply from colliery cottages. Unfortunately, I have not found a single reference to the men who worked there or their union, except that colliery officials took over their jobs during the 1892 strike to keep non-unionized Willington residents supplied with light.

## **THE RAILWAY**

In order to sell their products, Straker and Love needed a railway line to connect their collieries to the east coast for shipping. In 1823, the Tees and Weardale Railway proposed to build a line to connect the south west coalfield with the river Tees.<sup>29</sup> The twenty-six mile line was to start at Willington, run eastward to Sunderland Bridge and then south to Billingham Reach, four miles south of Stockton. Unfortunately, the bill was defeated in 1825. The Stockton and Darlington Railway opposed the bill because the line conflicted with their interests. William Russell of Brancepeth Castle, as a lord in the upper house, supported the Tees and Weardale Bill in 1824, but changed his mind, for whatever reason, in 1825.

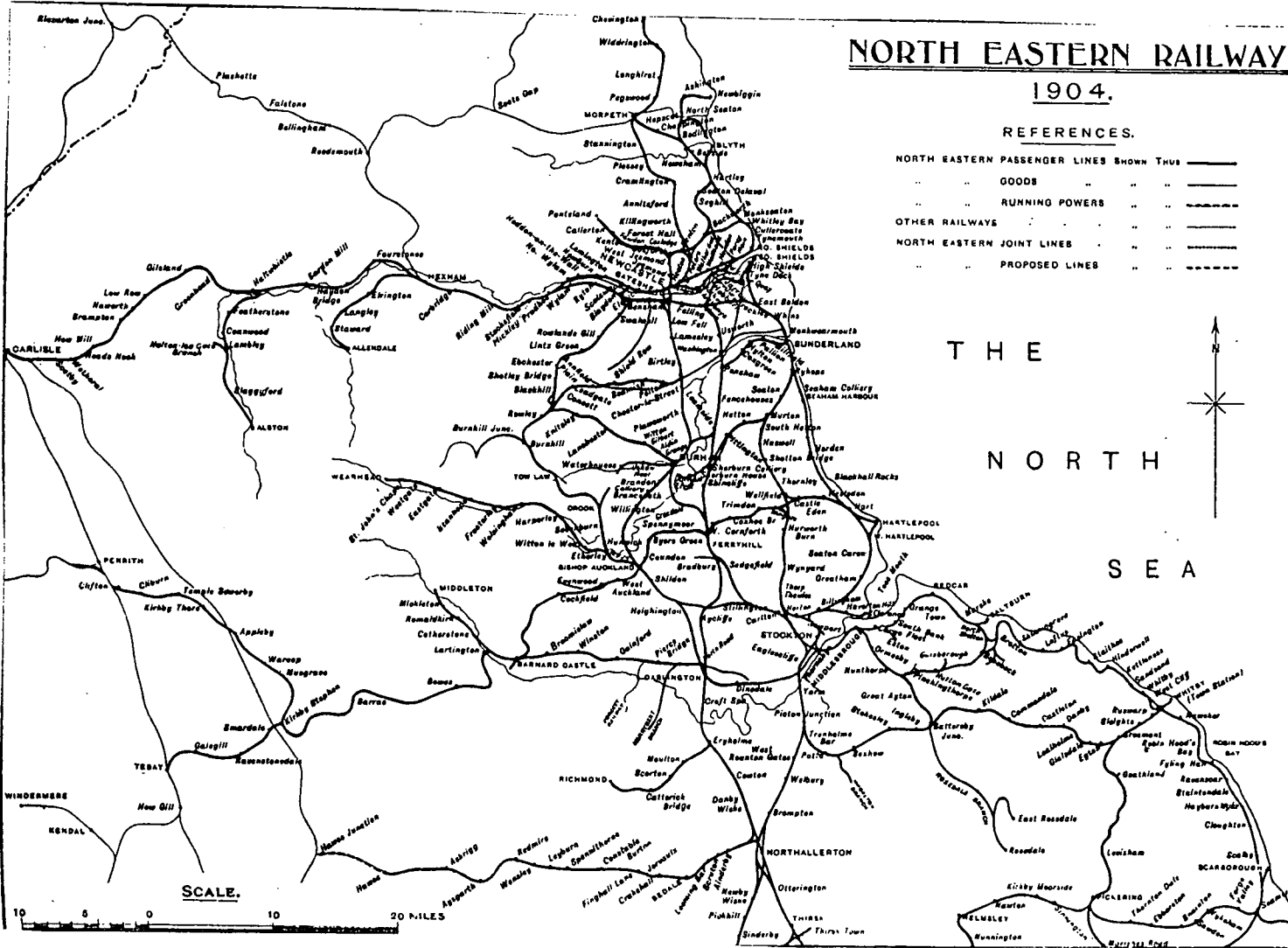
When the Northern Coal Mining Company discovered coal, it

# NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

1904.

## REFERENCES.

NORTH EASTERN PASSENGER LINES SHOWN THUS	—————
GOODS	———
RUNNING POWERS	- - - - -
OTHER RAILWAYS	—————
NORTH EASTERN JOINT LINES	—————
PROPOSED LINES	- - - - -

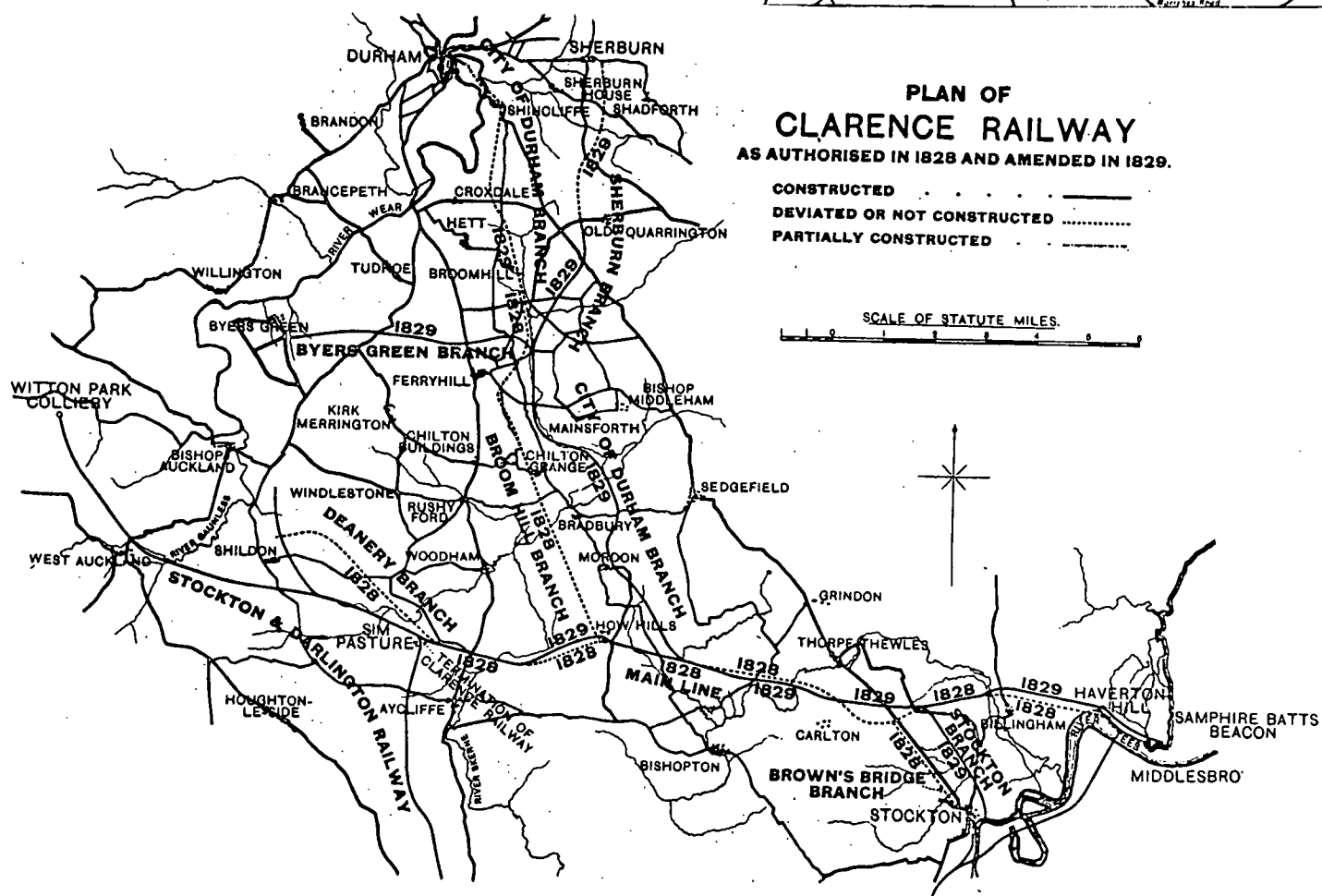


THE  
NORTH  
SEA

## PLAN OF CLARENCE RAILWAY AS AUTHORIZED IN 1828 AND AMENDED IN 1829.

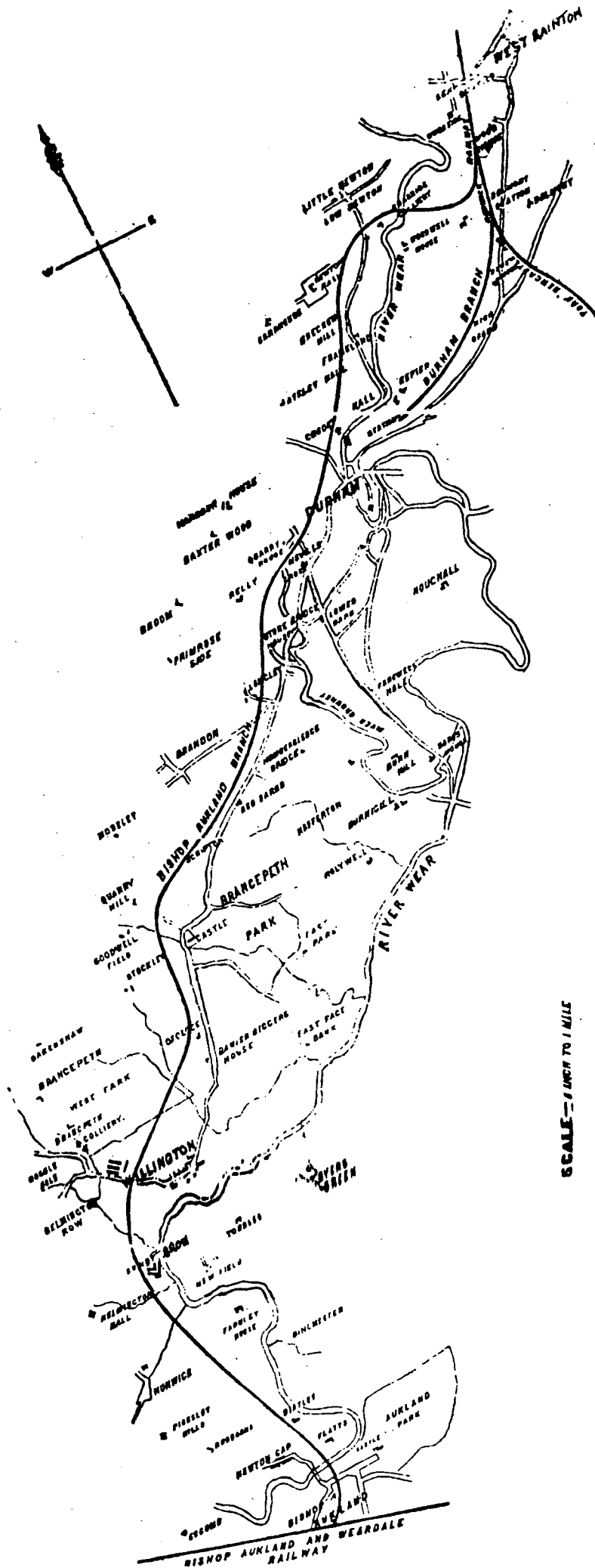
CONSTRUCTED	—————
DEVIATED OR NOT CONSTRUCTED	- - - - -
PARTIALLY CONSTRUCTED	———

SCALE OF STATUTE MILES.



Source: W.M. Tomlinson, The North Eastern Railway: Its Rise and Development.

The York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway



Source:  
"Durham Chronicle"  
June 4, 1852

was faced with the dilemma of transportation. The Clarence Railway had shown an interest in the Willington area in 1825, but William Russell blocked their engineers from surveying his estate. The Railway therefore built a branch line to Byers Green, situated on the opposite side of the river Wear (see map). Therefore, it seemed logical to construct a line from Willington to Byers Green, so that the Northern Coal Mining Company could transport coal to the coast for shipping. The West Durham Railway (1839) built a line from Willington to the Byers Green branch of the Clarence Railway. In order to do this, the company had to build a bridge over the Wear. Brancepeth Colliery probably was connected to the West Durham line by a private line built by the colliery owners.

The Northern Coal Mining Company, which was the major shareholder in the West Durham Railway, collapsed in 1848. The York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway managed to secure its shares and became the directors of the line. In 1852, the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway proposed a Bishop Auckland Branch, to link up Hunwick, Newfield, Willington, Brancepeth and Brandon collieries to Durham, where the branch would join the main line north. The branch opened in 1857 (see map). Brancepeth coal and coke ran from the colliery down to Willington Station, where it joined the branch and then main line to be shipped out at West Hartlepool. In 1854, the York, Newcastle and Berwick Railway merged with the York and North Midland Railway and the Leeds Northern Railway to form the North Eastern Railway (NER).

Willington Station consisted of a stationmaster's house, booking office, general waiting room and a small waiting room for

first class passengers. As more people used rail transportation, Willington Station became very crowded, especially on pay Saturdays. By 1866, the station was already inadequate to service the growing demand. The erection of the station brought Willington closer to the outside world. Mail and parcels regularly arrived everyday and the cheapness of train tickets meant that ordinary working class people could afford to travel to Durham or Bishop Auckland, the main shopping and leisure centres. Excursions to the coast became more popular. For large events, the NER put on special trains for passenger convenience. Special cheap tickets and trains meant that spectators could visit events like the Durham Miners' Gala and Durham Races more easily. For the Willington Choral Society concerts, the NER offered the audience special late trains back home. Crook residents, not connected to Willington by rail, caught a connecting omnibus service linked to the arrival of trains from Durham.

Despite the heavy traffic of passengers and freight through the station (10,152 passengers, 13,360 parcels and 58,000 tons of goods delivered in 1903 alone), Willington Station really owed its existence to Brancepeth and Willington Collieries.<sup>30</sup> The railway was extremely important to Straker and Love's operations. The 1863 Rocking Strike threatened the company's contracts with the NER, when they could not deliver their products due to industrial action. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that John Straker became a director of the NER in 1881. His position on the board ensured Straker and Love that all their interests would be met, and even furthered. The fact that John Straker was

elected by NER executives implies that he was well acquainted with the NER management personally. Such a blatant conflict of interest, however, was not unusual in Victorian Britain.

The railway had its own distinct brand of occupational hazards. Many workers were killed by waggons at the colliery. Because of the constant presence of trains, workers mistakenly walked in front of running trains or tried to dash across the railway line unsuccessfully. A slip or a moment's inattention caused many men and boys serious injury or death. The general public also risked their lives by making shortcuts across active railway lines.

Willington's only railway disaster happened on October 23, 1869 at Hunwick Station. Workmen were shunting waggons at Brancepeth Colliery, when twelve waggons ran wild. The waggons, running downhill, gathered speed through Willington Station. Unfortunately, the waggons were running head on into a passenger train from Bishop Auckland. William Dixon, stationmaster, was unable to contact Hunwick, the next station, by telegraph. He and several pitmen on their way home from work (c.6.30pm) ran to Hunwick, where to their horror, the waggons hit the passenger train, unloading people on the platform. The engineman and stoker died instantly, while several passengers suffered internal injuries and severed limbs. Those with severe injuries were dispatched to Durham County Hospital. The Deputy-Coroner felt that the accident was a result of "gross negligence."<sup>31</sup> Men working at Brancepeth Colliery were too young and inexperienced to be handling rail cars. Although the accident was a direct result of negligence at Brancepeth Colliery, Straker and Love

were not liable for any damages. The NER was forced to defend itself in court from a civil suit and lost.

The railwaymen at Willington were divided into two groups. A large majority of railwaymen worked for Straker and Love. These men included signalmen, firemen, enginemen, linemen and labourers. The Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens' Association and the Durham Colliery Mechanics' Association represented these men. Both unions found it difficult to unite, because they felt (like other miners' unions) that it was in the better interest of their members to remain a separate body.<sup>32</sup> Colliery railwaymen therefore had to follow Straker and Love's rules and regulations which applied to all their other workmen.

Another group of railwaymen were the station officials, clerks and other workers at Willington Station employed by the North Eastern Railway Company. Like colliery workmen, NER employees were liable to fines and deductions from their wages for violation of the company's rules and regulations. Fines were levied for negligence, running at too high a speed, refusing to start, loitering on the road, and being asleep on the job. The amount of money collected in fines went to support injured and sick workers and railway widows and orphans. The NER railwaymen were part of the Amalgamated Society of Railway Servants, Willington Branch. This union was totally separate from any miners' union in spite of the fact that the NER men were entirely dependent on colliery production. The NER's major industrial disputes occurred in 1867, 1874, 1889, 1910 and 1911. Most strikes involved the issue of wages and hours. The 1889 strike

was settled by arbitration for the first time. Along with their own disputes, NER workers were deeply affected by the miners' strikes. The revenue the NER lost in coal freight was passed down to the NER workers in wage cuts and employment terminations.

### **SERVICE INDUSTRIES**

Most residents in Willington relied directly on Brancepeth Colliery for employment. A growing minority of residents serviced the colliery workforce. Some small trades depended on Straker and Love contracts for their business. Thomas Longstaff, saddler, harness maker and ironmonger signed a contract to repair colliery saddlery, carts, waggon, and pit harnesses, and to provide the company with fresh horses for a year. Straker and Love paid Longstaff monthly for his services. Longstaff is only one example of several entrepreneurs who had large contracts with Straker and Love. In prosperous times, all parties benefitted from the contracts. This dependence of Straker and Love made businesses vulnerable to the directives of the company. During the Rocking Strike many shopkeepers refused to give strikers credit on the express wish of Joseph Love. It is obvious that Willington shopkeepers feared the authority of Straker and Love. Love controlled shops as diverse as painting and glazing, groceries and boot and shoe-making.<sup>33</sup> By manipulating the tradesmen, Love successfully prevented the Wesleyans and Primitive Methodists from finding a place of worship in Willington. The fledgling congregations had to worship in private houses, unconnected with the colliery.

As the population grew, so did the number of tradesmen and

professionals. Between 1858 and 1914, the number of people in trade grew from 54 to 130<sup>34</sup> By 1914, Willington had shops of all descriptions, a fried fish store, a picture house, several banks, insurance agents, surgeons and a dentist. The number of farmers remained fairly static. Straker and Love owned Burn Farm and hired a bailiff to administer it for them.

Willington women demanded economical and fair pricing. The Willington market was so successful that it undercut the shopkeepers. Angered by the loss in business, shopkeepers forced the market away from the main shopping area. Brancepeth Colliery women banded together in 1889 to protest against the high price of milk. They even sent a deputation to Joseph H. Straker to ask the owners to buy cows in order to supply workers with cheap milk. The expense of meat led to the "Dear Meat" demonstrations throughout Durham in 1872. Willington and Sunnybrow women held a demonstration at Willington Batts, condemning the high price of butcher's meat. The women demanded a co-operative butcher's. Joseph Love blocked any move by the men to start a co-operative in the 1860s.<sup>35</sup> He dismissed any men even talking about co-operatives.

Stymied in their efforts to have a store in Willington, several people joined co-operatives in nearby Crook and Bishop Auckland. The Bishop Auckland Industrial Co-operative Flour and Provision Society Limited failed to establish a Willington branch in 1866. The society was still trying to organize a branch, when the Crook and Neighbourhood Co-operative Corn Mill, Flour and Provision Society Limited decided to set up its own branch. Both societies were then frustrated when local residents in 1872 set

up the Willington and District Co-operative and Industrial Society Limited (the Crook society established a Willington branch in 1906, so that Willington then boasted two co-operative stores). The Willington Co-operative was extremely popular. By 1899, it had 1,012 members and had outgrown its premises. The dividend for each member that year was 3s4d on the £ for general purchases and 3s10d for butchers' purchases.<sup>36</sup> Besides Willington, the co-operative served the villages of Sunnybrow, Hunwick, Bowden Close, Oakenshaw, Page Bank, Brancepeth, Newfield, Todhills and Byers Green. By the turn of the century, co-operatives diversified into mortgages. The Willington Co-operative financed the construction of forty houses in 1903.

## ENDNOTES

- 1 Church, p.31-2
- 2 Ibid., p.399
- 3 Geoffrey E. Milburn, *Piety, Profit and Paternalism* (Cheshire, 1983), p.35
- 4 DC, 30 October 1863
- 5 Parliament. House of Commons. Select Committee Report 1890 XXIII 155
- 6 Margaret Ringwood, "Some Customs and Beliefs of Durham Miners", *Folklore* 67 (1957), p.423-5
- 7 DCRO NCB I/412
- 8 DC, Letters to the Editor, 30 October to 13 November 1863
- 9 W.B. Charlton, *A Fifty Years' History of the Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens' Association* (Durham, 1925), p.64
- 10 DC, 7 May 1868
- 11 DC, 9 October 1909
- 12 DC, 24 October 1890
- 13 DC, 8 June 1860
- 14 It was natural for colliery officials to hire sons and brothers of men already at work for they knew their relatives, and therefore the applicants were not complete strangers.
- 15 see Northern Daily Express, 29 January 1864, Table 1.8; also Table 2.3 (housing is part of wages earned); housing questionnaire 27 January 1891 and House Rent 1896 re housing allotments DCRO NCB I/Co/86
- 16 see DCOA Joint Committee Decisions DCRO D/EBF 14, esp. 3 September 1907, 9 April 1912
- 17 see footnote 15; also sliding scale reductions by DCOA (two separate reductions were made depending on occupation of mineworker). The discussion over these percentages can be viewed in all the mining unions' minutes and in secondary literature, i.e. Fynes, *Miners of Northumberland and Durham*
- 18 DCRO E/W53, National School Log Book
- 19 DCRO NCB I/Co/86

- 20  
Sifting through the wealth of secondary literature on coal mining, it becomes immediately apparent that historians have only two comments to make about women: 1) they were banned from underground work after 1842 and 2) they had little opportunities of employment. The obvious disinterest in women wage earners infers that they were non-existent or too small to be a factor in a family's wage. For a specific reference see Haines, "Fertility and Nuptiality", JIH 8:2 (1977), p.263-5
- 21  
Parliament. House of Commons. Select Committee Report 1899  
XV 1
- 22  
Northern Daily Express, 29 January 1864
- 23  
Ibid.
- 24  
DC, 9 December 1870
- 25  
William Moyes, The Banner Book: A study of the banners of the lodges of Northumberland and Durham, p.32
- 26  
DCRO D/EBF
- 27  
DCRO NCB Statistics
- 28  
Robert Hunt (ed.), Mineral Statistics of the U.K. of Great Britain and Ireland for 1858
- 29  
Most of this section is based on William Tomlinson, The North Eastern Railway (Newcastle, 19?)
- 30  
DC, 26 February 1904
- 31  
DC, 29 October 1869
- 32  
The sources as to the dissention among the mineworkers' unions are numerous. Indeed the creation of the Durham Colliery Enginemens' Union (later expanded to include boilerhandlers and firemen) from the DMA was a result of enginemens' dissatisfaction within the latter union, see R. Page Arnot, The Miners, p. 65; also minutes of Durham County Federation re crossed jurisdictions, i.e. 1910 (DCRO, D/EBF 13); also various inter-union disputes over strike funds in minutes of individual unions
- 33  
John Benson, British Coalminers in the Nineteenth Century (Dublin, 1980), p.91
- 34  
Based on the 1858 and 1914 Kelly Directories
- 35  
Benson, British Coalminers, p.91
- 36  
DCRO D/Co/DA

## CHAPTER TWO: HEALTH AND WELFARE

Britain's rapid industrialization in the nineteenth century created havoc with the existing health and welfare programs already in place. The lack of strong local government, sufficient for small agricultural communities, was inadequate and powerless to tackle the new problems mostly urban in nature, that industrialization posed. The creation of strong local or municipal governments was not a conscious effort to form effective political units, but was a byproduct of a new health system intended to eliminate the growing and alarming incidents of disease and its abettor -- poor sanitation.

It is ironic that the improvements in the health system of Britain's inhabitants were not instigated by those in the poorer classes who were worst affected but by the gentlemen and women of London, especially after the Great Stink of 1858. Assaulted by foul odours and threatened by the possibility of catching contaminable diseases Parliament began to introduce legislation gradually throughout the nineteenth century to combat these evils and prevent them from spreading.

The Elizabethan Poor Law, which lasted for over two hundred years, was outdated by the Industrial Revolution. Its reliance on the parish administration to oversee poor relief clearly was impossible in heavy urbanized areas and had few incentives to encourage honesty in parish officers. The Poor Law Amendment Act (1834) eliminated parish responsibility and created Poor Law Unions throughout the country administered by an elected Board of Guardians, who were ratepayers within their respective unions. The work of the union by paid officials aimed to ensure honesty

and diligence. The parish retained the right to assess and collect poor rates, but the increased democracy and bureaucratic structure of the unions, meant that this power was soon to be forfeited. The Public Health Act of 1848 furthered centralized local administration. A central General Board of Health was created under which local Boards of Health existed throughout the country.

The local boards had the right to appoint a Medical Officer of Health who was empowered to inspect drains, sewers, houses, and other areas of poor sanitation, thought to be the cause of disease. The Inspector of Nuisances assisted the medical officer by inspecting areas of environmental concern, such as refuse collection. Both inspectors were to prove very effective in the fight for disease prevention and a healthier environment. The Local Government Board Act (1871) eliminated Poor Law Boards in favour of Local Boards of Government overseen by a central Local Government Board in London. The Boards of Guardians continued as local administrators of the poor law. The 1888 and 1894 Local Government Acts further strengthened local administration by the creation of county and county borough councils and by the establishment of urban and rural district councils as health administrative bodies. By the early twentieth century Parliament went beyond local areas of administration and instituted national health and welfare programs -- such as Old Age Pensions Act (1908), Labour Exchanges Act (1909), National Health Insurance Act (1911), and Education (Provision of Meals) Act (1906). The creation of a welfare state to ensure the protection of its citizens from disease and deprivation revolutionized the function

of government and undermined the old established community leaders -- the gentry and the church.

### **Health and Hygiene**

Willington's major health problems -- high infant mortality, epidemics, disease and occupational injuries were affected to a great degree by the village's sanitation, housing and economy. Parliament's efforts to legislate Britain back to health through a public health system created Willington's first monitoring of its inhabitants' health, but failed to solve Willington's health problems.

The welfare of the population of Willington had much to do with the health of its inhabitants. One of the major causes of ill health and disease was the standard of living conditions. Victorians rightly viewed poor sanitation and housing as a source of public concern. Solving problems in construction and drainage, although sometimes controversial, was able to be enacted by legislation and an improved local administration. The difficulty arose in trying to improve the hygiene of a large section of the population and to care for those already past the stage of prevention, and now facing life as valetudinarians. Mining villages, in addition to suffering the general ailments and social conditions of the country, had the added problem of occupational hazards and diseases.

Victorians viewed miners as somewhat of an exotic race. Contemporary accounts of mining villages (Engels for example) depict mining communities as vulgar and degenerate.<sup>1</sup> Underground work, in itself, perhaps gave the impression of a demonic

character -- thereby those working underground had devilish or loutish qualities. The common view of miners was that they were dirty and unkempt.<sup>2</sup> However, miners themselves held personal hygiene as a virtue and despite their filthy working conditions, miners tried very hard to be neat and clean. The lack of pit baths (not installed at Brancepeth Colliery until the 1940s) and a proper water supply did not discourage men from bathing. On Sundays, residents paid particular attention to their appearance.

The men generally wear a black suit, and a stranger seeing them would hardly suspect them to be the men whom he had seen coming up from the pits begrimed with sweat and coal dust, and as black as negroes.<sup>3</sup>

Most colliery houses had a washhouse attached to them. The early colliery cottages in Willington which did not contain washhouses were renovated to include them in the 1890s. The washhouse, as the name implies, served for washing purposes. People bathed, and women washed clothes and hung laundry in them in bad weather. No matter how much a miner bathed himself, however, he could not disguise the marks of his occupation -- a blackened and scarred back. Due to the lowness of the pit, men had to hunch over to hew. Often they caught their spine on rocks projecting from the mine roof and the constant exposure of their naked backs to coal dust discoloured the skin.

Filth, despite the common Victorian perception was not acceptable to the working classes. People were not unhygienic because they wished to be but because they lacked the facilities and money to keep themselves tidy in appearance. Many poor possessed only one set of clothes, often ill-fitting and ragged. Robert Tressall's "The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists" dwells

on the working classes' lack of clothes and basic furnishings.<sup>4</sup> In Willington the Christmas charity committees often gave clothing and chits for groceries to the poor. The lack of even these basic necessities illustrates the true state of poverty within the village. As one headmistress described one Willington child:

The parents seem so sparing with soap and water. I wrote to one parent this morning. The child was in such a state that the teacher could not bear it. He is one just admitted from St. Oswald's Durham.<sup>5</sup>

### **Poverty and Crime**

At the same time Victorians were developing a national public health system to raise the living standard of the working class, the criminal justice system meted out harsh punishments for those unfortunates whose only real crime was poverty. Non-violent crimes such as theft and vagrancy, which originated from poverty, often resulted in prison sentences. And those convicted to pay only a fine often went to gaol for lack of funds. Violent crime, which only occurred in a small minority of all cases before the courts, received an overwhelming amount of publicity in the newspapers and captured the Victorian imagination. A good murder or dastardly assault made interesting news. The garroting panic of 1862, instigated by a series (but not unusual) number of garrottes created a panic, largely due to its attention in the media. The shockingness of violent crime meant that the problems associated with lesser non-violent crimes, i.e. begging, were often overlooked.

The majority of Willington's middle class, like the rest of

Victorian Britain, felt that poverty showed a lack of initiative and self-determination. A good example of that opinion is the experience of Thomas Carr, a shoemaker in Nelson Street.<sup>6</sup> Carr was a local Methodist preacher and a respected man in Willington. After a quarrel with chapel members, he left the church, consequently losing his standing within the community. He became an alcoholic and lost his trade. His wife and himself were turned out of their home and could only afford to live in a one room dwelling. Subsequently, Carr was jailed for stealing boots which indicates the desperate financial situation in which he found himself. When his wife, Mary Ann, died neighbours refused to move her body until they had had a couple of drinks first. The bed and her body were covered in vermin. Although the couple had 'respectable' married children living nearby, not one of them had aided the impoverished parents. Rumours spread at the time, concluded that the Carrs had eaten out of the pig trough due to lack of food. The fact the Carr's own children seemed to disown him and his wife probably indicates their disapproval for the alcoholic lifestyle he chose, rather than the more respectable position as a hard working and upstanding member of the community.

But not all local residents were impervious to the plight of their poorer neighbours. The Russell family often donated money to parish relief, maintaining their traditional position as lords of the manor. The Willington Charity Committee, a permanent body that sought to aid the very poor and infirm at Christmas, received financial support from all community leaders. Aged citizens, too weak to go out and receive their Christmas

dinner, had it delivered. Surplus funds were distributed in the form of grocery vouchers to needy families in January.

Real poverty was most evident during the miners' strikes. The 1863, 1879, 1892 and 1912 strikes caused severe hardship in Willington. During strikes, Straker and Love cut mineworkers off from their essential gas and coal supplies. Parents sent their children, as they would be free from retribution, out to collect berries, vegetables and coal from the pit heap for fuel. More desperate people stole from local farms. Soup kitchens opened to feed the starving strikers and their families. The Willington, Roman Catholic, Methodist New Connexion and school soup kitchens apportioned bread and soup to the strikers, needy and children. The Methodist New Connexion soup kitchen served 750 pints of soup daily in 1892.<sup>7</sup> The Willington soup kitchen in 1879 provided clogs and coats to needy persons. Benefit concerts and local subscriptions raised money for the relief effort. Lord Boyne, Rev Ruxton and Father Hosten made personal donations. Local organizations such as the Willington Co-operative, Willington Flower Show, Brancepeth Colliery Institute, Free Church Council and the Willington Workmen's Club aided the effort.

The men knew that a strike brought deprivation and hardship. Willington residents, although sympathetic (as a whole) to the workers, recognized that the men had chosen to face hardship themselves. It was starving children that made even the hardest hearted inhabitants contribute to the soup kitchens. Teachers' logs during strikes constantly comment on the state of the children. Local schools provided children with dinners and,

those in great need, with breakfast at school. Father Hosten provided Catholic school children with dinners from his own finances. After the strike was over, the soup kitchens closed down and excess money and food was given to especially impoverished families.

The concentrated charity efforts during strikes were for families normally receiving steady incomes. For paupers, there was little relief from Willington residents. The only charity in the village for the real poor existed only during the festive season as mentioned above. The only established forms of government relief from poverty were parish relief and the workhouse. The vestry and its successor the Poor Law Guardians determined who received aid. Outdoor relief was at the discretion of the local authorities and then only given to the very needy. For the destitute the only real offer to alleviate poverty was the workhouse, an institution created in 1834. In establishing these centres of shelter, free food and clothing Victorian intellectuals felt that inmates should work hard for their keep. Conditions in the workhouse were made bleak in order to discourage freeloaders. The government achieved its objective, for the workhouse was abhorred by every member of Victorian society. The nearest institution to Willington was the Durham Workhouse, seven miles away. Few poor Willingtonians viewed the workhouse as an alternative and persisted to live in impoverished conditions, albeit free from institutionalization. Most miners belonged to a friendly society so non-miners and widows were more likely to require some sort of relief. A nationalized Old Age Pension scheme was introduced in 1909. Only

fifty people received a pension that year in Willington since those on parish relief were disqualified unless they went off relief for twelve months, which they could not afford to do.<sup>8</sup> The poor therefore in Willington and throughout Britain had very few avenues to gain relief from their poverty. As a result many of the poor turned to crime.

The men on the front lines in controlling the social order of the village were the local Willington Police, part of the Durham County Constabulary (1855). The first mention of Willington Police Station is in 1863. Joseph Love built it at his expense, and it was probably in that year when the force was established in the village. Although Willington was an industrial village, the police force was rural in character. The Willington Police Force was small and did not have enough men to cope with all the offences committed in the village. In 1890 the force consisted of one sergeant and two constables, making a ratio of one policeman for every 1,702 people.<sup>9</sup> Shocking as this figure may seem, the Rural Constabulary Act recommended that no force should have more than one policeman for every 1,000 inhabitants. The sparsity of the police presence in Willington indicates that the police practised a great deal of discretion, since they simply did not have the manpower to investigate every disturbance.

The Willington local police force merely apprehended miscreants and presented them for trial. For cases involving summary jurisdiction offenders were brought before a magistrate in a formal court known as petty sessions. Usually JPs were leading community figures. John Straker, Joseph Love and

Robinson Ferens were all magistrates but only Straker attended court sittings. Offenders were more likely to be brought before Rev A.D. Shafto of Brancepeth Rectory who fulfilled the role of local judge for several years. If, however, the charge involved criminal jurisdiction offenders appeared at the Quarter Sessions, held four times a year before a judge and jury. The judge was a professional man of law and therefore was more qualified in adjudicating guilt or innocence criminally. For serious cases involving the death penalty offenders appeared at the assizes. Bridget McIntyre did so (see below) when she was charged with murder. The Willington Police handed over offenders not charged summarily to Durham County Gaol to await trial. The local police simply did not have the resources to lock up offenders for long periods of time. McIntyre, for instance, spent one month in prison awaiting trial.

Willington Police Court heard cases involving two major factors: drunkenness and poverty. Drunkenness usually led to breaches of the peace (see Chapter Four). Crimes based in poverty rarely involved violence, merely theft. Thefts involving clothing, boots and food were quite commonplace. The thieves simply grabbed an item for their own personal use. The theft of several miners' bait in 1881 had colliery officials baffled. Eventually it was determined that a tramp had wandered into a shed and stolen six meals and a bottle of rum and tea. Petty theft was not solely confined to men. Mary Ann Waldron appeared in an 1881 court facing her forty-seventh larceny conviction. Beggars and tramps were jailed or pushed out of the village for they strained an already inadequate parish relief fund. In 1865,

J. Clark was found sleeping in an outhouse at Brancepeth Colliery. He was convicted of vagrancy and incarcerated for three weeks with hard labour. Vagrants were considered criminals by Victorian society and were treated severely by the authorities. Despite harsh penalties, the number of vagrants rose to a staggering amount, especially in the inner cities. This is another instance of the failure of Victorian government to control migration into already overcrowded and impoverished urban slums.

Perhaps the most pitiful case involving poverty was the trial of Bridget McIntyre at the 1870 Durham Assizes. McIntyre's husband had been laid off as a labourer from Brancepeth Colliery and the family fell into rental arrears. They had only managed to pay nine weeks of a twelve month tenancy. When George Vasey, bailiff, and Police Constable Christopher Stockburn arrived at the McIntyre house to demand the rent, Bridget McIntyre was unable to pay. Vasey started to seize her furniture, but when he grasped the baby's cradle (the baby was in it), McIntyre became irate: "Vasey, you b---, I will kill you for taking my things."<sup>10</sup> McIntyre and Vasey started an argument and she hit Vasey with a rolling pin. PC Stockburn arrested Bridget McIntyre for assault. Vasey died a few days later of head injuries. She was tried for murder but the judge concluded that McIntyre had the right to use reasonable force to prevent an illegal seizure of goods in use (in this instance the cradle). Since she had used unreasonable force, the judge found her guilty of manslaughter, but with a recommendation of mercy. She was set free and bound over to keep the peace since she had already spent

one month in prison awaiting trial. The McIntyre case only highlights the suffering and destitution many families experienced in Wellington.

The precariousness of the coal trade, strikes and personal misfortunes were all factors that led to poverty in Wellington. Straker and Love was not willing to contribute in any large amount to conditions caused by market forces. Although, it must be said that the company did try to relieve residents but not in times of great distress (due to strikes). True poverty, that is long term poverty, was not remedied effectively to any great degree. The authorities made provision only for the very destitute as illustrated above. Residents were willing to show charity at Christmas and during strikes but not at other times. The police treated vagrants and beggars as criminals and not victims. The Salvation Army, which concentrated its efforts on helping the poor, did not have the support of a large enough cross-section of the population to effect real change. The failure of government and private bodies to remedy the poverty problem effectively forced many unfortunates to remain endemically poor. As a result, crime offered the poor the only opportunity to gain instant relief from their stress. Thereby the poor became criminals and society sought to punish them for what was in the first instance a case of poverty.

### **Sanitation**

Upon entering the northern coalfield contemporary visitors were first struck by the intense air pollution created by the

collieries and the burning of coal. The black residue emitted by coal engulfed the area as one visitor noted:

The most visible characteristic of Durham is its dirt, for the smoke of the collieries, which envelopes the country in every direction, blights vegetation, covers the fields with black ashes, and hangs in a thick cloud overhead.<sup>11</sup>

Willington was not particularly attractive and a traveller's handbook, which noted places of interest along rail routes in County Durham, described the stop nine miles from Durham City on the way to Bishop Auckland as, "Willington Station, in the midst of a hideous colliery."<sup>12</sup> The handbook was more than justified in its criticism of Willington's conditions, since Willington unfortunately, had an infamous reputation for its lack of sanitary hygiene and its general deplorable state. Local residents were far from satisfied concerning the state of their village. Some were even prompted to write to local newspapers depicting the village's shortcomings.

Victorians believed that sanitation was directly linked to the spread of disease. The cholera and small pox epidemics that victimised Victorian society every few years caused great concern and local governments tried earnestly to remedy sanitary conditions. Willington's nuisance committee regularly inspected the village for evidence of poor sanitation after its establishment in the 1860s. When the Willington local board was established in 1881, it paid a medical officer and a sanitary inspector to make regular reports on the health and condition of Willington's inhabitants and their dwellings to the board. Willington ratepayers tried unsuccessfully throughout the

nineteenth century to improve the village's social conditions. Since sanitary improvements often cost a great deal of money, ratepayers were reluctant to make any decisions involving an increase in rates. Meetings to suggest ways of remedying Willington's sanitary state often resulted in stalemates or even chaos.

The sanitary state of Willington has long been a reproach to the township and a source of danger to the health of its inhabitants, and it would appear that in searching for a remedy the mental equilibrium of the ratepayers is in as much danger of being overturned as their bodily health is threatened by the physical evils which exist in their midst.<sup>13</sup>

Willington's main street, which encompassed both Commercial and High Streets, was potholed and muddy. High Street was not paved with flagstones until 1883 and Commercial Street until 1893. The condition of the main thoroughfare was wretched, especially after a good rainfall. The pavement was uneven and remained as such into the twentieth century:

.. you go down the centre of the road, for, notwithstanding you are up to the ankles in mud, it is better than the flags, which are so irregular that you never know till thump you go down on your knees.<sup>14</sup>

The shops, public houses and places of entertainment along High and Commercial Streets were interspersed with residential dwellings. The sanitary inspector gave notice in 1884 to a High Street butcher's shop to rectify the washing of blood and water down an open channel opposite house entrances. If the main street could be described as bad, the back streets were simply horrible. Many back streets remained unpaved and lacked

sufficient drainage which created smelly and muddy roads. The practice of building colliery rows backing other rows only enhanced existing sanitation problems. Privies, ashpits, water taps and drains all occupied the back of the house. If sanitation measures were in regular working order, residents had fair sanitary surroundings. Usually, however, all was not in working order. Open drains, overfull ashpits and unclean privies created a severe nuisance problem.

Victorians had a great deal of problems obtaining a pure and sufficient supply of water. It was not uncommon for water supplies to be contaminated by seeping cesspools or drains, and in many areas it was difficult to find an adequate supply for the growing population. In many areas residents had to pay for water by the bucket from the communal tap (private taps in houses were a luxury). The idea of free water was late Victorian with the advent of municipal water companies. Willington, being a mining village, had the advantage of free water pumped up from the mines when drilling for coal. Although, this water supply was very rudimentary.

Water for Willington residents prior to 1875 was wholly inadequate. High Willington residents relied on one small spring for both their cooking and drinking water. In summer, the spring dried up and residents had to obtain water from a muddy beck. Elsewhere in the village were numerous springs and of course the dubious river Wear, although this supply still did not fulfill Willington's needs. Straker and Love supplied colliery rows with tepid water, but some rows lacked sufficient taps. In 1871, no less than one hundred people used one pump daily.<sup>15</sup> Miners in

rented accommodation did not receive any water supply from the colliery. The Weardale and Shildon Water Company by Act 29 and 30 Vict c300 (1866) obtained the right to lay mains pipes in Willington. The pipes were finally laid in 1875 and residents put them into immediate use. On the board of directors sat no less than three members of the Pease family (Henry, Arthur, H. Fell). The Peases, based in Darlington, had mining interests (Pease and Partners) in the Crook area. The water company was very successful and in 1901 amalgamated with the Consett Water Company to form the Weardale and Consett Water Company.

After mains piping, Willington's drinking water improved and was of "excellent quality."<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the drainage system was far from perfect. Many houses had neither drains nor channels. The sanitary authority received several complaints from residents whose property had become a cesspool from someone's sewage. William Richardson, a farmer, complained in 1871 that sewage flowing from a drain down the back of High Street was emptying into his field. In summer, this open cesspool stank and became a nuisance. The North Eastern Railway Company threatened to take legal action after persistent complaints to the local board went unheeded, since the sewage flowing from Chapel and High Street which accumulated into Richardson's field, leaked onto Willington Station. The sanitary authority recognized the problem but had run out of funds to complete the street drain, leaving the sewage to leak onto Richardson's property. The nuisance committee did not have enough power to levy a rate to finish the drain and petitioned Lord Boyne for funds. The ineffectiveness of the local

authorities was well recognized by the residents:

In Willington we have houses that have no privies, no sewage, no, drains; nor nothing connected with them. If our parochial committee acted rightly, these nuisances would be put down.<sup>17</sup>

Another highly offensive nuisance was the problem of refuse. Before the introduction of dumps or landfills solid refuse was simply discarded onto an empty field. In a rural setting this practice, although distasteful, was not necessarily unhygienic. In an urban area, however, dumping refuse onto the street was not merely a nuisance but a health hazard. And this was compounded with the problem of keeping the streets clean from horse and other animal manure. Obviously, in summer the streets stank horribly.

Another rank problem in Willington was privies. Luckily for Willington water closets and cesspools were rare in the village. Before mains piping, water closets could not be introduced into the village, and when it was possible to do so, it became impractical. Water closets were not a necessity, but a luxury. The Weardale and Shildon Water Company charged an extra rate to supply water closets and private baths in dwelling houses. Both WCs and cesspools were highly unhygienic. Most towns in Britain lacked adequate drainage and treatment facilities to release the contents of WCs back into the environment. And many houses with WCs often smelled due to blocked pipes. Cesspools often cracked and leaked their contents back into the water supply. Another problem with cesspools was their cleaning, which had to be performed by private contractors. The working class simply could not afford such a fee and cesspools were left to overflow.

Willington's residents favoured the use of a privy, usually shared among several houses in the early nineteenth century. In 1906 two privies served twenty-six and twenty-three people respectively, but this situation was unusual at that time.<sup>18</sup> Residents took turns in scrubbing out the privy in order to keep it sanitary. Privies, compared to cesspools and WCs, were very sanitary. They were emptied regularly by shovel onto carts and the refuse was dumped far from residential dwellings onto an authorized dump site. For the mineworkers in Willington Straker and Love serviced their privies in all colliery cottages free of charge.

Colliery carts collected the waste regularly from colliery cottages and the local board did likewise for other houses. During the 1892 strike, colliery cartmen refused to do their rounds. The local board wanted to dispose of the nuisance but was afraid of the expense and of creating a precedent, whereby the board would be responsible for the entire village's waste disposal. So, it left the ashpits to overflow. The local board dumped their waste on a refuse tip, approved in 1883, at the low end of Willington. It is not clear if Straker and Love did likewise. Prior to the official establishment of a dump, one can assume that refuse was tipped either on waste land or into the river Wear. Even after its establishment, residents fell into old habits. Farmers complained to the local board in 1887, that villagers tipped ashes onto their land, thereby destroying the soil. In 1906, concern was raised when some residents simply dumped the contents of their midden privies in the streets, which prompted the sanitary inspector to suggest the installation of

water closets. The sanitary inspector regularly checked the ashpits. At a local ratepayers meeting, John Tulip accused Robinson Ferens of using his influence to find out when the inspector was coming, so that Straker and Love had forewarning and could pass the inspection. Others at the meeting agreed. One voice shouted that colliery carts sometimes came around the houses as early as 2am on the day before the inspection:

Tulip: It is just this way. Mr Ferens is Mr Ferens and I am John Tuilip. That makes a mighty difference  
Ferens: Not at all  
Tulip: ...whenever there is going to be an inspector the colliery carts are sent (loud applause) and the rows are all cleaned up (cheers). But I do not know the inspectors are coming, and for that reason I have to abide the consequences.<sup>19</sup>

The fact that Straker and Love rarely received a notice from the inspector indicates that their position of influence affected the inspector's reports.

Willington was first lighted with gas lamps in 1865. The gas lighting committee and later the local board regulated lighting in Willington. Straker and Love produced gas at Brancepeth Colliery Gas Works for Willington and Oakenshaw. In the early nineteenth century the supply of gas was insufficient. The gas supply was so irregular that shopkeepers were forced to keep candles or lanterns on hand.

The light they had in the place only rendered the darkness more visible.<sup>20</sup>

In 1885, the colliery erected a new gas works which dramatically improved the quality of gas and resolved many of the earlier complaints. The quality of street lighting was not solved until 1905. The local board had a contract with Straker

and Love to clean, light and extinguish the street lamps. Prior to 1905, the contract was valid from dawn until dusk, except on nights during a full moon. This inefficient form of lighting was abandoned in 1905 in favour of lighting the lamps from sunset to midnight between August and May. Altogether the village contained 116 lamps and the new Straker and Love contract lit up the streets beautifully for the first time.

Sanitation in Willington, although criticized, could not have been that bad. True, the streets were rough and uneven and not all the necessary drains were installed, yet residents by comparison were better off than their fellowmen in Newcastle or London. Brancepeth Colliery provided all their workers (the majority of the townspeople) with free houses, coal, gas, water and even a refuse collection service. Straker and Love were organized and efficient -- the local board was not. The local government failed to plan for the expansion of Willington and only responded to the problems once they had been created. The nuisance committee recognized problems, but had no effective means of enforcing compliance to sanitary standards. The local board, empowered with the finances to make effective change, was weak and afraid to raise rates. As a result members resorted to insults and casting aspersions rather than effectively governing the town. The result was a strange melee. Willington was far advanced in its lighting and water supply and far behind in its drainage and street paving. The town was an anomaly. Straker and Love made Willington progressive and raised the standard of its sanitation. Local government lagged behind other governments in its failure to combat the fundamental causes of bad sanitation

through ill-financing and ill-feeling. And another factor led to Willington's sanitation problems. During a strike, the colliery had no qualms in cutting light and fuel to colliery houses and the majority of Willington residents. Even colliery refuse collection halted as collection was a unionized job. The result was a nightmare. Sanitation was not simply the improvement of sanitary conditions but a political force manipulated by various members of the community to achieve their own ends.

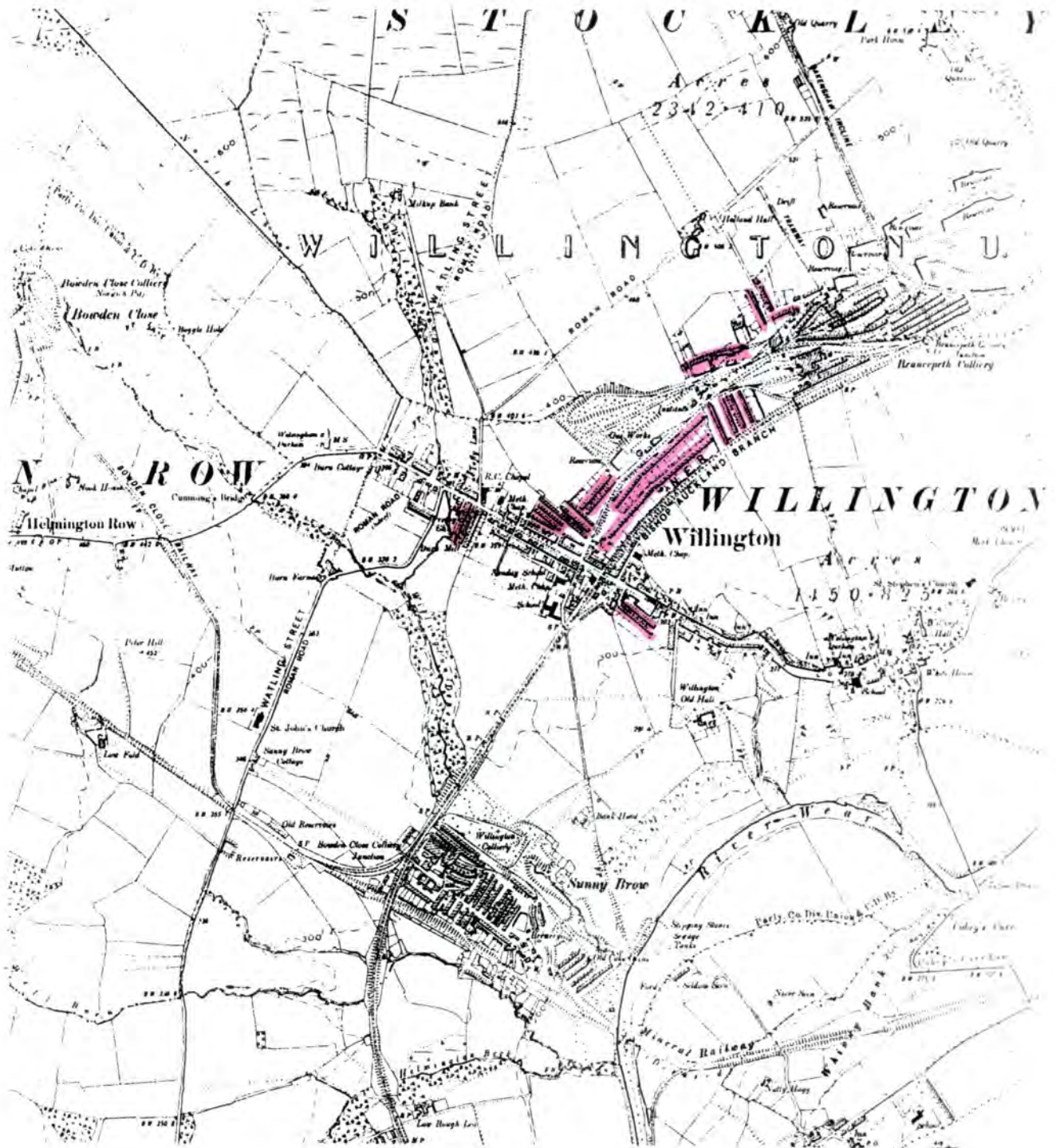
### **Housing**

Victorian housing underwent massive changes due to the Industrial Revolution. The need to have large numbers of workers near a certain industry meant that housing had to be concentrated into one small area, otherwise the workers would have too far to travel to their place of work. This highly concentrated or urban pattern of housing was new to most areas of Britain -- London, being the notable exception. And unfortunately by the time government realized the lessons to be learned from London's overcrowding, rookeries, slums and bad sanitation, other areas in Britain were already far too progressed in similar horrific housing disasters. The rapid expansion of industry did not parallel highly organized and regulated urban planning. Houses were simply built where there was space. Tenants had few housing rights and the very poor were forced to accept completely uninhabitable structures, such as damp cellars devoid of light. Contemporary Victorians such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell are so detailed in their descriptions of slum housing


that the reader cannot help but believe that it was the truth. And slums were not unique to Britain -- continental Europe which experienced industrialization shortly after England also experienced similar horrors. Emile Zola's description of a miner's village in Germinal and of the life miners led in northern France is similar to the life led by their comrades in Scotland and South Wales.

Residents in the northeastern coalfield enjoyed a higher standard of living than their counterparts in Wales and Scotland and this included housing. There were no cellars or tenement buildings in Willington and a surprising number of people lived in a house to themselves. The large increase in the village's population did present a housing problem, but for a few exceptions, this never led people to live in slum dwellings such as people accepted in the cities.

In 1839 housing in Willington consisted of farms, inns, houses, cottages and Willington Old Hall. When Brancepeth Colliery started production, Straker and Love built cottages to house the workers. The constant growth of the labour force created housing pressure. Straker and Love constructed a series of colliery rows to accommodate the men and their families, but there were many mineworkers who received no accommodation. For them and the growing number of workers involved in service industries, housing became a real problem. Independent proprietors seized the opportunity to construct housing, since occupancy was virtually guaranteed. Unlike other colliery firms in the country, Straker and Love did not need to build houses to attract labour. Brancepeth Colliery was always fully manned

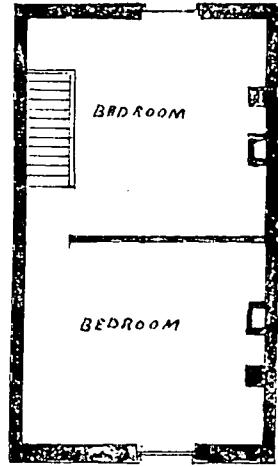


BRANCEPETH COLLIERY HOUSING 1898  
(the village of Oakenshaw excluded)

 denotes colliery cottages

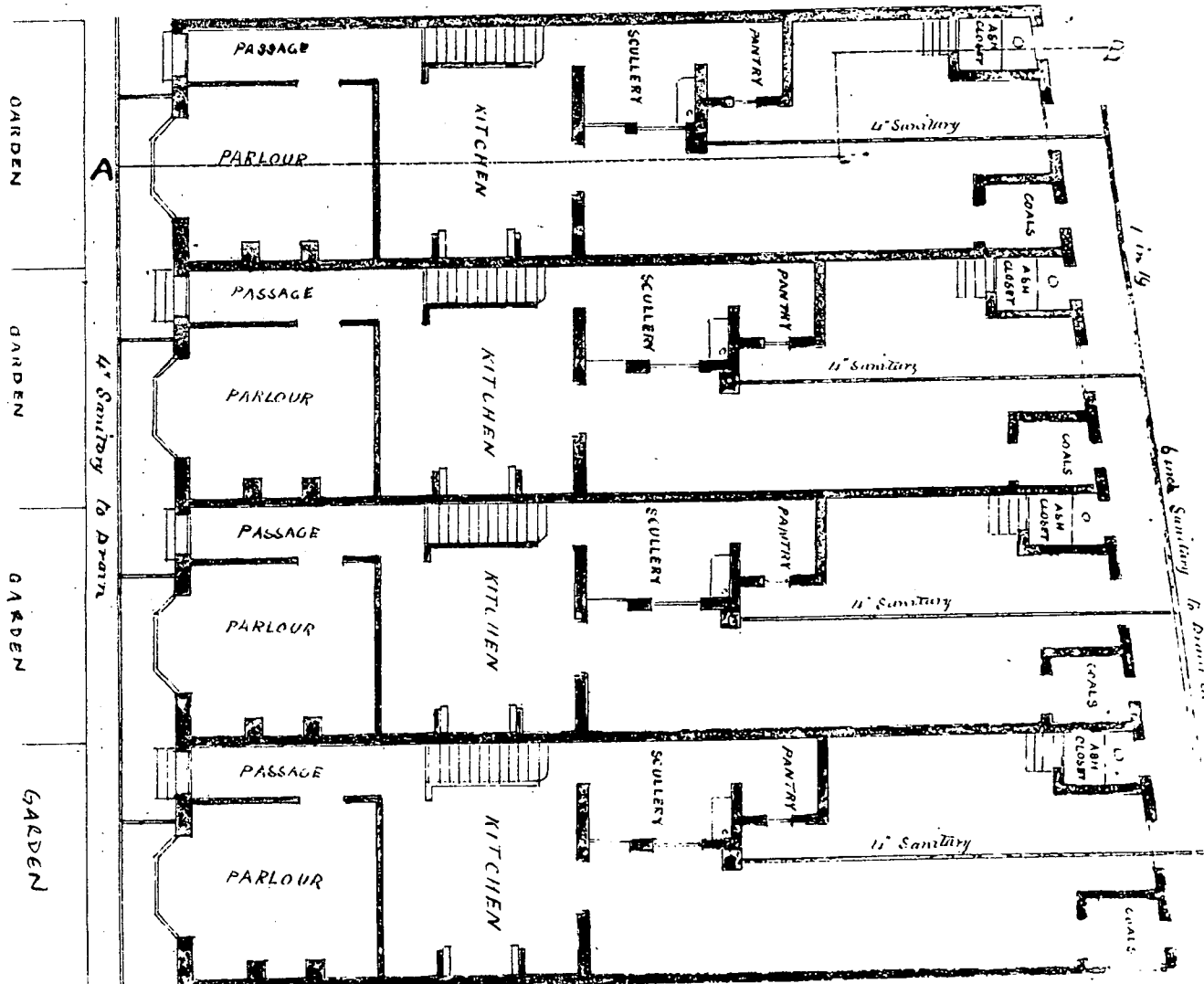
Plan of Four Houses 1894 (Clarence Terrace)  
 Source: DCRO, Willington U.D.C. records

This is an example of officials' colliery cottages. Notice the ornate brick work and bay windows and the provision of a garden. See also photos at end.



BEDROOM PLAN

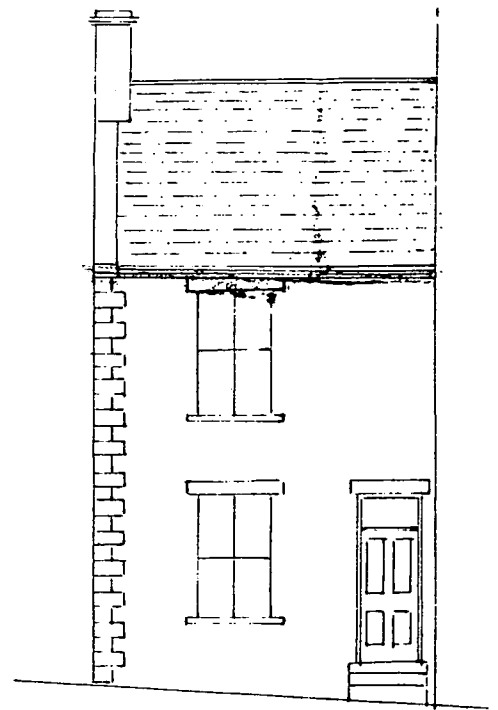
FRONT ELEVATION



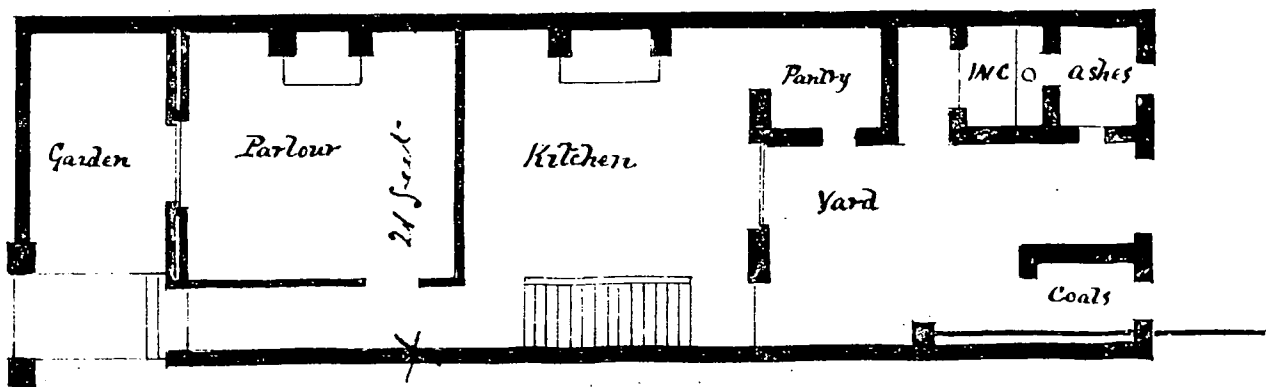
GROUND PLAN

A Four Roomed House Plan  
(Hunwick Lane)  
Source: DCRO, Willington  
U.D.C. records

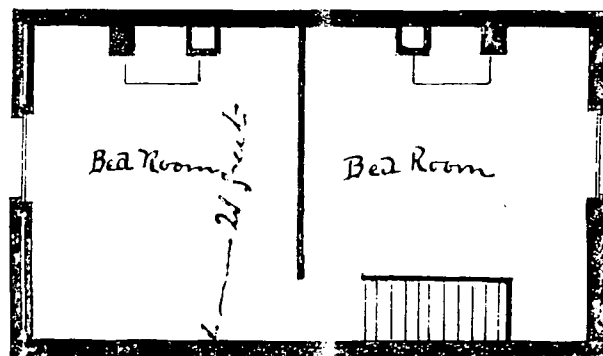
This is an example of a four  
roomed colliery cottage. See  
also photos at end.



*Elevation*



*Ground Plan*



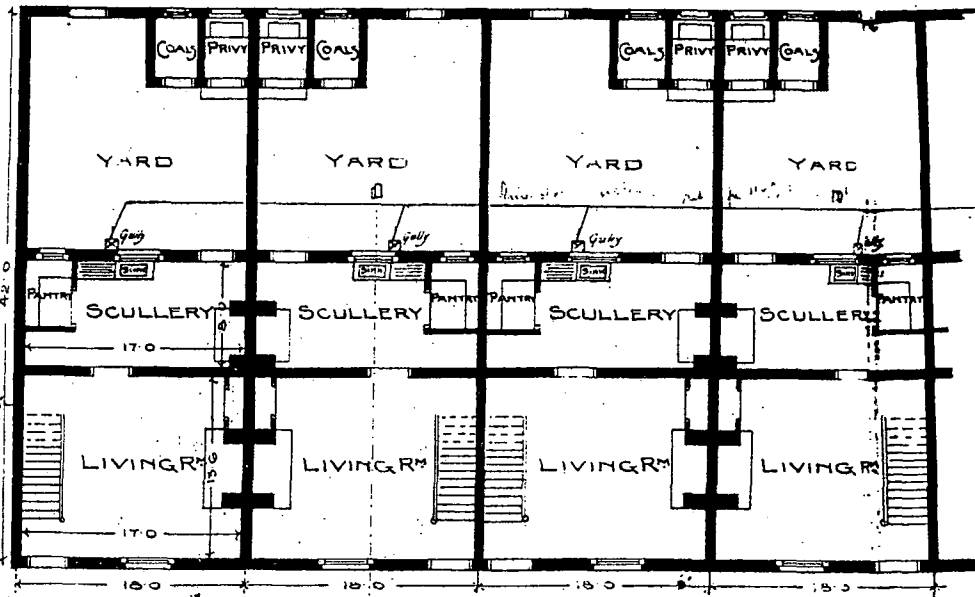
*Chamber Plan*

Another example of a workman's colliery cottage. Notice the difference in the use of space and division of rooms compared to the plan of houses in Hunwick Lane.

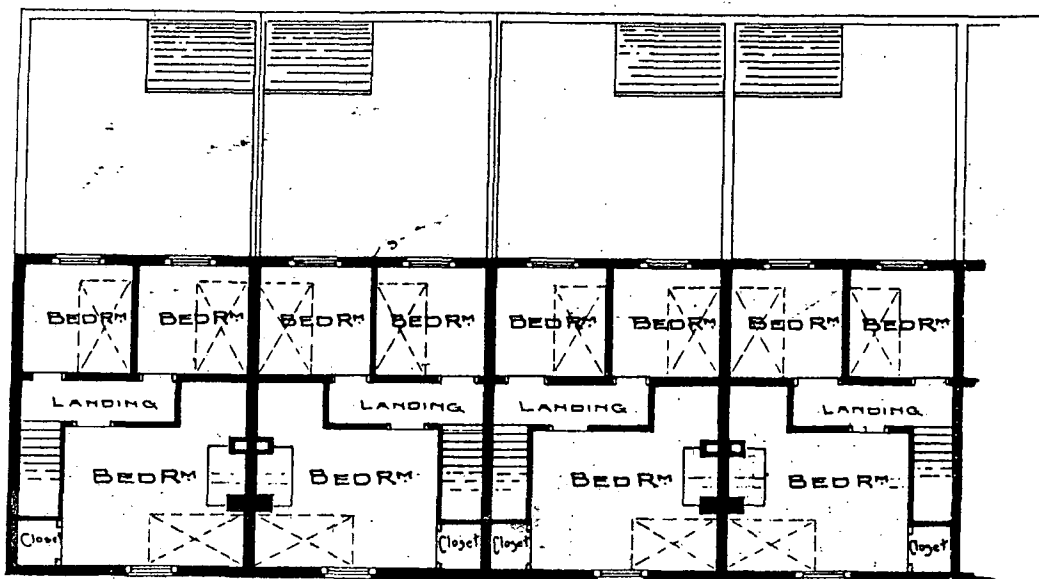


FRONT ELEVATION

BACK STREET



GROUND PLAN



(except in the case of strikes) and so the colliery was not under pressure to construct colliery cottages. A look at the census shows the explosion in housing construction and the high level of occupancy.

Table 2.1 Housing Statistics

Date	Houses Inhabited	Houses Uninhabited
1831	43	-
1841	46	-
1851	159	2
1861	441	13
1871	846	28
1881	948	21
1891	948	26
1901	1,060	-

Source: Census

As houses became more in demand, contractors tried to squeeze them into back streets and wherever they could find a vacant space. John Tulip even built two cottages backing colliery privies. Building continued unchecked and the result was a major social disaster:

Its straggling streets of houses of almost every shape and size do not give it a prepossessing appearance. There are houses in the main street, old and undesirable, and the open channel systems still prevail throughout the district.<sup>21</sup>

Although Willington was a rural community, its housing patterns created an urban atmosphere. Houses were concentrated into very small areas, for the village could not expand onto the farms. Sanitation problems of an urban, rather than a rural character affected the village. Poor residents had to accept houses with neither drains nor conveniences, for there was no other alternative. Even mere hovels served as homes. In 1884, the local board declared a cottage at the back of Nelson Street an unfit dwelling. It had no back door or other conveniences and

had served as a dwelling for over a year. The proprietors, Rock Building Society, were served notice to put it in order or close it for habitation.

References to private housing in Willington is very sparse. Willington Old Hall was the oldest large residence in the village. Its occupants were gentlemen or large farmers. Tradesmen resided above or near their places of business -- usually along High and Commercial Streets. Farmers lived outside of the village in houses on their own farmsteads. Descriptions of housing for the middle class and professionals have survived in housing plans. James Robson's house in Hunwick Lane was built with red brick and white ornamental brick dressings. The sills were made of stone and the roofs of slate. The front room had a wooden floor, while the washhouse had a cement one. The house also included a pantry, coal house and water closet. Drainage consisted of a trap and gulley, and six inch sanitary pipes leading to a cesspool. The south east and north walls were twelve inches thick, while all others were nine. The front yard was enclosed with a wall and iron palisades.

Colliery houses constituted the majority of housing in Willington. In 1874 Straker and Love owned roughly sixty percent of all houses. By 1896 this figure had risen to over seventy-five percent.<sup>22</sup> Colliery houses, or cottages as they were known, were terraced houses set in rows. Straker and Love's cottages were dispersed throughout the village as a result of the firm's land claims. Unfortunately, most of the firm's land was near the colliery itself. This meant that, as in other mining villages, a large number of houses were concentrated around the

pit, and the air and noise pollution there must have been intense. The Brancepeth pit heap overshadowed the countryside and glowed perpetually. Terraced houses, however, did have their advantages. Coal fires kept by neighbours either side, helped one to keep a house warmer. The closeness of neighbours aided anyone in need of assistance, although complete privacy was difficult to maintain. Many colliery rows had small front gardens, but not large enough for growing vegetables. Horticulturalists had to rent an allotment for that purpose. By the 1890s most cottages had a backyard containing a washhouse, coal house and ashpit. Several families shared a privy, which they each took turns in maintaining.

The general size of a colliery cottage was quite small, but the amount of rooms in a house varied greatly. Four roomed houses started to be built on a large scale in the early twentieth century. One and two roomed cottages were a trend in early colliery housing. The former were low, badly lighted and ill ventilated. In winter the house was cold and in summer exceedingly hot.

Table 2.2 1874 Brancepeth Colliery Cottages

Number of Rooms in a Cottage	Number of Cottages
1	2
2	249
3	207
4	52
6	1
8	4

Source: NCB Statistics

Straker and Love realized that one and two roomed cottages had become antiquated by the late nineteenth century. In 1894, the firm modernized thirty-eight two roomed houses into four roomed

houses with a self contained yard, back premises and a washhouse. The six and eight roomed houses were the officials' residences, which tended to be more ornate than those of the workers. R.L. Weeks, Brancepeth Colliery viewer, resided at Burn house after the Strakers vacated it. The colliery owners preferred to live in large houses situated in Low Willington called Willington House (Love and Ferens) and the White House (Strakers). Both houses had large lawns and servants quarters. After achieving financial success Joseph Love and Robinson Ferens built their own mansions in Durham City. Joseph Straker lived in his own large house in Northumberland, which his sons inherited along with other houses.

John Wilson, MP, opened twelve Aged Miners' Homes in Willington in 1913 for retired Brancepeth Colliery workmen. Each house had two rooms, a scullery and conveniences. The Aged Miners' Homes were built to accommodate retired miners and therefore were quite small in size. They were the only retirement homes in the village prior to 1914.

Table 2.3 1896 Brancepeth Colliery Housing Allotments

A) Married men with houses : 665 (includes 412 hewers)

Underground Occupations: overman, deputy, mastershifter, hewer, stoneman, shifter, rolleywayman, onsetter, waiter-on, horsekeeper, pump attendant, handputter

Aboveground Occupations: engineer, inspector, shaftsman, tokenman, weighman, horsekeeper, banksman, waggonrider, boiler minder, bank headman, bank bottom-man, fireman, guard, cokeburner, foreman joiner, foreman mason, foreman smiths, pick sharper, horse shoer, fitter, waggonwright, boilersmith, plumber, smith, joiner, tub mender, sawyer, mason, platelayer, striker, mechanic's labourer, engineman, other men

B) Single men with houses : 30

Underground Occupations: deputy, hewer, onsetter's assistant, hand putter

Aboveground Occupations: tokenman, horse shoer, joiner, engineman, other men

C) Men and Boys without houses : 906 (includes 216 married men)

Underground Occupations: filler, water-leader, timber leader, braking incliner, greaser, driver, other boys

Aboveground Occupations: lampman, branch driver, cartman, branchman, screener, cokedrawer, small runner, coke filler, leveller, cokeyard labourer, painter, foreman platelayer, mechanic's apprentice, painter, other boys

D) Men receiving rent in lieu : 1

Aboveground Occupation : foreman filler

Source: NCB Statistics

Each man who received a cottage was required to keep it and its windows in good repair. The men who did not qualify for a colliery house were boys and labourers. A large number of married men did not live in colliery houses, and since they earned lower wages than those in houses, most of their wage must have gone for rented accommodation or lodging. If they were lucky enough, they lived in houses occupied by relatives, although this is hard to prove. Residing in a colliery house saved workers rent and provided them with a house instead of rooms, to live in. But one serious drawback was Straker and Love's right to evict the occupants if the breadwinner left or was dismissed from the colliery. Widows and orphans of miners killed in the pit had no claim whatsoever to colliery houses, since the breadwinner no longer worked at the colliery. Only the breadwinner was entitled to a housing allotment and this consideration was removed when he vacated his post for any reason. Sons, working as mineworkers at the pit, were not entitled to claim their father's housing rights. Straker and Love's strongest weapon against disgruntled workers was eviction, which they enforced in 1863. Since workmen were not tenants,

they could not claim squatting rights over colliery houses. Coal allowance, by the same manner, was withheld from striking workers.

Coal, like colliery cottages, was part of a worker's wage. Not every worker was entitled to a coal allowance (for example firebrick makers). The colliery did continue to provide coal to entitled workers who became sick or disabled. The coal was delivered regularly to colliery cottages by Straker and Love cartmen. Men in both colliery cottages and in rented accommodation received 16 cwts of coal every three weeks, and sometimes at closer intervals in the winter. How workers not living in Straker and Love premises received their coal is not documented.

Overcrowding was a severe problem throughout Britain and Victorians felt that this was one of the factors linked to disease. The duty of the sanitary inspector was to check overcrowding and ensure that all dwellings were safe, well lit and ventilated. He also inspected the conveniences and drains to ensure that all houses were in good sanitary order. Parliament gave more power to local government through a series of housing acts to ensure that working class housing was fit and healthy for habitation and that lodging houses were well regulated.

County Durham had the second highest percentage of overcrowding after Northumberland according to the 1891 census. And the three most overcrowded towns in England were Gateshead, Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Sunderland.<sup>23</sup> Despite this fact overcrowding was rarely mentioned in the sanitary inspector's

reports in Willington and yet it is impossible to picture an eight member family not being overcrowded in a three roomed house. The fact that no complaints exist of overcrowded colliery houses suggests that residents were satisfied with their accommodation. Private lodgings for workers were more likely to be overcrowded. In 1871 in Reardon's lodgings six beds were crammed into a 20x14 foot room and another three in a 13x13 foot area.<sup>24</sup> All the lodgers were mineworkers.

Table 2.4 Housing of Miners in County Durham

	No. of occupants per house	Percentage of subletting	Percentage of unsuitable dwellings
1901	5.93	16.15	4.20
1911	5.69	14.75	4.89

Source: The British Coal Trade, H. Stanley Jevons, 1920

One type of overcrowding was the practice of building back to back houses, which was characteristic in northern housing construction. In 1906, there were one hundred and fifty back to back houses in Mill Street, High Street, Commercial Street, Park Terrace and Low Willington. Back to back houses caused their own particular brand of problems, for residents had only one entrance to their homes. These houses had no through ventilation for a house in the middle of a row had three neighbours -- one behind and one either side of the house. Obviously, more people could inhabit one area with back to back houses than with the conventional row houses. In Willington, the back to back houses had front entrances that faced earth roads lacking channels. After a rainfall Commercial Street backing Lydia Street was a quagmire of mud.

More notorious than the back to back houses were the back

to front houses known as Rodger's buildings. The lack of a planning authority had created an unpleasant dilemma. One row of houses fronted the ashpits and drains from the back of the row opposite. The sanitary inspector was alarmed at the condition of these houses. The front houses had no channel, ashpits or other conveniences. Three ashpits served the twenty back houses, and instead of the inhabitants throwing their filth out their back, they chose to dispose of it in their front. The owner was served several notices, but the lack of available housing in Willington meant that people would endure practically anything to get a house.

Unfit inhabitable houses was another Victorian housing problem. When the number of adequate dwellings was far less than the demand for housing people had to accept substandard housing for there was no other alternative. In 1906, the sanitary inspector found fourteen dwellings unfit for habitation. The houses had ladders for stairs, bad floors and open ashpits. In a couple of houses, residents had to wheel refuse through the house in order for it to be carted away.

The general state of the colliery cottages, with the exception of drainage, which was partially a local government problem, seems to have been satisfactory in Willington. Only in one case in 1876, is there evidence of a run down colliery cottage. The sanitary inspector discovered an uninhabited Straker and Love cottage at the high end of Willington that had no back door, ash midden or sanitary conveniences. It is unknown whether the firm renovated it or not. The number of private dwellings declared unfit for habitation was very rare in

Willington, although it did occur. And it seems that there was a recurrence of negligence from a few owners who never seemed to quite satisfy the inspector. Rodger's buildings, as mentioned above, was constantly put under notice.

### **Epidemics and Disease**

The major diseases of the nineteenth century were typhus, typhoid, influenza, scarlet fever, cholera, measles, diphtheria, tuberculosis and smallpox. Most of these diseases were highly contagious and coupled with a poor sanitary environment they fast became uncontrollable epidemics. And fatalities were quite high -- roughly thirty percent.<sup>25</sup> The smallpox epidemic of 1837-40 alone killed 42,000 people. Cholera frightened many Victorians for its four epidemics between 1830 and 1870 killed altogether over 124,000 people in Britain. Parliament began to realize that local doctors and medics simply did not have the resources to cope with these dreadful diseases. A series of health acts dealing with housing, sanitation, and vaccination was complemented by the establishment of local medical officers of health, whose duty was to stop the spread of disease and prevent it from occurring.

Willington's medical officer, by profession a doctor, was quite active in enforcing health regulations, but he was often hampered by the lack of medical facilities available to the public. Without an isolation hospital, quarantine became difficult. Ratepayers discussed as early as 1871, the proposal of an isolation hospital. Dr McDonald suggested the parish rent six cottages to isolate smallpox patients, the main disease at

that time. The expense of such a project left ratepayers unwilling to make a decision. Without an isolation hospital, doctors tried to isolate patients in their own homes. When a miner's daughter caught smallpox in 1884, the doctor made the family next door move away until the girl had recovered. Communication with the affected family was strictly forbidden. An Infectious Diseases hospital was finally erected in 1904 at Helmington Row. The Auckland, Shildon and Willington Joint Hospital Board regulated the forty bed hospital. Half the patients in 1905 were from Willington. In other instances patients were often too poor to follow the medical officer's orders. When he ordered a smallpox patient to burn all his clothes in 1893, the local board had to compensate the patient for the loss of his clothes.

Willington had only one resident surgeon until the late nineteenth century, when the town's size attracted a couple of doctors and a dentist. It is interesting to note how the villagers dealt with the lack of physicians. In 1853, a cholera epidemic struck Willington. Joseph Love paid a few colliery workers to nurse their sick co-workers. He also enabled Thomas Dunn, railway inspector, to nurse the sick men at Brancepeth and Willington collieries. After the epidemic was over, grateful colliery workers presented Dunn with a gold watch for his services.

The doctor was exceedingly important to Willington. The nearest hospital, Durham County Hospital, was used only for serious cases. Miners relied heavily on the doctor to tend to work-related injuries. Straker and Love employed a doctor to

look after the men. One doctor, however, could not cope with the large number of occupational injuries. The St. John Ambulance Association opened a branch at Brancepeth Colliery in 1881. Workmen took courses on first aid and sat an examination. Dr R.E. Brown donated his services as medical instructor. Increased general knowledge of first aid allowed the doctor to spend more of his time on serious injuries. Friendly societies such as the Oddfellows and Foresters offered their members the services of a doctor. Dr W.C. Allen and Dr MacDonald were surgeons to the lodges respectively. Miners, who constituted the majority of members, did not need to worry about paying for a doctor's services if ill. The Willington Nursing Association started in 1896 with a staff of two nurses. The association raised funds for the nurses' wages and accommodation. Miners' lodges subscribed to the association in order to receive prompt nursing assistance. Much to the consternation of the association, Brancepeth New Pit did not subscribe. Their reasons remain a mystery. Members of the association consisted of community leaders -- Rev Urmson, Father Hosten, Dr R.E. Brown, Dr E.J. Brewis, R.R. Taylor, W.J. Rutter, A.W. Elliott and R.L. Weeks. In 1900, the two staff nurses visited 2,491 people and nursed 156. By 1905, this number had risen to 4,286 and 225 respectively.<sup>26</sup> The severe shortage of nurses and doctors meant that treatable diseases and injuries became fatal.

Parliament realized by the early nineteenth century that mining was a dangerous occupation. The horrific mine accidents and disasters forced politicians to enact legislation to enforce mining safety. However the majority of mine injuries often as

not did not occur during a disaster. Roof falls, gas leaks, mechanical failures and human error all contributed to mining accidents. It was several years however before Parliament recognized that miners were prey to certain unexplainable chest ailments and breathing problems. Miners asthma and black spittle were well known by the miners to be the risk of working underground. As a result miners tended to live shorter a lifespan than the general population.

### **Infant Mortality**

Willington was a fairly young village in the nineteenth century. Miners were usually young men and therefore the age ratio became unbalanced with a high number of young couples and a low number of elderly residents.

Marriage was very popular in Willington. Miners did not have difficulty in finding partners as one contemporary remarked, "the blackness of the pitmen at working times is no disadvantage in the eyes of the fair sex..."<sup>27</sup> Although illegitimacy was high in the west and north west of England, it was low in the North East.<sup>28</sup> There were of course couples cohabiting without being married, but this did not seem to have caused anything besides unpleasant gossip. Since divorce was financially impossible for the working class, dissatisfied spouses simply found someone else and eloped. The "elopers", as contemporaries called these couples, moved far away from the village in order not to be harassed by deserted spouses or malicious gossip. Despite the fact that the elopers had no legal marriage contract, both partners felt bound as if they were married.<sup>29</sup> The woman changed

her name to Mrs X (her partner's surname) and to all appearances was married to him. The couple could have a family and remain together for life, never revealing that they were not legally married. Very few mothers therefore remained unattached. If a single woman did become pregnant and there was no chance of marriage, in whatever form, families protected the woman and the child. An elder sister or mother of the single woman raised the child as her own. A perusal of local baptism records shows that there were very few fatherless children in Willington. Orphan children did not necessarily end up in the workhouse. Relatives, friends or neighbours fostered them.

Coalmining areas, and Willington was no exception, had high birth rates. Unfortunately, mining areas had also high infant mortality. Since such a large number of children were born in mining communities, high infant mortality (although serious) did not affect an average natural increase in coal areas.

Table 2.5 Children born per 100 couples (wife over 45 yrs.)

	Miners	Agric. Labs	Total in England
1852-1861	759	738	690
1862-1871	760	702	662
1872-1881	717	667	605
1882-1886	684	632	551

Table 2.6 Children surviving per 100 couples

	Miners	Agric. Labs	Total in England
1852-1861	465	529	464
1862-1871	505	535	473
1872-1881	502	535	473
1882-1886	497	521	425

Source: JIH VIII (2), p.254-5

The fact that people in mining villages married the earliest in life compared to those in other occupations (24 years for men; 22 years for women in 1886) meant that miners' wives were biologically capable of having the largest families in England.<sup>30</sup>

And miners enjoyed large families. The rural atmosphere of a pit village, relatively high wages, free houses and coal, and the lack of employment opportunities for women encouraged large families. It is difficult to get an accurate picture of family size in Willington because miners were highly mobile. But, the Emmerson family provides a rough example of family size. In 1885, Ralph and Mary Emmerson celebrated their golden wedding anniversary. The Emmersons had five sons and one daughter, who each had an average of 5.5 children for a total of thirty-three grandchildren.<sup>31</sup>

Infant mortality was a worrying problem in Victorian Britain because despite its decrease in the latter nineteenth century, the problem remained serious.

Table 2.7 Birth and Death Rates 1881-90

	England & Wales	Coalmining areas	Rural areas
crude birth rates per 1,000	32.4	36.9	29.4
crude death rates per 1,000	18.8	19.8	17.0
death rate 0-14 years	19.4	20.8	13.8
death rate 45-49 years	12.8	12.9	9.7

Birth and Death Rates 1891-1901

crude birth rates per 1,000	29.3	35.8	26.6
crude death rates per 1,000	17.8	19.2	15.9
death rate 0-14 years	19.6	21.4	13.3
death rate 45-49 years	11.2	12.1	8.9

Source: D. Friedlander, Demographic Patterns, Economic Development and Cultural Change 22 (1) 1973, p.41

Infant death was attributable to a variety of factors -- poor nutrition, unsanitary surroundings, lack of warmth, impure food, and prematurity. The health of the mother during pregnancy and the standard of medical attention at birth also determined the health of the baby. In Willington, infant mortality was a

worrying problem. Deaths of children under five years old accounted for over fifty percent of all deaths in 1892.<sup>32</sup>

Willington schools constantly closed by order of the local sanitary authority because of the outbreaks of disease, which often proved fatal to the young children in the infant's class. Dr E.J. Brewis, medical inspector, felt that infant mortality was directly linked to bottle feeding and not to the sanitation of the village. He found that ninety percent of all infant deaths were due to dirty bottles and solid food given too early to infants.<sup>33</sup> He found that women living in the worst sanitary conditions had healthy breast fed babies. However, bottle feeding was prevalent throughout Britain, especially in the factory towns. So why did mill towns not have as high an infant mortality rate as the mining areas? The only answer possible, that one can deduce, is that the polluted atmosphere of the village due to coal dust was too toxic for new, and non-immune babies. The Willington local board was unable to remedy the problem of high infant mortality and in 1906 the village had the unenviable honour of having an infant mortality rate of 192 per 1,000 -- the highest in County Durham.<sup>34</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1

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2

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3

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- 13 DC, 29 September 1865
- 14 DC, 6 February 1866
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29

For a good example of this kind of marriage arrangement see Mary Ann Cotton of West Auckland's personal relationships in Arthur Appleton, *Mary Ann Cotton: History and Trial* (London, 1973)

30

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33

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34

*Ibid.*

### CHAPTER THREE: BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGY

The lord of the manor had dominated Willington's social activities in its early history. The Russell family were the inheritors of a paternalistic and aristocratic social form of order. Brancepeth Colliery's establishment rocked the foundation of this system of order, as it did in many pit villages in the North East. Straker and Love began to usurp the aristocracy's former circle of paternalism. Joseph Love, especially became the major paternalistic figure in the village. The colliery provided funds for schools, institutes, public buildings, churches, poor relief, concerts and even a police station. Straker and Love found support for their ideas and programs in a large section of the community euphemistically known as "respectable" people. The middle class ideal of self-respectability was a way for the growing middle class to identify themselves as a distinct social group from the aristocracy and the poor. This middle class notion of respect was not restricted to the bourgeoisie, but included a large number of the working classes, for the working class was not an homogeneous group, as early historians have asserted. This "respectable" class of artisans, tradesmen and farmers believed that morality and respectability should be the goal of every individual. They rejoiced in their own positions as leadership examples in the community. Their ideology however forced them to be an extrovert class. They were not satisfied in their own groups, but believed that other classes in society should follow their example. The Willington aristocracy, which was a tiny group in the village and gradually losing its influence, was not the object of their attack. Instead the

moralists turned their attention to a large group of heathens and scurrilous characters, whose lifestyle not only blighted the community, but served as an example to other unfortunates. These base people were the drunkards, gamblers and burlesque audiences whose presence in the village undermined the moralists view of society. The popular class, for lack of a better phrase, were working class people who enjoyed a drink with friends and a bet on the races. They did not care much for religion because those supposed moralists turned their nose up at their presence. Through minor incidents, like pew rents, the moralists' made sure that they were not defiled by those base characters.

Inevitably, both sides were suspicious and prejudiced against the other. Instead of trying to work together and find a common ground, the two groups attacked one another. The moralists tried to convert the popularists. The popularists ignored and resented the moralists for trying to dismiss their present lives as worthless. The aristocracy, now rapidly losing power, was in no position to intervene. Straker and Love were on the moralists' side and encouraged them with finances to complete their conversion of the unfortunates. A great deal of social tension was felt in the village as a result. Through their churches, temperance groups, militarism and Christian athletics, moralists pressured the popularists to join their side. The popularists refused to surrender their gambling and drinking habits and their own forms of entertainment to a group, that had entirely misunderstood them. An investigation in the following two chapters of the activities of both groups illustrates the large social division that existed in Willington.



## Religion

Religion played an important role in Willington Society. In addition to its function as a place of worship, each church and chapel offered its congregation social status. Class and religious distinctions in the community gave every person a source of social identity. As McLeod stated:

In nineteenth-century Britain, sectarian allegiance was to rank next to class as the most important source of social identity.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from the established church, Willington offered residents a plethora of dissenting churches and sects. The Methodist New Connexion, Wesleyan Methodists, Primitive Methodists and the Roman Catholic Church became firmly established in the nineteenth century. An idea of the popularity of each church group is given below in the total accommodation available in each church.

Table 3.1 Church and Chapel Accommodation

Denomination	Size of Accommodation	
Methodist New Connexion	800 (1868)	700 (1855)
Wesleyan Methodists	800 (1874)	
Primitive Methodists	550 (1881)	500 (1860)
Church of England	350 (1873)	300 (1855)
Roman Catholic Church	350 (1905)	

Source: Kelly Directories

We can see that the Methodist churches were by far the strongest religious groups in the village, as they were throughout County Durham. The largely working class population was attracted to a church that embraced democratic principles and encouraged each person to strive as individuals.

Dissenters generally saw their chapels as bastions of freedom, democracy and equality of opportunity, and were inclined to regard churchpeople as snobs or syncophants. Churchpeople prided themselves on broader minds and wider culture, claimed a special affinity with the Royal Family, saw

themselves as the truest British patriots,  
and dismissed Dissenters as puritanical bigots.<sup>2</sup>

Methodist preachers were often working class, self-taught men. The weekly bible study groups allowed worshippers an opportunity to discuss their problems and strike up immediate friendships.

Other religious groups such as the Presbyterians, Baptists, Society of Friends and Church of the Latter Day Saints sparked a minority interest. The Salvation Army, truly the most unique Christian organization founded in nineteenth century Britain, excited a large response in Willington.

### **Church of England**

The Anglican Church realized by the early nineteenth century that a large part of their congregations were wandering away from the fold. Shocked by the rapid increase in Methodism, church leaders were mobilized into action. The result was the large scale building of churches throughout England in areas that were isolated from a church or a priest. Brancepeth Colliery created a population boom in Willington. The parish church in Brancepeth village was simply too small and far away to serve the congregation efficiently. In 1855, Viscountess Boyne laid the foundation stone of St Stephen's Church, Willington. A luncheon at Brancepeth Castle attended by over three hundred people raised money for the church building fund. Viscount and Viscountess Boyne, Mrs Russell, and Straker and Love subscribed to the fund generously. Aside from their £100 donation, Straker and Love also financed the construction of the rectory. The firm also made repairs and delivered house coal to the rectory free of charge. The Straker family's religious persuasion is unclear.

But, Joseph Straker made it a point to give the National school children an annual Christmas dinner, and he and his family often donated money to the church. Joseph Love and his family were devout New Connexionists, whose interest in the local church seems highly suspect. When Reverend Frederick Wardell Ruxton (1827-1890), Willington's first incumbent, accused Joseph Love and Robinson Ferens of deceit in the issues of the 1863 Rocking Strike, Ferens and Love fought back. Love, in a letter to the Durham Chronicle, insisted that Ruxton look at the true facts. Without the help of the colliery, Ruxton would be without a house, coals, a free repair service and financial support for the National School. Ruxton was deeply humiliated by Love's public boasting of his contributions to the church and his illustration of Ruxton's dependence on Straker and Love.<sup>3</sup>

Rev Ruxton had an unmistakable habit of alienating his congregation and other Willington residents. His use of ritualism actually divided the congregation for several years. The vestry meeting in 1870 refused to levy church rates because the ratepayers thought Ruxton frivolously spent most of the rates on wine and white satin. Without paying a church levy, ratepayers had no say in church matters. Ruxton was then left free to run the church his way without interference. Complaints soon started to pour into the local newspapers' offices about Ruxton's services. The Northern Echo intrigued by the story, sent out a reporter to witness a service first hand.<sup>4</sup> The reporter was amazed at the interior decoration of St. Stephen's. The reading desk, lectern and pulpit were fringed with aprons marked with triangles, Roman and Maltese crosses. Glaring patterns of

wallpaper decorated the chancel. Stars dotted the dark blue painted ceiling. At the beginning of the service, Ruxton entered the church with a procession of choristers armed with a cross in front. When they started to parade around the church, people started to walk out. At a second service, Ruxton refused to give the sermon declaring that people "were lazy and didn't care twopence for religion."<sup>5</sup>

Ruxton's fight with the congregation did not end in 1870. Fifteen years later, people were still walking out of his services. It was custom for parishioners who did not wish to receive communion to leave the church as soon as the minister began that part of the service. Ruxton did not approve of this custom and finally one Sunday in 1885, he requested that non-communicants either sit through the communion service or leave before he started the service. Predictably, most of the congregation stood up and left. The next Sunday, in an act of vindictiveness, Ruxton deliberately altered the service. There was no organ or choir. At the close of prayers, Ruxton again requested parishioners to leave at that point and not later in the service. And again people walked out. Ruxton tolled the bell for the second time. This second service, he declared was "not for Dissenters or Heathens."<sup>6</sup>

The Anglican congregation was not the only object of Ruxton's ire. He insulted many villagers when he stood up at a meeting of the Church of England Temperance Society and said:

Durham was the most drunken diocese in the Kingdom, and unfortunately, he was the incumbent of probably the most drunken parish in the diocese.<sup>7</sup>

At a local ratepayers' meeting in 1865, Ruxton felt snubbed when the townspeople wanted to have Robinson Ferens in the chair and not Ruxton. As incumbent, it was customary to let Ruxton chair the meeting as head of the parish. Even after a ballot was counted against him, Ruxton refused to leave the chair.

Mr Robinson: We winnit hev the parson (shouting). We won't be priest-ridden (loud and prolonged cheers).

Mr H Watson: No, nor we winnit be farmer-ridden (uproar). (Publican)<sup>8</sup>

The meeting was absolute chaos. Nothing had ever been seen like it in Willington. Ruxton was determined to have his say in all matters. He felt that as incumbent, he had the right to guide his parishioners. When the chair issue was finally settled (Ferens took it) the meeting erupted again over whether there should be a poll or vote. When Ruxton's views on the poll were overruled, he stormed out of the meeting.

Dissenters felt injustice at the hands of Ruxton and the Anglican church. They agitated for several years for a cemetery in Willington, because Ruxton charged exorbitant burial costs. A cemetery was finally established in 1880. When the Church decided to consecrate the cemetery in 1911, the Willington and District Free Church Council reacted strongly against it. Despite the council's objections on the grounds that a consecrated cemetery would give Anglicans rights and privileges over other congregations, the Home Secretary approved the site and the Bishop of Durham consecrated the cemetery that October.

Willington was not an ideal parish for any priest. The village had a lot of social problems, high mobility and was full of people from diverse backgrounds. Rev Ruxton's appointment to

the parish did not ease tensions, but created more. Ruxton was from the south of England and he probably had difficulty in understanding his northern congregation's psyche. His use of ritualism, which was part of a national church debate, distanced worshippers who did not agree with that practice as part of Anglican theology. His bombastic defence of church rights angered local ratepayers, who felt that he was trying to dictate their local secular policies. Dissenters were especially irked with him over burials since he took advantage of the fact that St Stephen's had the only Protestant burial plots (until 1880) and overcharged the residents who without a proper cemetery had no other option.

The Anglican Church faced a crisis in the nineteenth century. The Industrial revolution jeopardized the church's existence. Parliament began to legislate acts to correct industrial evils, and these acts effectively placed problems formerly the domain of the church into secular hands. Parish relief, for instance, was no longer determined by the local minister, but by a body of elected men answerable to the British government. Politics, justice, and social welfare were gradually being removed from the church's domain. Even in religious matters, the church's power was dismissed by the large Methodist following in the North East and by the surprising growth of the once illegal Roman Catholic Church. It is no wonder that Ruxton felt defeated and even betrayed by Willingtonians' indifference to his plight and beliefs.

It is indeed ironic that the Anglican Church sent Ruxton to Willington to gather the residents around the church, but instead

he divided the congregation into two camps (Ruxton and non-Ruxton supporters) and discouraged many villagers from approaching the church at all. Although in Ruxton's defence it must be stated that he supported the workers in the 1863 strike and was a victim of Diocesan policies.

It (Willington) was, like many others, the victim of Bishop Baring's policy, the rector (Rev F.W. Ruxton) being left without a curate (Dr. Baring refused to license one) for many years. The place is a hotbed of manifold heresies and many sects, with a considerable population (mostly Irish) attached to the Roman obedience.

Ruxton's successor, Rev Thomas Urmson, was not as colourful a character as Ruxton, but also came to blows with the dissenters over the cemetery question and religious instruction in board schools.

#### **Roman Catholic Church**

As the Durham coal mining industry grew and demanded a larger labour force, Irish immigration to Durham increased. The Irish, who faced a life of poverty and hardship in their native land, seized the opportunity to find a better life in the coalfields of the North East. According to the 1881 census, six percent of Willington's inhabitants were born in Ireland, a figure which does not include their families born in England. A large number of Irish worked at Brancepeth Coke Works, although some did manage to become hewers. The majority of them were single men living in lodgings. The number of single Irish women in Willington was very small, and those who were employed were exclusively domestics. It was not uncommon for an Irish Catholic man to send for a bride from Ireland, rather than marry a

non-Catholic.

The Irish were alienated from the rest of Willington and not solely by their own choice. Englishmen had a deep distrust of Roman Catholicism and rejected Irish culture as base. To make matters worse, Irish politics started to affect British affairs in the late nineteenth century. The growing political debate over Home Rule and Fenianism developed into political violence and protest. Hatred towards Ireland and the Irish created Willington's worst ethnic violence.

...there was an intense feeling in the neighbourhood against these Fenians.<sup>10</sup>

Fights and assaults created tension in the Willington local police force. In 1873, Michael Jackson was held down, kicked and beaten by Police Constable Christopher Stockburn and two men. Jackson was then arrested for carrying a knife. His attackers thought he was a Fenian. Irish Catholics were not the only targets of attack. James Carr, an Irish shoemaker and Orangeman, was brutally assaulted in 1871 by a group of Irish labourers. His injuries resulted in a broken thigh and cuts to the head. In court, it was revealed that Carr had refused to subscribe to a Catholic secret society that his assailants, Ribbonmen, demanded he join.

The violence culminated in the murder of Martin Hagan on Willington Race Day in 1873. Hagan, Patrick Murray, and John Hindes left the Pit Laddie Public House at eleven in the evening to go home. As they peacefully walked down the road, a gang of about fifty Englishmen confronted them. Hagan's friends managed to escape from the mob, but unfortunately, Hagan was beaten to death. Joseph Turnball, arrested and later convicted of murder,

said to one of the gang during Hagan's beating: "Well done, Dickey. I will jump his b---- Irish guts out."<sup>11</sup> The Assize judge was horrified at the brutality of the crime. He condemned sectarian violence and gave Turnball capital punishment. Because the case was based on circumstantial evidence, the sentence was commuted to life imprisonment on appeal. Turnball walked out of jail fourteen years later. The Willington Races were permanently cancelled after the murder.

Rejected by their co-workers, the Irish stuck together. Irish families lodged only Irishmen. Single Irishmen married Irish women. Nelson and Katherine Streets had large Irish populations, creating an "Irish quarter" in the village. The Roman Catholic Church feared that the Irish would lapse if they lost contact with a priest and began to increase their presence in England, which was made easier by the repeal of the anti-Catholic laws. Willington was served by Crook's Catholic mission, until the village set up its own mission in 1877. Education was important to the church because it instilled Catholic catechism at an early age, and therefore a school was established in Willington in 1873 prior to the building of a church. When Willington became a mission station, the school until 1905 served as both a church and educational institution. The mission, Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, had to operate out of a school because the largely Irish congregation was too poor to build a church.

Father Aloysius Hosten (1841-1923), a Belgian priest ordained at Ushaw, became Willington's first resident priest and ministered in the village until his death. Prior to his arrival,

Catholics in Willington were served by the Crook Catholic priest. Hosten was greatly admired and loved by his congregation. In his silver jubilee as priest (1894), Willington Catholics had a great celebration. The congregation presented him with a gold watch and constantly interrupted his thank-you address with cheers. While Rev Ruxton irritated and alienated his congregation, Hosten was busy gathering Catholics around the church. When he died in 1923, his body was buried in a special plot near the church entrance.

Apart from the school, the church offered other attractions. St Patrick's Day became a major festival in the 1860s. In Willington, celebrations began with a parade led by the Catholic Temperance Society. Green ribbon and shamrocks adorned all the Catholic buildings en route. The festivities ended with an evening concert that was crowded every year. Catholic social clubs existed -- the Catholic Young Men's Society, Catholic Literary Institute and the Shamrock Football Club existed to cater specifically to Catholics. Our Blessed Lady's Temperance, Sick and Burial Society, formed in 1862, and the Willington Branch of the Northumberland and Durham District Council of Catholic Benefit Societies were both friendly societies catering to Catholics, otherwise not protected since most Catholics worked at low paying colliery jobs, which lacked the union benefits offered to higher wage earners (i.e. hewers).

A Catholic Church eventually opened in 1905. Straker and Love contributed £100 to its building fund. The attached cemetery had already been consecrated by the Bishop of Hexham and Newcastle in 1884. The Catholic congregation was quite large in

relationship to the number of Catholics living in the village. It is estimated that there were 852 Catholics in Willington in 1882, 452 of which attended Easter Communion that year.<sup>12</sup> Roman Catholics, mainly Irish, remained loyal to their church and its activities. The more social injustice they suffered, the more tightly knit their community became.

The Roman Catholic Church and the Church of England were the established churches in Willington, and it is interesting to note their differences. The Catholic church was the Irish people's church. It was not alien or too high-brow for the congregation. Although Hosten was a foreigner, his relationship to the congregation was one of warmth and understanding. He was greatly admired by the Catholic community and his persona probably helped firmly establish the Catholic church in Willington. The Anglican Church, on the other hand, had major problems in establishing itself in Willington. Ruxton's personality was unsuited for a northern mining village, yet that was not the sole problem the church faced. Ruxton had no curate for a long period of time and had to cope with a large, newly-developed disunited community. Hosten had at least the advantage of ministering to only one group of people -- the Irish; Ruxton had to deal with people from all over Britain. The theological controversy over ritualism, which Ruxton decided to adopt, did not help the Anglican congregation either. The most elucidating comment on St Stephen's position in the community is summed up by a Willington churchman in 1870:

I must own that the influence of us, the members of the church, is very feeble for good here; our action disunited; that our church is disorganized, and that we are

rapidly becoming a byword and a reproach  
among our neighbours.<sup>13</sup>

### **Methodist New Connexion**

The strongest Methodist group in Willington was the New Connexion, and not purely out of religious conviction. Joseph Love, himself a local preacher, ensured that the congregation grew by forcing Straker and Love workmen to join the faith. Workers had to state their religious allegiance before they were able to sign the bond. Other Methodist groups were unable to gain a firm foothold in Willington until the early 1870s. By that time, Love had recognized their right to co-exist with the New Connexion, for they no longer threatened the latter's strong congregation. The first chapel, situated at Brancepeth Colliery, was built in 1845. As the congregation enlarged, another chapel was built in Chapel Street and Mrs Joseph Love laid the foundation stone in 1855. The new chapel accommodated seven hundred people. By contrast, the parish church only accommodated three hundred, which illustrates the size of the New Connexion congregation. Lord Boyne donated the Chapel Street site. Joseph Love, John Straker and their company contributed to the chapel building fund. Throughout their lives, Joseph Love and Robinson Ferens liberally donated to the chapel. Unlike other dissenting religions, the New Connexionists were rarely troubled with financial matters.

Methodists were firm believers in Sunday school and it is probable that Willington New Connexionists established their school in the 1840s. Up until 1873, the New Connexion Sunday school was the only alternative to the National School. Straker

and Love supported the school financially by providing the master with a house, free coal and an annual salary. Colliery workmen outfitted and repaired the school. Mrs Joseph Love gave the schoolchildren and teachers an annual tea. Children marched in procession through Willington and past the Love residence. Then Mrs Love came out of her house and handed out oranges/nuts to each child. In 1857, over eight hundred children participated in the event. The new Sunday school, opened in 1874, was dedicated to Joseph Love.

A large majority of meetings and lectures held in the New Connexion chapel were chaired by Joseph Love, his family or colliery officials. Aside from Joseph Love, Isaac Pearson Love, Robinson Ferens, W.L. Gott and R. Thwaites frequently chaired meetings. Since most of the congregation consisted of Straker and Love workmen, it is evident that the social position of members paralleled that found at the colliery. Leaders in the chapel were also leaders at Brancepeth Colliery.

The Methodist New Connexion was actually a minority methodist sect in England, but Joseph Love and Robinson Feren's involvement made it a large methodist group in County Durham. Willington, understandably, had the largest New Connexion membership in County Durham and had its own circuit. Chapels throughout Durham were financed by the Love family and Ferens, himself, helped to found the Sunderland circuit. Most of Ferens activities were channelled through the Durham circuit, since he resided there after establishing himself in Willington. The impetus that the New Connexion received from Joseph Love is clear by the examination of the local preachers' plan. In 1863, ten

New Connexion lay preachers resided in Willington -- Joseph Love, T.D. Stephenson, R. Dalton, H. Ridley, T.T. Rushworth, D. Coates, W. Conn, R.S. Hume, J. Catcheside and W.L. Gott. Wesleyan Methodists, however, did not even have one resident lay preacher in Willington by 1871.

### **Primitive Methodists**

The Primitives had great difficulty in establishing themselves in Willington. Joseph Love's quelling of any opposition to the New Connexion dealt Primitive Methodism a severe blow. Colliery officials would not bind Primitives until they converted to the New Connexion. But a small and determined group of Primitives started to worship under James Wilson of Crook. In 1853, they moved to Christopher Holmes' kitchen in Willington. Then they relocated to a joiner's (Ralph Worrell) loft where he erected a pulpit and set of stairs. Both Holmes and Worrell were men independent of Brancepeth Colliery. The movement grew to warrant the building of a chapel in 1863. The Primitives soon outgrew it and built a larger chapel to seat five hundred people in 1881. In 1906, the Bishop Auckland Circuit divided to create the Willington Circuit.

Most of the congregation were Straker and Love workers -- miners, coke drawers, cokeburners, blacksmiths, horsekeepers, cloggers, masons, bricklayers and cinder drawers. Primitives were working class grass root methodists who believed:

It offered them a formula for self-respect in a world that constantly told them they were rough, uncultured, animal-like, and a prey to every passing whim and emotion. Primitives condemned all those aspects of popular culture that might provide a warrant for these slurs.<sup>14</sup>

The Primitives had their own Sunday school and temperance league. On Willington Race Day, the chapel provided a diversion for adults and children in the form of a parade, tea and field sports. Eventually, the Primitives became acceptable within the community. Straker and Love donated £100 to the 1881 chapel building fund.

### **Wesleyan Methodists**

The Wesleyans suffered the same problems as the Primitive Methodists. When the society first entered Willington in 1863, they found it difficult to find accommodation. Joseph Love did not want them in the village. The Wesleyans persevered however and started worshipping in David Mitchell's house. When they outgrew that, the society moved to a blacksmith's shop in Low Willington. Growing in size, the Wesleyans opened their own chapel in Lydia Street in 1876. By that time, they had firmly established themselves in Willington. Joseph Love, J. Straker and Robinson Ferens each contributed to the chapel building fund.

The Wesleyan Sunday school was well attended -- 370 pupils in 1896. In that same year the Wesleyans built a Sunday school to accommodate 500 children. Needless to say, Straker and Love contributed to the fund. Mrs. J.H. Straker laid the foundation stone. In spite of the size of the Sunday school, the congregation started to stagnate. In 1906, Rev David Pughe revived the society with his Christian Brotherhood movement. Week by week the congregation grew larger, until Pughe had to hold his sermons in the open air. Three to four thousand people assembled on the flower show field to listen. The Willington

Silver Band played the hymns. They were the largest congregations ever seen in the village. The movement petered out when Pughe moved to another area.

It is difficult to determine which churches charged pew rents. St Stephen's, built to seat three hundred, kept thirty seats aside for the poor, which suggests a pew rent system. The trustee records of the Wesleyans show that they did charge pew rents. Some side seats were set aside for the poor. In 1894, 221 seats were let costing 1s6d to 6s per pew or 6d to 1s per seat.<sup>15</sup> Stewards ensured that seats were only occupied by the proper persons. The pew system was gradually phased out in the late nineteenth century and replaced with an offertory. Many people believed that the pew system stressed class inferiority and discouraged church attendance.

Joseph Love, without a doubt, tried to hinder development of the Primitive and Wesleyan congregations. He was determined that the New Connexionists should prosper and he intimidated his employees and local merchants from giving other methodist groups any support. The smallness of the Anglican congregation and the futility in trying to convert Catholics (almost impossible) probably spared them a direct confrontation with the colliery. And helping with the construction of St Stephen's won Love praise in Durham City (and with the Bishop of Durham). The success of his New Connexion campaign, his removal to Durham City, and his advancing years, meant that Joseph Love could show more tolerance and even token generosity to the other methodist sects. His death in 1875 allowed the chapels to blossom undisturbed.

### **Presbyterians, Mormons, Baptists and Quakers**

Aside from the main religions in Willington, as already discussed above, a small group of others attracted a minority interest. The Society of Friends did visit Willington in 1865 and claimed a couple of converts, but the movement virtually died. The Baptists established a place of worship in the High Street in 1881, but never had enough interest to merit building a chapel. An American missionary, from the Church of Latter Day Saints, found it difficult to convince Willingtonians to join the Mormons. The unfortunate preacher ended up defending his faith rather than preaching it on a street corner when he was faced with a barrage of questions from a local Wesleyan preacher.<sup>16</sup>

The Presbyterians, however, did manage to gain a foothold in Willington. In 1876, Presbyterian residents are first mentioned as part of Crook Presbytery Church. When the Primitive Methodists vacated their old chapel in 1881, the Presbyterians acquired it as their mission station in Willington. The congregation tried for several years to have missionary Mark. W. Robson ordained, but in vain. It was not until 1903, that his successor, William Jobson, was ordained and the mission became the Willington Presbyterian Church. Although the Presbyterians managed to find themselves a church, their congregation remained small. In 1903, the church had only 64 members and 155 children in the Sunday school. The congregation was mainly composed of working class people, most of whom were employed at Brancepeth Colliery. The most prominent members of the church were James Allison (agent Brancepeth Colliery) and William Cochrane (surveyor of mines). The Presbyterians, like the Roman

Catholics, were born into the faith and not converts. Although there is a link between Scottish immigration and the rise of Presbyterianism, this link is harder to establish than that between the Irish and Roman Catholicism. Despite the Sunday school, Christian Endeavour Society, Temperance League and no pew rents, the church began to dwindle. In 1959, it was dissolved and the 37 remaining members transferred to Crook Presbyterian Church.

## **EDUCATION**

### **Elementary Education**

Schooling in Britain in the early nineteenth century was the prerogative of the wealthy, which excluded the majority of children in the country. Voluntary schools (schools that relied on donations or sponsorship) were not widespread and varied greatly in their educational abilities. The first attempt at introducing mass education to working class children was through the Sunday school movement. Dissenters firmly believed that each individual should be functionally literate in order to read the bible. Since no institution offered basic literacy on a mass scale, the Dissenters tried through a Sunday school program. The success of the Sunday schools encouraged Dissenters to establish in 1809 formal voluntary schools nationwide known as British schools which had religion as part of the curriculum. The Church of England, naturally, did not want Anglican children attending an "indoctrinating" dissenting school so established National schools nationwide to provide an Anglican form of education.

Although both the National and British schools were numerous

and well-attended, not all areas in Britain had access to an elementary school. Parliament rectified this situation in 1870 when it established state (or board) schools to be located in areas which lacked or had insufficient school space for the number of children in the area. Therefore England had a unique educational system. Social classes were physically separated into public or National/British/Board schools. Wealthy children did not go to the same schools as those of the working classes. And the middle class strived to send their children to more socially accepted public schools. The lack of social integration among children had severe consequences later in adult life. If children did not understand one another, there was no possibility that labour and management would either.

Miners regarded literacy as the key to success. Literate miners had more opportunities for promotion and could better defend themselves against the coal owners. The miners' unions saw literacy as a way of making mineworkers equal to their employers. It is hardly surprising therefore that the slogan "knowledge is power" graced many union banners. Although miners wanted their children to be literate, the type of education they chose varied a great deal. Some families believed that Sunday schools were adequate educational institutions, while others wanted their children to attend established elementary schools. Economics played a major role in many school children's education. Parents wanted literate children yet felt that boys should contribute to the family budget. Boys were expected to join their fathers at the pit, as soon as they were able.

Several lads left this week. A new seam of coal commenced at the colliery. Consequently,

lads wanted.<sup>17</sup>

Another factor that deterred parents from sending their children to school was the expense involved. Before the Education Act of 1891, elementary education was not free. Parents had to pay school pence for their children to attend classes. Although elementary education became compulsory in 1880, school wardens could not force families to send their children to school if they could not afford or did not want to pay school fees. The government began subsidizing private schools in the 1830s, but in spite of an increase in grants after 1862, many schools still lacked the finances to operate self-sufficiently.

The first established elementary school in Willington was the National School built in 1851. There is evidence that a small private school existed prior to its construction, but no records of it have survived. The Hamilton-Russells donated the site for the National School and Mrs Straker, Mrs A.D. Shafto and Rev A.D. Shafto donated money towards its construction. John Straker paid for the construction of the teacher's residence and the enlargement of the school in 1860. Just over one hundred children, mostly from mining families, attended the school when it first opened. Colliery children went to the National school because Straker and Love did not build a colliery school at Brancepeth Colliery, but at Oakenshaw, which was too far away for most colliery children. As a consequence, the company subsidized each colliery child attending the National school 2d per week from 1863. Rev Ruxton, school manager, was angered at Straker and Love's lack of responsibility in not subsidizing the school

from its inception and blindness in not subsidizing a large number of colliery children attending schools elsewhere. Joseph Straker's annual Christmas dinner treat of roast beef and plum pudding for the children was another example of Straker and Love's generosity to the school.

The Roman Catholic elementary school opened in 1873. It was especially important within the Catholic community because the school room doubled as a chapel until 1905. The Roman Catholic Church feared that if Catholic children attended non-Catholic schools, their religious beliefs would be irreversibly altered. The church's conviction that education and religion were inseparable insulated the Catholic schoolchildren from the other village children. As a result the Catholic school tended to distance itself from the other village schools. The school board repeatedly demanded attendance reports from the Catholic school without success. Father Hosten safeguarded the school's interests by his seat on the board during the first few years of its existence. He was replaced by James Daley and Nathan Coates Siddle, both major Catholic community figures.

Willington's third elementary school was the Board school, which opened in 1881. The Willington School Board decided to erect a board school in 1879, when the school warden reported that the district was short 292 school spaces. By the time the school opened in 1881, the deficiency in available spaces had increased. The board had also failed to realize that dissenting parents, who sent their children predominantly to the National school, did so out of desperation. Willington had an Anglican and Catholic school, but no provisions for Protestant dissenters.

The Dissenters only choice was to send their children to the Board school since the nearest British school was in Oakenshaw (opened in 1882). When the Board school opened, there was a mass transfer of children from other village schools to the new non-denominational Board school and of previously unaccommodated children into the former schools.

Within one week of the school's opening, it was so full that no more children could be registered. Teachers were dismayed that half of the pupils knew nothing and many had never been to school before. The crowding was so great, that teachers used the covered playground as a classroom. Excess pupils could not be transferred because all the other Willington schools were full. In 1891, 715 children appeared on the register, yet the school only accommodated 537. As one exasperated teacher exclaimed: "Where can I place them?"<sup>18</sup>

Independent of the three main elementary schools in Willington were small private ones. Mr Henry St Montagu and Miss A. Allen ran their own schools. Miss Allen, a former National school teacher, left the school in 1889 to establish her own institution. Approximately thirty children left to join her. According to contemporary accounts, Miss Allen ran the largest private school in Willington (40 pupils in 1889).<sup>19</sup> No evidence exists of how these private schools operated. Music teachers for piano and violin must have existed. The London College of Music even offered music theory examinations at Brancepeth Colliery Literary Institute. The most popular form of elementary education was Sunday schools. Sunday schools were not merely places of religious instruction, but they taught the basics --

reading and writing. Sunday schools were not officially acknowledged educational institutions, but they provided rudimentary education to many children who did not have the opportunity to attend an elementary school. Working boys had the chance to go to school on Sundays, so many parents were not concerned with stopping their child's elementary school education and sending them to work; the children could learn the same lessons at Sunday school. The New Connexion Sunday school provided dissenters with the only alternative to the National School for several years. Straker and Love subsidized the school, no doubt, due to Joseph Love's interest in the church. The Wesleyans, Primitives and Presbyterians all established their own Sunday schools. The parish church formed a Sunday school in 1890 separate from the National school. Apart from rudimentary education, Sunday schools provided entertainment and excursions for the children.

Willington schools had to deal with three major problems -- overcrowding, epidemics, and attendance. Overcrowding reached an acute crisis in the National school in the 1890s (see above). The number of pupils on the registers far outweighed the accommodation available for them. Perfect attendance would have created severe problems for the teachers. The Roman Catholic school, on the other hand, did not have a serious overcrowding problem, as attendance figures indicate.

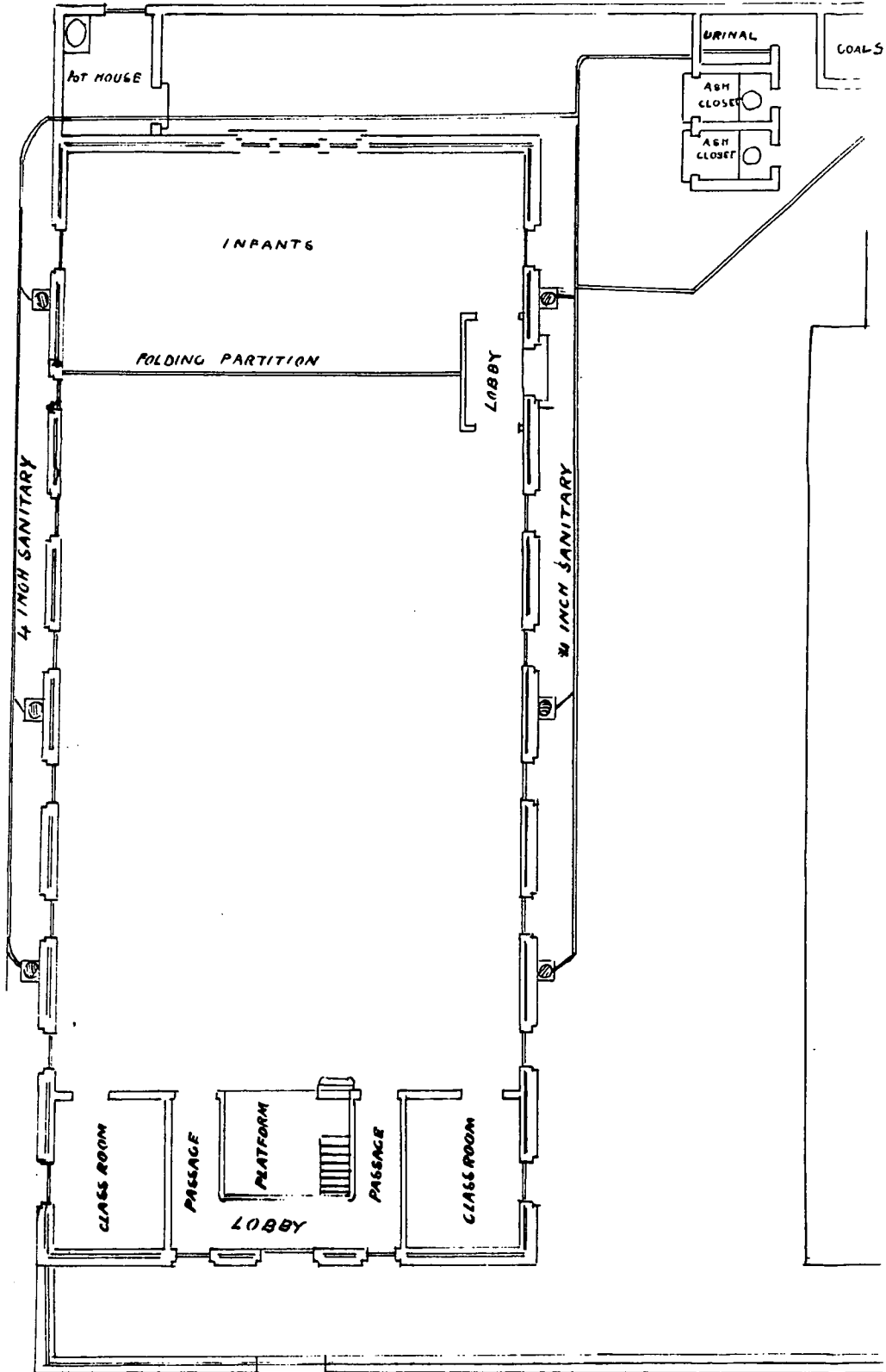
Table 3.2 School Accommodation

School	Accommodation		Average Attendance
Board	636 (1893)	350 (1881)	82.3
National	274 (1882)		85.6
Roman Catholic	220 (1882)		80.7
Miss Allen's	40 (1881)		75.0

Source: Durham Chronicle, Kelly's Directory

Plan of Wesleyan School 1896 (Lydia Street)  
Source: DCRO, Wellington U.D.C. records

The classes were all held in one room except the infants. Note the sanitation facilities provided for the children and the large number of windows for ventilation. It is probable that other schools were built along the same line.



GROUND PLAN

Although it is possible that Catholic children attended other schools, religious affiliation served to ensure that pupils attended their own educational institutions. Roman Catholics went to the Catholic school, Anglicans the National school and all others the Board school. There is an indication, however, that children attended the nearest schools to them, regardless of religious factors. The National school was situated at Low Willington near the church, the Catholic school at High Willington and the Board school lay off the main street somewhere in the middle. For a small child living in Low Willington, it could take him/her over half an hour to walk up to the Catholic school. Icy and wet conditions made it dangerous for children to walk long distances, for they could catch cold sitting in wet clothes at school. Therefore parents often sent small children to the nearest school despite their religious beliefs.

A more irritating problem than overcrowding was attendance, or rather lack of it. The school board kept records on attendance levels and truancing caused serious problems. Before the introduction of free elementary education, absent pupils meant a loss to the school income. In 1882, the National schoolmaster sent two pupils out to fetch a truant, thereby handling the situation without informing the schoolwarden or the child's parents. Another master had to take more stringent measures:

Two of the fourth standard lads are very guilty of truancing. I have tried many means to cure them such as public and private corporal punishment; solitary confinement; reasoning with them, and forgiving them, but without success. As a last resort, and an example to the rest of the school, I have dismissed them.<sup>20</sup>

Many teachers were bewildered when they walked into the school

and faced half-empty classrooms. The circus, fairs, races, galas and sports competitions enticed many children into truancy. Schools reluctantly had to close half days to allow children to attend these events. Sanctioned holidays included religious days, school vacation, and special events such as the United Sunday School excursions. Teachers were less willing to accept other events, like important football matches, as legitimate excuses.

The colliery affected school attendance on a large scale. In times of depression, Straker and Love laid the pits idle. Unemployed men moved away with their families in search of work elsewhere.

30 children have left the school in two months - this is owing to the owners of the colliery discharging men.<sup>21</sup>

Large numbers of children were absent during strikes. Striking families could not afford to pay school pence and needed the children to help at home. Children were less likely to be punished by Straker and Love for scavenging coal, and parents sent them out to get coal and gather berries. An entry on October 23, 1863 read:

Several children are absent today. Some are gathering potatoes and others blackberries; the pitmen have not gone to work yet. I am afraid the strike will materially affect the school attendance.<sup>22</sup>

The schools did try to help working class children from deprivation during strikes. Needy children were given meals and clothing. School concerts raised money for the relief effort.

The greatest concern for teachers was the spread of epidemics -- scarlet fever, influenza, measles, smallpox,

typhoid, diphtheria -- not just among the children but the teachers as well. The Sanitary Authority regularly closed schools down for several weeks if they felt that too many cases of a disease occurred in one place.

We have been very much handicapped this year -- first a colliery explosion, whereby 22 [sic] lives were lost -- this upset the work for 2 weeks -- secondly -- school closed for 5 weeks by order of the Sanitary Authority.<sup>23</sup>

One mistress was highly sceptical of this measure. She felt that the closure of the schools enabled children from different schools to have more contact with one another and therefore diseases were spread rather than contained.

Isolation here is practically impossible and "measles" is but lightly regarded by the majority of the people, hence the closing of the schools brings about the intermingling children from infected and non-infected centres...<sup>24</sup>

Robert Colls maintains that education was an agent of social control<sup>25</sup> And his view is one that is shared by many historians. Institutionalized education, they assert, was not an intellectual activity but a means of indoctrinating children with work habits and discipline. Colliery owners subsidized or provided colliery schools in order that the next generation of workers would be trained, disciplined and obedient. Applied to Willington, this argument is ill-founded. Straker and Love subsidized the National School, yet there is no evidence to suggest that the colliery dictated to the school its curriculum or methods of disciplining children. In fact, many children received no subsidy from the company at all, especially the Roman Catholics. The Sunday schools were dependent upon donations, but it is doubtful that the colliery influenced their goals and agendas.

The Straker and Love families were Christians and believed that morality should be instilled into the children, but this belief was more of a personal sentiment rather than a company directive. Joseph Love, himself, was a lay preacher so his views on Christianity and Methodism were obviously quite strong. The school teachers, through their logs, speak not of control or subjugation, but of education and the social environment. The teachers were concerned about the alarming number of "backward" children. Their task was not to program the pupils, but to teach them to be more informed people. School trips, slide lantern shows, and special guests in the classrooms proves that Willington teachers considered literacy as only part of a child's elementary education.

### **Secondary Education**

No secondary school existed in Willington prior to 1914. In fact it would have been impractical to build such a school in a coal mining village. Many youths found work at Brancepeth Colliery as soon as they could legally leave school. The large absences at the National school during the Bishop Auckland hirings indicates that employment was a more pressing problem for the pupils than further education. Before 1904, even if a youngster wanted to continue with his/her education, the lack of funds in most Willington families, excluded them from doing so. In 1904, the Durham County Educational Committee began scholarship examinations in mathematics, English and general knowledge for grammar school fees. Three boys from the National school won the scholarships in that year and were able to attend

the nearest grammar school in Bishop Auckland. After that date, more children were able to further their education in the same manner.

### **Further Education**

Many adults who lacked basic elementary education or who wanted post-elementary education attended night school or used the services of the various reading rooms. The Wellington Literary Institute, Wellington Mechanics' Institute and the Wellington Workmen's Newsroom offered working men the chance to improve themselves. The newsroom, located above a barbershop, was comfortable, neat and bright. Members read newspapers or played bagatelle and chess. The institutes offered penny readings which were very popular. A series of readings in 1867 had to turn crowds away at the door.

By the 1880s, the newsroom and institutes had disappeared and a new organization, the Brancepeth Colliery Literary Institute, came into operation. R.L. Weeks, viewer, was elected president. The institute had a selection of forty newspapers and periodicals comprising the Newcastle Daily Chronicle, Newcastle Leader, Newcastle Journal, North-Eastern Gazette, Northern Echo and Weekly Chronicle. Newspapers were not kept very long, but sold off at reduced prices for those interested. Straker and Love sponsored the institute and influenced its activities. The rooms were closed on Sunday and the institute supported the Independent Order of Good Templars and its band. Lectures were designed to improve the morality of the workers, rather than appease their desires. The influence of Straker and Love is

### THE MINER'S GRAVE

Here rests beneath the earths cold soil,  
A sturdy son of honest toil;  
No willow trees weep here and wave  
It simply is a miner's grave.

No woe or want will vex him more,  
Although in life he was but poor;  
Yet he was food and kind to all,  
When they had need on him to call.

He was unknown to pomp or fame,  
Yet he lacked not in a good name;  
And take his life and careful scan,  
You'll find he was an honest man.

His barque was oft-times roughly driven,  
Yet still the harbour sought was Heaven;  
For all who sought him, rich and poor,  
They found in him, a friend most sure.

And though he sleeps and murmurs not,  
His good deeds won't be soon forgot;  
For now from sorrow he's secure,  
'Twas simply fate ordained him poor.

Excerpt from: The Poetical Works of Charles Wilson:  
The Pitman Poet Vol. I, London, 19?

Charles Wilson (1891-1968) was a Willington pitman and poet. He went down the pit at age 13 and he continued his education at night school. He rose from the ranks of the Northumberland and Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund, Brancepeth C Pit at 20 years of age and a year later he was elected assistant checkweighman at Brancepeth Colliery. His literary achievements included a vast number of poems, of which the above is one. His most famous poem, "The Battle of Life" (1914) raised a large amount of money for the war effort. "The Miner's Grave", however is reminiscent of his earlier life as a miner. It is an interesting statement of working class values and how Willington's mining community regarded themselves.

exemplified by Joseph H. Love's presentation to the institute of a steel engraved photograph of himself.

In 1888, the institute started a series of science classes which were directly funded by Straker and Love. It is hardly surprising that J.G. Love, an office apprentice at Brancepeth Colliery, won a first prize award. After six years, Willington township placed the classes under the Willington Local Board District Technical Educational Committee. The classes offered subjects in dresscutting, laundry work, cookery, poultry keeping, geology, ambulance and principles of mining. St. John's Ambulance Association supervised the ambulance course.

Other associations and institutes offered adult courses as well. The Willington Shorthand Association gave classes one night a week. The Willington Church of England Evening Continuation School, started in 1894, offered arithmetic, human physiology, mensuration and sound, light and heat, citizenship, French, geography, algebra, physics, chemistry, needlework and drawing. Classes were two nights per week. Evening courses however were not limited to adults. Many schoolchildren attended night classes. The church evening school divided adults and children into junior and senior classes. Evening classes had a high attendance rate, except when men worked overtime at the colliery or a major festival occurred (i.e. harvest festival).

The further education opportunities in Willington were designed to help workers improve their qualifications and their character. Straker and Love believed that the Brancepeth Colliery Literary Institute should set an example for the men to follow. Lectures involved discussions in self-improvement,

especially total abstinence. The science classes which offered work related courses for men and women were very successful. The Church evening classes again offered students courses in self-improvement and employment training. The fact that elementary schoolchildren also went to some of the classes, proves that the classes were of an academic rather than recreational nature. There were still a lot of Willington residents who did not care to further their education.

Unfortunately there are still many who think more about their pigeons and their dogs than cultivation of their minds.<sup>26</sup>

## **POLITICS**

### **Local Politics**

The growth of Willington was so fast that there were no government or administrative bodies in place to check its development or deal with its problems effectively. And Willington was not the only industrial village in England living under an agricultural political system. Parliament realized the need to reform local political bodies and legislated several local government bills in the nineteenth century to tackle this problem.

Willington's most powerful local body in the early nineteenth century was the civil parish. Ratepayers elected officers to the parish and levied rates for poor relief, roads and other local events. Prominent personalities were elected parish officers. Robinson Ferens, John Tulip (butcher), William Richardson (farmer), and William Rutter (contractor) all served as guardians. Parish overseers over the years included John

Middleton (grocer and druggist), Richard Render (tailor), Thomas Wakefield (watchmaker), John Mowbray (butcher), Thomas Longstaff (saddle and harness maker) and James E. Harris (general dealer). Thomas Dixon Stephinson (painter and glazier) and William Arrowsmith (resigned his post to become farm bailiff to Straker and Love) served as assistant overseers. Robert Atkinson (farmer) held the post of waywarden for several years. It is clear by the above list that Willington politics was dominated by farmers and tradesmen, although the large majority of residents in Willington were connected to the mining industry. Only Ferens was directly involved in mining. In order to be a ratepayer, one had to be a freeman, which excluded a large majority of the village -- the pitmen. The restrictions placed on who were ratepayers gave a small minority of villagers great power over the majority. Miners resented the farmers' attempts to control the village (see footnote 8).

The rapid changes in Willington found expression in local political meetings. Rev Ruxton was determined to assert his position as incumbent of the parish. He felt threatened by the new community leaders who he surmised wanted to undermine his position. At a ratepayers' meeting in 1865, Ruxton was disturbed when the ratepayers elected Robinson Ferens to the chair, and cast him aside as the traditional chairman of the meeting. Ruxton's demands to have the chair were ignored because the ratepayers felt that he was not impartial. When Ruxton did not succeed in chairing the meeting, he stormed out. The chair issue was raised at subsequent meetings. Ruxton was unable to win any major support and he was forced to see Ferens chair

successive meetings. The vicious in-fighting among the miners and farmers, incumbent and ratepayers, colliery management and tradesmen found an unpleasant outlet at ratepayers' meetings. The issue that polarized opposition forces was the debate over the Local Government Act.

To oversee local sanitation problems, the Durham Board of Guardians appointed a Nuisance Committee to Willington in 1862. Robinson Ferens was part of the initial committee. However, Willington ratepayers soon realized that the Nuisance Committee was useless in dealing with the village's health and sanitation problems. In 1865, residents first discussed adopting the Local Government Act (1848) to remedy Willington's growing social problems. The meeting broke out into chaos. Rev Ruxton stormed out after trampling his hat and stick underfoot. The inability of the ratepayers to reach a decision, especially when it involved considerable expense, was further illustrated in 1876. Ratepayers discussed the establishment of a Local Board of Health in connection with another move to adopt local government. The meeting again failed to reach a decision. Ratepayers did not want to pay higher rates, yet wanted a stronger local authority. In the end they agreed to stay under the existing Rural Sanitary Authority, but not before tempers rose and insults were exchanged. The Durham Chronicle reported scenes of a "very stormy character" not untypical of local meetings.<sup>27</sup> In fact, the Willington ratepayers' meetings were so notorious, that the Chronicle reported especially spicy exchanges verbatim. Reporters added their own comments to events, which angered local residents.

I feel slightly grieved and humiliated at seeing us compared in the Durham Chronicle to a lot of Ogibbeway [sic] Indians (loud laughter and applause).<sup>28</sup>

The ratepayers finally adopted the Local Government Act (44 and 45 Vict. c.61) in 1881. The Willington Local Board comprised the towns of Willington, Stockley and part of Brancepeth. The first members elected to the local board were T.D. Stephinson (agent), Anthony Sayer (postmaster), William Harle (viewer, Page Bank Colliery), William Rutter (gentleman), Joseph Hewitson (farmer), Charles Ernest Bell (coalowner, Bell Brothers), James Allison (coke manager, Brancepeth Colliery), James D. Williamson (engineer, Brancepeth Colliery) and William Heppell (mining engineer). The increased power of the mining industry in local politics is illustrated quite clearly. Only one officer was a farmer by occupation and this trend continued as mineworkers became more involved in local and national politics as voting regulations were changed to encompass the working classes. The Willington Local Board was transformed into the Willington Urban District Council under the 1894 Local Government Act.

In the nineteenth century, Parliament enacted legislation to change government at all levels. The 1888 Local Government Act revolutionized provincial politics by the creation of county councils, which rejected the traditional provincial aristocracy as a political force. The Willington Division of the Durham County Council, formed in 1889, encompassed Brancepeth, Page Bank, Brancepeth Colliery, Oakenshaw and Willington. Rev A.D. Shafto was elected the first alderman, but he was soon replaced by A.W. Elliott (draper), a long time local politician in

Willington.

As we see above, social tensions in Willington found expression at local political meetings, which is not entirely surprising. In reality, political meetings were the only occasion when opposition forces came together to discuss one issue. The churches, temperance groups, schools and recreational activities were all exclusive to one of Willington's social groups. Therefore, local government was the only forum in which people could express their feelings to the other group. As a result meetings became a platform for the exchange of personal insults and grievances. Each group fought to maintain its own interests and unfortunately local administration suffered irreparable damage. Willington's social condition was never resolved prior to 1914, because those who were responsible for it, were too busy insulting one another.

### **National Politics**

As stated above, Robinson Ferens was a major political figure in Willington. His wealth and position as the village's leading employer demanded respect from persons not even directly involved in mining. Ferens was a well-known Liberal supporter. The Liberal Party had a strong following in the South Durham (changed later to Mid-Durham) riding, of which Willington was a part, from the late 1860s. Prior to 1868, Conservative members had been returned to South Durham. In the 1865 election, the Conservative Party won a resounding victory. Of the fifty-two Willington voters, thirty-nine voted Conservative (plump votes).<sup>29</sup>

Notable Liberal voters were John Straker and Joseph Love. The Liberals beat the Conservatives in the 1868 South Durham election. In that election 127 votes were cast for the Liberals, while the Conservatives received only 82 votes. Liberal support continued to increase in the late nineteenth century as more men became enfranchised. The Willington Conservative Association, formed in 1885, tried to regain votes. Prominent Conservative members were Joseph H. Straker, Dr. W.C. Allen, R.L. Weeks and James Allison. The Association failed to win its mandate at the ballot box. The Conservative Party only received support from the Willington non-dissenting "establishment". As each reform law was enacted more and more working men cast their votes for the Liberal party, along with the traditional dissenting Liberal voters -- Joseph Love and his family.

The Willington Liberal Association attracted much attention in the village. Large crowds attended Liberal addresses. The Willington branch of the Irish National League eagerly listened to Liberal speakers advocating Home Rule for Ireland. The majority of Liberal supporters, the miners, were prior to 1884 disenfranchised. Before the Third Reform Act, voting was based on household suffrage and miners were disadvantaged because colliery cottages were not eligible since miners received a cottage as part of their wage and did not rent it as a tenant. Through their unions miners agitated for a change in the voting regulations. At a franchise meeting in 1874, over two thousand miners with banners assembled on Willington Batts to protest against disenfranchisement. In 1884, miners held a meeting at the Prince of Wales Theatre, Willington, to denounce the voting

laws.

Unable to vote, miners used pressuring tactics to bully voters into supporting their party. During the 1874 election, a Conservative cab bearing red ribbons was stoned by Liberals when it rode down a Willington street. Police intervened to stop a riot, but unfortunately, the restlessness continued after dark. A Liberal supporter was set upon and beaten by a gang of Conservatives. In retaliation, fellow Liberals began smashing windows along the High Street. Police were called in to stop the fighting. An infamous tactic of political parties was to ply disenfranchised men with alcohol so that they could intimidate opposition voters. Deep suspicion fell upon the Liberal Party for this tactic during the 1868 South Durham election. John Allen, a provision dealer and beerhouse keeper, laid a civil suit on Robinson Ferens for non-payment of goods. The "goods" were in the form of alcoholic refreshments served to thirsty disenfranchised men to win their favour. Mr Wanless, a colliery official, had handed out tickets that were exchanged for food and drink. Michael Hagan, a recipient, stated: "I got a ticket from Wanless for 4s. I got drunk of course: that was the object."<sup>30</sup> And Allen was not the only unpaid tradesman. Ferens denied responsibility for the tickets on the grounds that Wanless had been dismissed from the colliery previously and that the Liberal Party did not authorize any such tickets. The jury found for Ferens. The suspicion of irregularities in Willington during the 1868 election were not erased however.

The Third Reform Act (1884) pacified the miners. A large section of the mining population became enfranchised. As soon

as miners received the vote, they used their power en masse. The miners' block vote, which alarmed many politicians, was a testament to working class solidarity. Over sixty percent of Mid-Durham votes were held by miners.<sup>31</sup> In the first election after enfranchisement (1885), William Crawford was elected the first miners' politician in Mid-Durham. His fellow officer in the DMA, John Wilson, took over Crawford's seat upon his death in 1890. Wilson remained a Member of Parliament for the next twenty-five years. The working class felt that the Liberals were the only party that understood their needs. With the rise of international socialism, miners became aware that a socialist party was much better suited to them. The establishment of the Independent Labour Party and the Willington Labour League (1906) gained rapid momentum. It was not until after the First World War, that the miners' block vote switched to the Labour Party, where it remains today.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 Hugh McLeod, *Religion and the Working Class in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1984), p.36
- 2 *Ibid.*, p.66
- 3 see exchange of Letters to the Editor, DC, 29 October 1863 to 6 November 1863
- 4 Northern Echo quoted in the DC, 14 January 1870
- 5 *loc. cit.*
- 6 DC, 12 June 1885
- 7 DC, 17 March 1876
- 8 DC, 29 September 1865

- 9  
Church Times quoted in the DC, 13 April 1883
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Roger J. Cooter, *The Irish in Co. Durham and Newcastle* (M.A. Thesis, University of Durham, 1972)
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DC, 4 February 1870
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*Ibid.*, 17 March 1892
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DCRO, E/W64, 26 May 1882
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*Ibid.*, National Log Book, 25 October 1886
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*Ibid.*, E/W53, National Log Book, 23 October 1863
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*Ibid.*, E/W54, National Log Book, 24 October 1898
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*Ibid.*
- 25  
Robert Colls, "Oh Happy English Children!: Coal, Class and Education in the North-East", *Past and Present* No. 73 (1976), p.75-99
- 26  
DC, 30 September 1887
- 27  
DC, 21 January 1876
- 28  
DC, 3 March 1876
- 29  
The following election results are compiled from the 1868 and 1865 South Durham Poll Books
- 30  
DC, 1 April 1870
- 31  
Roy Gregory, *The Miners and British Politics 1906-1914* (London, 1968), p.10

## CHAPTER FOUR: RECREATION AND LEISURE

### Popular Culture

Willington society was split into two groups. Upstanding, temperate and religious minded residents constituted the first group. They were the so called "respectable" citizens who engaged in moral pursuits of recreation and leisure. As a consequence, they clashed with Willington's second social group who enjoyed recreations which involved drinking, gambling, or both. Respectable citizens felt that these base entertainments would not be popular if the entire community followed a strict set of moral guidelines. Therefore respectable Willingtonians tried to win over supporters of popular pursuits to their ideas of appropriate forms of entertainment. Unfortunately, they failed miserably for each social group felt that the other was trying to dominate the village. Historians have aptly described this conflict of interest as the chapel vs pub issue, a simplification of the true nature of the problem. The issue was not whether religion was better than drinking. But, the underlying issue was who had the right to dictate Willington's social policies. Neither group was willing to concede any rights to the other. As a result, the two groups became not only ideologically separate, but physically separate, which created social tension within the village as the moralists became more persistent in their conversion campaign and the popularists became exceedingly annoyed by outside interference in their affairs. An examination of the entertainments of the two groups illustrates their diversity.

## Drinking

Respectable Durham citizens were concerned about the recreational pursuits of a large proportion of the working classes. The Durham Chronicle reported:

We have frequent occasion to congratulate the working-classes of this country upon their improved condition. The high wages they have been receiving for some time past has enabled them to procure home comforts which at one time were quite unattainable. We regret to find, however, that in too many instances these wages are not wisely expended. Too large a proportion of the wealth won by hard toil is wasted - and worse than wasted - in sensual indulgences, and the inordinate pandering to purely animal gratifications, unfortunately so prevalent, carries in its train other evils of the direst character.<sup>1</sup>

The most popular form of "sensual indulgences" was drinking. There have been a lot of discussions and theories as to why people drink. Depression, happiness, poverty, wealth, comradeship and loneliness are all contributing factors. Regardless of the cause, a large proportion of the population drank heavily. Drinking in itself was not the sole cause of the temperance campaign in Willington. But the brawling, fighting and bad language that resulted from drunkenness terrorized Willington residents. Straker and Love workers received their pay every fortnight (until 1912), and every pay Saturday there were disturbances in the streets because of drunkenness. In 1886, residents had a short respite.

For some months Willington has enjoyed an unbroken quiet from the freaks of drunkenness and disorder which at the pay weekends it has been occasionally the grief of the better part of the inhabitants of the neighbourhood to witness.<sup>2</sup>

If families could afford it, they travelled to nearby Durham or Bishop Auckland on pay Saturdays. Women had an opportunity to

visit the market and do some shopping. Men, however, spent their time drinking and chatting with the locals. The number of people travelling back to Willington drunk, and those already inebriated in the village, forced more moderate residents to stay indoors.

Drinking was not confined just to pay Saturdays. Many sporting events and fairs were marked by the appearance of a refreshment tent which offered beer to thirsty spectators. At the Willington Fair in 1866 publicans did "a roaring trade."<sup>3</sup> Publicans quickly realized that sporting events attracted a large number of people. Astute publicans therefore sponsored sporting events to draw crowds of prospective customers. The Victoria Inn used an adjoining alley to hold fives matches. In 1870, over one thousand spectators crowded into the alley to see a prize match. No doubt the Victoria Inn was busy serving customers during and after the match. The Kelly Directory of the period gives a good idea of how many premises in Willington sold intoxicating drinks. In 1858, thirteen drinking establishments were listed. By 1873, the number had risen to twenty-seven. A few ambitious residents made it a sport to try a pub crawl through Willington, but the sheer number of drinking establishments made many participants surrender.

Willington's "respectable" citizens were appalled at the lifestyle these drunks led. Church groups tried to convert these sinners (in their eyes) into decent people. Although the churches and Salvation Army did win over some converts, the main body of their target remained immovable. Realizing that conversion was more difficult than suppression, community leaders agitated to restrict drinking establishments. When Sunday

closing became a national debate, Willington residents, supported by the churches, organized meetings and demonstrations approving the Lord's Day Bill. A great uproar was created in Willington when a workmen's club was proposed in 1902. Religious leaders and temperance workers held meetings and tried to block the plans. They argued that Willington had enough drinking establishments (26) and that a workmen's club would only increase the number of places young men could be perverted by drink. The Willington and District Workmen's Club, a club especially designed for working class men, opened in 1903, despite their protests.

Straker and Love did not actively discourage their workers from frequenting public houses. The company was concerned about drunkenness at work. The rules and regulations of Brancepeth Colliery clearly stated that the consumption of any type of alcohol on the job would result in instant dismissal. Enforcement of the no-drinking rule, however, appears to have been lax. Miners often took a bottle of rum and tea for their bait at the pit. Employee absence, not drinking on the job, was a major problem for Straker and Love. In the early nineteenth century, miners recovering from a weekend hangover, would simply not show up for work on Monday. Saint Monday, as this "holiday" was called, infuriated coal owners. Owners eventually eliminated these days off by fixing clauses in the miners' bond or agreement, penalizing time off work without a legitimate cause. Straker and Love's 1863 agreement fined workers for any absence without a valid excuse.

Drunkenness did not just affect men but women as well.

Although women could not join their spouses and fathers in the pub, they could buy a jug and drink at home. Depression, poverty and ignorance encouraged many unfortunates to seek solace in the bottle. Children growing up in a drinking family, in most cases, saw drink as a part of family life. Only a small percentage of these children rejected their family's ways and embraced teetotalism. Perhaps temperance workers failed to combat drunkenness effectively, but their notions of it and its effects were sadly true. Drunken men fought in the streets causing severe injuries or death to themselves. Brawling damaged property and frightened local inhabitants. Domestic violence and assaults all had their roots in alcohol abuse. Drunkenness was a major problem for Willington police. In 1875 alone, 552 people were brought before a magistrate on a charge relating to drunkenness. 400 were convicted and fined a total of £557.<sup>4</sup> The number of convictions for drunkenness in Willington was very high compared to the Diocese of Durham which had a conviction rate for drunkenness of 1 in every 41 people. Willington topped the list with a rate of 1 in every 16 people.<sup>5</sup>

In 1866 a drunken man named Berwick started to badly beat his wife. The police took him into custody after neighbours raised the alarm. Two drunk cokeyard men were fighting at a Willington pub (1867), when one hit the other with a brick and fractured his skull. Police charged the offender with assault. William Condon was attacked by two men while walking home with a gill of whisky, just purchased at the Market Hotel. His assailants wanted a drink, and when he refused to give them one, they pelted him with stones. Police had their hands full in 1865

when, a pitman was ejected from a pub and he turned around and tried to fight them. The number of assaults, breaches of the peace, and drunk and riotous offences laid in Willington were endless. The local magistrate who heard the majority of cases was Rev A.D. Shafto of St Brandon's, Brancepeth. John Straker, J.P. sat on the bench frequently. Although Joseph Love was a magistrate, he never involved himself in local court cases. Punishments for drunkenness varied from being bound over to keep the peace, to fines and imprisonment.

At times, drunkenness resulted in serious offences such as manslaughter or murder. Martin Hagan's death at the hands of an anti-Irish mob in 1873, had its roots in drunkenness. When H. Todd and J. Taylor (colliery workmen) had an altercation after a few drinks over money won at a pitch and toss game (1866), the men started to fight. After six rounds, Taylor collapsed and later died. Police arrested Todd the same evening at Russell's public house. Willington Police had to be cautious in their interference where drink was concerned. To one half of Willington, drunks were a menace to be placed under arrest and taught a lesson. To the other half, drinking and its consequences were an accepted social activity. The Willington Police, Straker and Love, and religious groups effectively tried to change working class society. But, the workers would not be manipulated into abandoning a recognized social pastime.

Clearly the collier's first loyalties were to his family, co-workers and community, not to the authorities or their works. It is also evident that the forces of authority in some ways recognized this; for the police were apprehensive about the growing number of coal workers; the prison officials were appalled by their ignorance and the owners distressed by their intransigence.

Without the leadership customarily supplied by gentry, employer or government, the pit villages became insulated, exclusive and socially self-reliant -- in short, alien communities to most of the upper classes.<sup>6</sup>

### **Gambling**

Drunkenness was not the only major policing problem in Willington. Gambling was just as prevalent. The reasons as to why people gamble are as complex as those for drinking. By placing bets on athletics and games of skill, supporters proved their loyalty. The thrill of taking risks motivated others to gamble. Poor people, seeing no improvement in their economic conditions, gambled in the hope of winning prosperity. The results of gambling shocked many residents. Gambling addicts pawned all their possessions in the hope of a winning streak. Instead of providing an avenue out of poverty, gambling simply increased distress. A 1913 report on Northern conditions reported:

Gambling is a vice which now certainly vies with drunkenness as the immediate cause of untold calamity in thousands of homes.<sup>7</sup>

Certain forms of gambling were recognized by the community, albeit reluctantly. Racing was extremely popular. The Willington Coursing Meeting and the Willington Hunt Steeplechases attracted large crowds. The Steeplechase offered the following stakes in 1869: Willington stakes 20 sov, Crook stakes 5 sov, Brancepeth stakes 15 sov, Tradesmen's stake a £5 hunting saddle, Ladies' Purse 5 sov, and Farmers' stake a cart and saddle trapping. In the same year the coursing meeting gave £6 for first and £2 for second prize in the eight dog all ages greyhound

race. Owners had to pay an entry fee for each dog or horse and the stakes varied according to the age/type of animal entered. Gamblers travelled to Willington from as far as Newcastle-upon-Tyne and local residents often travelled out to distant races (i.e. Durham Races). Bookmakers operated out of a betting ring set up for the occasion. Besides gambling the races offered spectators refreshment tents and stalls of all descriptions. Itinerant dealers arrived to sell their wares. The races had a carnival atmosphere and many people enjoyed the drinking and day out. Church groups did not favour the activities associated with racing. Many churches organized field days and public teas on the same day, so residents would not be inclined to go to the races. Despite the large attendances on these "race day" field days, a still greater number of people went to the races. Pigeon racing was another popular racing sport in Willington. Many workmen kept pigeon hutches in the back of their houses. Public houses normally sponsored pigeon races. Distances did not exceed ten miles. The stakes on an 1884 race were £10.

Illicit gambling occurred at almost every athletic event. Because of its illegality, it is hard to determine the extent of the gambling and the size of the bets. Bowling, running, billiards and fives matches attracted much attention and betting. Fives matches were always well attended. Four thousand spectators witnessed a championship match in 1870. The stakes were £25 a side. Local bookmakers placed bets, while the nearby Victoria Inn served thirsty customers. Quoits and pitch and toss were the target of intense police scrutiny. Convicted for playing (and gambling) pitch and toss, two pitmen were

incarcerated for seven days and in addition had to pay court costs. Pitch and toss was especially irritating to a large number of residents. One local resident wrote to the Durham Chronicle (1874) complaining that the language associated with the game was so bad, that his family's Sunday outings were spoiled. Although the police and many residents disapproved of these sports and their consequences, quoits and pitch and toss were extremely popular. Even the Durham Chronicle quoted the odds in a local quoit match in 1867(!).

Prize fighting was illegal and organizers had to plan fights in secret. In 1895, two miners (one from Brancepeth, the other from Willington Colliery) agreed to a fight. The match had to be arranged the night before, so that the police would not find out any information about the fight. At the end of the twenty-ninth round, the Brancepeth miner threw in the towel. Another fight in 1899 resulted in a knock-out in the 8th, just as the police arrived on the scene. By that time, it was too late to stop money exchanging hands. Prize fighting is the only blood sport that has been traced to Willington. There is no evidence to suggest that dog or cock fighting existed.

Apart from sports and entertainments that involved gambling, a large number of Willington residents enjoyed the opportunity to win prizes at local shows for their skill or produce. Respectable citizens, who abhorred gambling, gladly accepted prizes at shows. The Willington Bird Show, Willington Flower Show, Willington Fair, Brancepeth, Brandon and Willington Ploughing Contest, Leek shows and athletic events offered residents several ways to win cash. Most show entrants were from

### WHAT IS GAMBLING?

Gambling in its lowest form,  
Is not what we oftentimes think,  
Done by men who're clothed in rags,  
Pitching coppers for a drink.

This I know is bad enough,  
At its best 'tis but a curse,  
But to tell the truth, I know  
Ways and means that are far worse.

Gambling is not only done  
By the prostitute in rags,  
Or the urchin in the street  
Selling matches on the flags.

No, the highest in the land  
Known by name of earl or duke,  
Care not, by what ways or means,  
Honest people they may fluke.

Even to the royal blood,  
Where examples should be shown,  
They partook in gambling rife,  
Which the whole wide world had known.

For at home in England's isle,  
Princes of the royal name,  
Have partook in games which would  
Bend a poor man's head in shame.

Yet they hate this petty gambling,  
Which the poor man might partake,  
But they count it quite a glory  
With their thousand-pound sweepstake.

Excerpt from: The Poetical Works of Charles Wilson:  
The Pitman Poet Vol. I, London, 19?

Wilson's comment on gambling illustrates the division between the upper and working classes. The upper classes chastise the working classes for gambling, but willingly bet themselves. Their blatant hypocrisy infuriates the working classes, and it is no wonder that the classes were separated by a gulf of misunderstanding and intolerance.

the working class.

The Willington Bird Show was very popular with working class men, whose interest in pigeons extended to other birds. The first annual show in 1865, which included an exhibition of rabbits, was a great success. The Willington Ornithological Association received one hundred entries for the 1866 show. The Willington Floral, Horticultural and Industrial Society also had a strong working class interest. The first show in 1876 in J. Straker's field exhibited flowers, vegetables, poultry, mechanical designs, needlework and handwriting. The flower show also included a band contest. The show attracted over 2,000 people in 1889 with a prize total of £110. Farmers competed in the Brancepeth, Brandon and Willington Ploughing Contest which started in 1861. The competition moved around farms in the area each year. The Willington Fair offered prizes for animals, as well as providing peep shows, cheap jacks, auctioneers and penny showmen. The different leek shows were sponsored by public houses, which awarded prizes for the best leeks. Church groups offered youths annual sports days. Children won prizes for running and jumping.

Brass band contests, usually included in shows, were very popular. Willington had several brass bands. Some lasted only for a few years. A constant problem for the bands, was that their members usually colliery workers, moved around frequently. Therefore, one year a band could have excellent performers and the next merely beginners. The Willington Temperance Fife and Drum Band, composed of members of the disbanded Willington Band of Hope Fife and Drum Band, was accused of violating temperance

principles. As one resident penned:

Some represent themselves, you see,  
To drink hot coffee and cold tea,  
But think that nothing is so fine  
As to go to Durham and drink their wine.<sup>8</sup>

The band was private and not affiliated to any group, although its members were bound to temperance principles.

A rival band, the Willington Artisan Fife and Drum Band, composed of coke workers at Brancepeth Colliery, were sponsored by grogsellers. The sponsors gave the band cash and new instruments along with the occasional free drink. The men felt that the temperance band was trying to discredit them by implying that the Artisans were paid in liquor. The "battle of the bands" started to annoy residents in Willington when people could not sleep at night because of the noise. Residents complained in November 1876, when four bands decided to outplay each other after midnight. On December 8th, the Artisan Band deliberately charged into the temperance band head on. Police arrested twelve of the Artisans for assault.

The Willington Temperance Band survived into the twentieth century, but its main rival became the Willington Silver Band, formed in 1880. After winning numerous contests, the latter became known as the Willington Prize Silver Band. Their 1908 season ended in fifteen prize titles and winnings of over £36. Operating a brass band was very expensive. The prize band's instruments were valued at over £350 in 1908. Bands desperately sought sponsors to purchase and refurbish instruments. Straker and Love's role in sponsorship must have been large. The Brancepeth Colliery Welfare Brass Band (post 1914) relied solely on the company for its support. The only evidence prior to 1914

that reveals Straker and Love's role in brass band sponsorship is that Joseph H. Straker advanced an unnamed band a sum of money at a small rate of interest. The loan enabled the band to purchase new instruments.

### **Popular Entertainment**

Many historians have concentrated upon the fact that followers of popular culture mainly drank and gambled, which although might be true for some adherents, was not true for all. Drinking and gambling for the most part excluded women. Although they did participate in these pursuits, they were excluded from the places where these events were involved. For courting couples, married couples and single women, there were a number of ways they could spend their free time.

Organized entertainment in halls always attracted a large crowd in Willington. The 1867 series of penny readings had to refuse admissions. Local residents gave amateur performances much to the amusement of the crowd. Thomas Williamson, Willington's renowned "weather prophet", gave his forecast for the coming weeks. A respectable citizen in the Durham Chronicle thought the performance was "burlesque" and "characteristic of a low singing saloon."<sup>9</sup> Members of the audience wrote a letter expressing their sorrow at this savage attack on what they considered fun.

The Albert Music Hall, which is first mentioned in 1881, delighted audiences with amazing acts and frivolity. As technology progressed and live entertainment was replaced with cinematic film, the Empire Picture Hall was a natural progression

from the music hall. On its opening in 1911, the cinema filled up to its capacity seating of one thousand, without any difficulty.

The travelling shows, common to the early nineteenth century, arrived in the village with much pomp and circumstance. Wombell's Collection of Wild Beasts, the circus, and Hunter's Moveable Theatre always filled the houses. In fact, the circus was so popular that residents virtually dropped everything to see the parade. Women rushing out of the house, so as not to miss a thing, grabbed their husband's caps instead of searching for their own hats (contemporary fashion dictated that women cover their heads).<sup>10</sup>

Sports matches drew large crowds of men and some women. Football was especially popular in Willington. The Brancepeth Colliery Literary Institute offered men gymnastics, swimming, camping, billiards, chess, and other such activities. Women were not excluded from all its activities. Women attended in large numbers at the institute's annual gala at Brancepeth Castle, the Durham Miners' Gala, and Oddfellows and Foresters' anniversary celebrations. Popular activities exclusively for women, must have occurred, but there is no evidence of these.

### **Middle Class "Respectable" Culture**

There was a general feeling in respectable Victorian Society that the world had become base and inhuman. Violent crimes and blood sports seemed to be on the increase and enjoying popular support. Upstanding, moral citizens started to form

organizations and pressure groups to keep these alarming tendencies in check. Organizations like the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals gained national attention. Morality became a public issue and groups were created to bring morality back to the masses who had abandoned Christian principles. The nineteenth century Christian Movement encompassed all aspects of life. Moralists tried to convert their fellow immoral residents through the temperance movement, the Salvation Army, and Christian athletics. Christian revivalism was not purely a middle class phenomenon. Many working class people tried to uplift their fellow men and women to be honourable, albeit poor citizens.

It must not be supposed -- as we apprehend it too commonly is -- that the Pitmen are universally a base and degraded class of men -- a race of unredeemed heathen. No such thing, there are amongst them hundreds and thousands of what in homely language are called "decent" persons, and who may be truly described as moral, intelligent, and religiously minded -- They are content to earn an honest pittance by their daily labour, and to enjoy the fruits of their industry in the bosoms of their families; and it is well known that they who are able and willing to work can obtain an ample provision for those who are dependent upon them.<sup>11</sup>

### **Temperance Movement**

The temperance movement tried to eliminate a major factor that led to despair and crime. Drunkenness, a not uncommon sight in Willington, deprived many families of the resources to alleviate their poverty. It also created violence and street fighting. Contemporary Willingtonians believed that the only way to stop drunkenness was to limit and regulate shops selling alcohol, and convince people to stop drinking completely.

Temperance groups attempted to do this by encouraging residents to sign a pledge to abstain from alcohol. Every religious group in Willington had a temperance society attached to it. Meetings were held to encourage more people to sign a pledge to abstain from alcohol. Public teas provided entertainment without the need to have an alcoholic drink. Refreshment or cocoa rooms supplied non-alcohol drinks to patrons. They tried to rival the public house as a place of conversation and merry-making with little success. The Hope of Willington Lodge, no. 1,202 of the Independent Order of Good Templars was a successful organization. Their performances, usually including a brass band, were always crowded. The Templars held a variety of events -- teas, parades, sport days and concerts. Similar organizations such as the Sons of Temperance Society, no. 461, the Rechabites, and the Willington Social Temperance Club provided the same type of amusements.

As in the rest of England, Willington had its own Band of Hope. The Bands were undenominational and upheld the principles of temperance, honesty and cleanliness. Throughout the country Bands of Hope were guiding children towards a respectable lifestyle. Along with Sunday schools, the Bands concentrated on educating and providing recreation solely for children. Music was introduced to the children and the Willington chapter had its own drum and fife band. The Band of Hope movement, mainly a working class phenomenon, had over three million adherents by the end of the century.<sup>12</sup>

On the surface, it appears as if Willington society as a whole embraced the temperance reformers, but this is not so.

Many people rejected these "do-gooders" who, not unsurprisingly, were major figures in the church and at work. Lord Boyne and Straker and Love donated funds to reform drunkards. The New Connexion temperance concert stage in 1868 was built by Straker and Love workmen. Colliery owners had an interest in keeping their men off alcohol. Abstaining workmen were punctual, alert and better for the company's image. The temperance football clubs and the Temperance Band were very successful groups, but the latter was attacked for remaining temperate in name alone (see above).

### **Salvation Army**

The Salvation Army (1877) was an innovative group of Christians. Based on a military system, members received a rank and uniform, and were then separated into divisions and corps. The army fought a war to rescue people from sin and save them for Christ. The 120th Corps, stationed at Willington, was a tremendous force. The Salvation Army believed that the middle class notion of civilizing the poor was false. The only way to effect change among the working class was to save them. Reforming a person's soul was much easier than trying to reform their minds. The Hallelujah Army, as it was earlier known, had its own brass bands. The soldiers and their bands held Hallelujah teas, concerts, games and public meetings. What made the Salvation Army attractive was its conviction and determination to save people, regardless of their religion. Crowds grew so large at meetings, that they had to be held outside the barracks (hall). In times of depression, the army

was quick to offer its services to the community.

### **Christian Athletics**

The Christian athletics movement was also very popular in Willington. The Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) was the major exponent of healthy, moral sporting activities. Racing, boxing, fives and quoits all involved drinking and gambling. Flower and vegetable shows, and band contests offered entrants prize money. Sports like football, cycling, cricket and tennis were free of financial rewards. The basis of Christian athletics was that one should compete morally without the incentive of financial gain. Participants played for comradeship and health inspired by God's gifts of speed, agility and thought. Willington had several football clubs -- Willington Albion, Willington Rovers, Willington Wanderers, Brancepeth Colliery White Star, Temperance Football Club, Willington Town Wednesday, Willington Co-operative, Brancepeth Colliery Rangers, and the Shamrock Football Club. The Temperance Football Club was so successful that it entered the Northern League Football Association. The other amateur teams were part of the Durham County Football Association, although not concurrently.

The Roman Catholic Literary Institute and Willington Church Institute (1890) provided healthy sports for their congregations. The Catholics had an annual sports competition stretched over two days. Participants enjoyed tug-of-war, bucket puzzle, quoits and foot racing without being tempted by beer tents or bookmakers. The institute also supported the Shamrock Football Club, a temperate Catholic association. Anglicans did not have their own

football club, but enjoyed other sports. The Church Institute had its own cricket ground and tennis courts. In the reading room, members could play chess or billiards. Many respectable citizens enjoyed billiards, but were dismayed that billiard tables were only available in public houses, which only encouraged drinking and gambling. Church institutes set up their own tables so that residents could enjoy a more wholesome form of the game. In 1894, the Anglican institute even formed a rambling club.

### **Patriotism and Militarism**

The stress of morality in Victorian society complemented one of loyalty. The creation and celebration of the British Empire brought about Jingoism which had its effect on Willington. Alongside this growing patriotic fervour was the increased importance of militarism. The Salvation Army is an early example of the growing militarist movement in Britain. The festival surrounding the Queen's Jubilee in 1887 was commemorated by the construction of the Queen Victoria Jubilee Bridge over the Wear, connecting Willington to Todhills. To celebrate the event, Charles Straker, Joseph H. Straker and Straker and Love helped to defray the schools' festival expenses. Bonfires were lit at night. The largest bonfire was placed on top of Brancepeth pit heap.

Growing militarism is evident in Willington from the jubilee onwards. The Willington Gun Club (1894) allowed enthusiasts to become crack shots. In 1895 the Church Lads Brigade (Willington Company) was formed. Similar to the Salvation Army, it combined

the military and religion together. The Brigade had three companies in Willington (A,B,C) and the boys were grouped in each according to experience. Youths studied drill, ambulance, wood carving, drawing and indulged in sports. Each had a uniform and was led by an adult, also uniformed. Dr. E.J. Brewis was a leader in the early twentieth century. In 1899, B Company along with Crook and Willington volunteers of the Durham Light Infantry paraded through the streets headed by the Willington Silver Band.

The Durham Light Infantry (DLI), created under Cardwell's reforms, was formed from the 68th and 106th foot in 1881. The British government felt that personalizing the military would make it more attractive to possible recruits and this strategy worked very effectively. Willington volunteers were part of the DLI, Second Volunteer Battalion, D Company. In 1896, residents tried to form a Willington Volunteer corps and signed up over 200 people. Unfortunately, the war office rejected the corps, because the British army was inundated with volunteers. As part of D company, Willington volunteers established a Willington Volunteer Ambulance Corps, which gave weekly instruction. The Boer War gave Willingtonians a cause to celebrate. When four men volunteered for the front, fellow residents serenaded them with a parade headed by the Willington Silver Band. The enthusiasm for the war is best illustrated by a contemporary account of the Relief of Mafeking in 1900.

Never in the history of Willington has there been such a patriotic outburst as was witnessed on Sat. when the news of the relief of Mafeking became known. Almost from every house and place of business flags were displayed, whilst streamers were strung across the principal streets. At some of the collieries cannons were fired, and at the railway station fog signals were exploded. A

procession was formed at the Board school at 2 pm and marched round the town. First came the Willington Silver Band...next the Willington section of the 2nd V.B.D.L.I...and children to a number of upwards of 1,000 most of them carrying small flags, brought up the rear. In the evening the town was thronged with people...A torchlight procession was held at 10pm through the principal streets, when the effigies of Presidents Kruger and Steyn were set ablaze.<sup>13</sup>

In 1908, residents finally realized their dream of a local volunteer corps. The Territorial Army of the DLI, created a 6th Battalion to include the area of Bishop Auckland, Barnard Castle, Consett, Crook and Spennymoor. The enthusiasm for the military did not abate until the First World War exposed the true horrors of military conflict.

### **High Culture**

Genteel Willington residents participated in their own forms of recreation and leisure. Church and chapel bazaars were very crowded with the elite of Willington and neighbourhood. Prominent ladies ran stalls of sale of work and confectionary. A well-known gentleman always collected admission. Poorer residents, who could not afford admission, had to wait until the last hours of the bazaar to gain entrance at a reduced rate or free of charge. Harvest and Christmas festivals in the churches were a time of concerts and merry-making for the upper class residents.

Outside of church, genteel residents looked forward to various balls. The Willington Quadrille Party held an annual ball with supper and dancing. The Willington Flower Show Ball in 1870 attracted the elite of the neighbourhood. The ultimate sign of acceptance into high society was an invitation to

Brancepeth Castle or to Mrs Love's or Mrs Weeks' exclusive garden parties by invitation only.

The Albert Music Hall and the Empire Picture Hall were definitely not on the agenda of Willington's finer residents. The Willington Choral Society, established in 1898, gave classic performances in the Wesleyan Hall annually. Pieces performed included The First Walpurgis Night (Goethe/Mendelssohn), May Queen, and Hymn of Praise (Mendelssohn). Members of the society were a list of Willington prominent personalities: Viscountess Boyne, Charles Straker, R.R. Taylor, Rev Urmson, W. Cochrane, D. Grieves, Father Hosten, Thomas I. Love and R.L. Weeks.

Willington's leading residents were not confined socially to the village. Their affluence meant that they could afford trips to Durham City to attend the theatre, concerts and parties there. As a result, their circle of entertainment was far spread and excluded most of Willington's inhabitants.

#### ENDNOTES

- 1 DC, 6 December 1872
- 2 DC, 4 June 1882
- 3 DC, 2 November 1866
- 4 DC, 31 March 1876
- 5 Ibid.
- 6 James C. Burke, *Crime and Criminality in County Durham 1840-1855* (M.A. Thesis, University of Durham, 1980), p.132
- 7 Charles E.B. Russell, *Social Problems of the North* (London, 1913), p.8

- 8  
DC, 8 December 1876
- 9  
DC, 29 March 1867
- 10  
Based on a lantern slide picture of women wearing men's caps  
while watching the circus parade (in private possession)
- 11  
DC, 20 July 1839
- 12  
Lilian L. Shiman, "The Band of Hope Movement: Respectable  
Recreation for Working-class Children", Victorian  
Studies Vol.XVIII No. 1, Sept. 1973, p.50
- 13  
DC, 25 May 1900

## CONCLUSION

There can be no dispute that Willington was a Straker and Love pit village. The old aristocratic Russell family of Brancepeth surrendered their traditional rights as landlords when they leased their estate to the mine company. The importance of the mine in Willington was so great that the residents had more cause to appease the colliery owners than the lord of the manor. The decline of the aristocracy throughout Britain was not due to a definite political change but to the increasing unimportance of the aristocracy in an industrial society. Land, which had once been a source of great wealth, was superceded by the vast amounts of capital being generated by industrialists. The new leaders of the nineteenth century were the captains of industry and one such captain was Joseph Love.

Love and his son-in-law Robinson Ferens, who followed in his footsteps, were major figures in Willington. The Strakers were too far removed from the village to have a similar impact. The Love family demanded respect from Willingtonians and certainly were in a position to command it. Family marriages were celebrated by festivities, dinners, and cannon salutes. The pits even closed to mourn the death of one of the owners. Joseph Love was an ardent Methodist New Connexionist and was determined that the sect should succeed in County Durham. He enlarged the congregation by forcing men to join the chapel on the day they were hired at the colliery. He invested a large amount of money into building New Connexion chapels and schools. The thriving community of New Connexionists in Willington, which largely outnumbered the other Methodist congregations, was unusual in

England, for Wesleyans were the most popular Methodist group in the country. Another of Love's passions was the elimination of any unionists at his collieries. His harsh handling of the 1863 Rocking Strike even aroused critical comment in London. Robinson Ferens had a less brusque style, although he too thought himself to be the man of Willington. He was heavily involved in local politics and it was Ferens who ousted the church (Rev Ruxton) from its traditional position in local government. However, Ferens was also criticized for using his power to Straker and Love's advantage. He was accused of receiving forewarning when the sanitary inspector was about to inspect colliery housing. Ferens also managed to escape prosecution for illegal political dealings (was he really innocent?).

But the real question remains. How much was the individual Willington resident a servant to Straker and Love? Could a person live completely untouched by the firm? The Love family's use of power really was no different from that of the landed gentry centuries earlier, but with one unique difference -- the Love's had considerably more power. It is impossible to mention one group, institution, structure, or necessity that was not even indirectly connected to the colliery in some way or another. No one person, despite his/her occupation could avoid Straker and Love. After all, Straker and Love introduced the railway and telegraph system. They injected cash into the local economy and provided service industries a steady existence. The company repaired roads and provided lighting. They even relieved ratepayers of paying a great deal of money in refuse collection. Even the local vicar relied on Straker and Love for his home and

coals, much to his chagrin later when it was used as a weapon to silence him in the 1863 Rocking Strike.

The influence Straker and Love had touched all areas of village social life. When everything ran smoothly, everyone prospered, but the real face of a company controlled town was evident when things became rather rough. During strikes, Straker and Love cut the men off from all their benefits as punishment. Recognized leaders of industrial unrest were persecuted by the blacklist system in the Durham coalfield. House evictions and the stopping of credit starved the men to go back to work. Strikes are the most vivid example of how the company used their power. But what is most generally overlooked is the power Straker and Love used every day. If a breadwinner could no longer work the family was susceptible to eviction from their colliery cottage despite how many other people in the family were working at the pit. There was no such thing as tenant's rights or protection from unfair dismissal. Without a just cause the company could fire at will. It is largely due to the miners' unions that workers were protected to a degree unheard of in other areas of English industry.

Apart from the owners, Brancepeth Colliery itself was a significant force in the village. The mining industry created a body of workers who were generally young and male. This meant that mining villages experienced an age imbalance. Willington was full of young couples and children. It took quite a few decades before there was a natural balance of the ages. The need for large numbers of people near the pit created an urban atmosphere in Willington. The tendency of building row houses

in pit villages, not only served as a cheap form of construction, but created a closer community atmosphere. The back streets of colliery cottages were a hive of activity -- children playing, women chatting and men trudging home from work all lended itself to a convivial atmosphere between neighbours. The equality of colliery housing among the workers meant that all houses were the same; therefore all neighbours were equal. The housing conditions of towns and cities could not be described as such. The paradox of mining villages was that they were both rural and urban in nature. Urban in that the pit villages had highly concentrated populations living in one area, yet rural in that pit villages were located in farm areas. Both farmers and miners interacted together. Recreation for the community was enhanced by wide open spaces and fresh country air. The rural character of the village did not cause the inhabitants too many problems. Its distant location from a town caused it some obstacles in the early century. The arrival of the railway and the increased use of bicycles made this distance negligible. It was the urban character of the village that caused difficulties. First of all, the lack of any organized planning created a large majority of the social problems. Ill-surfaced streets, the lack of drains, buildings next to possible health hazards, and the lack of a pure water supply all plagued Willington residents. All these sanitary problems were solvable but most solutions cost money and Willington ratepayers were unwilling to bear this cost, not unsurprisingly since, until the late nineteenth century, the majority were farmers living on their own property outside of the village and the nuisances. The absence of a local

administrative body capable of solving Willington's sanitation problems must have caused the inhabitants much grief and frustration. Even the new local bodies such as the local board were simply overwhelmed by the task ahead.

Another victim of industrialization was the established church. The traditional role of the Anglican church in guiding the souls of all England's inhabitants and controlling local secular policies by the vestry started to decline in the nineteenth century. The vestry was replaced by Parliament with a local board, no longer answerable to the local incumbent. The elimination of the vestry's involvement in rates and social assistance (i.e. poor relief) meant that individuals no longer looked to the church for comfort but to the government. The alarming number of Protestant sects and the legality and increase of Catholicism in Britain greatly alarmed the church. But unfortunately the church was unable to combat these new threats. The church was no longer "the church" but one of several churches. Rev Ruxton personified the struggle the church faced. He strongly resisted secular encroachment on church responsibilities and he angered residents by his uncompromising attitudes. The church no longer had a grip over the population and Ruxton soon discovered this fact in his own personal defeats in commanding authority in Willington.

Willington resembled many pit villages in the country in that the mine was sunk close to an already existing village and therefore some inhabitants did not have occupations directly linked to the pit. The mines in remote areas of England and especially Wales and Scotland were so isolated that new villages

had to be built to accommodate the workers and their families and therefore the residents were all directly involved with the colliery. Mineworkers of course dominated Willington, but were not its sole inhabitants. This situation created a sometimes tense atmosphere. The social divisions in the community were linked to class, religious affiliation and occupation.

There were two major social groups in the village --respectable people and popularists -- but these groups in themselves were not homogenous. The respectable people of the village were both working, middle and upper class. They were staunch church/chapel supporters and approved of temperance principles. They believed in self-improvement and honest labour. Their recreations involved Christian athletics, bazaars, lectures, exhibitions and self-improvement classes. The respectable people were very different in nature to the popularists who enjoyed drinking, gambling, fairs, contests, professional sports and any recreations associated with the above.

Both groups were hostile to one another and since their interests were divergent, they rarely had the opportunity to come into contact with one another. Local board meetings were often the arena for disputes and concerns to be raised. The church confronted its secular challenge at these meetings. Miners confronted the farmers on their right to determine local policy. Local political meetings were the focus of the frustration of the working men who were disenfranchised from voting locally and nationally. The Irish Brotherhood meetings allowed the Irish to vent their feelings on the status of their

culture and nationality. The selection of schools and churches was a conscious choice of one group over others which was closely linked to other social considerations. Trades unions were a focal point and tool for addressing concerns and injustices. Unfortunately, despite all the arenas available to vent frustration and express opinions very few neutral avenues were open for the residents to come together and mix. It was indeed possible for one part of the community never to come into contact with another. And this condition was not just typical for pit villages, but to all urban communities in Britain.

Willington's diversity made it into a lively Victorian pit village. The vast numbers of clubs, associations and recreations offered residents a dynamic community. It was possible for one to be entertained every day of the week. Cultural diversity did not halt Willington's growth, but made it more vibrant and a place worth living in. Residents wanted a nice and easy life and they achieved it the best they knew how. They coped with pit life and its restrictions. They accepted Straker and Love's power, but were not in the least passive. When the residents wanted a new chapel (i.e. P.M.'s) they were determined to achieve it, in spite of the obstacles. The same is true for unions as well. Despite the sanitation problem, overcrowding in the schools, and the prevalence of diseases, Willingtonians strived to live a normal life. It is a credit to them that their society, with all its problems, was extremely vibrant and rich.

Throughout Britain agricultural villages were rapidly being industrialized in order to mine for coal. Willington was a typical northern pit village. The various coalfields in Britain

were different in character and this was expressed by the way of life of each village. The North Eastern coalfield was prosperous and this was reflected in the high standard of living of its miners. Since most mineworkers in the Durham coalfield were native northerners, their lifestyle was influenced by their geography and culture. The Irish were a minority, conspicuous in their cultural differences. The industrialization of agricultural areas into collieries fundamentally affected the inhabitants socially. Villages became more culturally diverse and the diversity of peoples led to the establishment of several different churches, clubs and associations. The physical problems of sanitation, drainage and housing were the result of ill-planning but did not adversely affect the social life of the village. Although the industrial revolution tangibly changed the face of the country and created "pit villages", its effects go far beyond that.

The Industrial Revolution, however, was more than an expansion of commerce, more than a series of changes in the technology of certain industries, more even than an acceleration of general economic growth. It was a revolution in men's access to the means of life, in control over their ecological environment, in their capacity to escape from tyranny and niggardliness of nature.<sup>1</sup>

The new organizations and establishments of Willington were more than just recreational/social meeting places. They represented certain ideals and beliefs and villagers consciously selected what groups to associate with. Every club, group or church expounded a certain lifestyle. The uniqueness of pit villages was that just like urban areas, members of the community were easily divided by their associations. That residents willingly

wanted only to associate with their own kind created strong social status and even a social hierarchy. The demonstrations and arguments that occurred in Willington were the result of friction when one social group in the community felt victimized by another. The vitality and prosperity of the village continued into the early twentieth century. The decline of the North Eastern Coalfield with the dismantling of the collieries, the eradication of pit heaps, and demolishing of colliery cottages signalled an end to a unique form of community: rural yet urban; industrial yet residential; diverse yet united -- a community, that despite its serious social problems, was strangely cohesive and functioned in spite of the fact it was not designed to exist in the first place.

#### **ENDNOTES**

1

Harold Perkin, *The Origins of Modern English Society 1780-1880* (London, 1969), p.3

## APPENDIX A

### A Biography of Joseph Love (1796-1875)<sup>1</sup>

Joseph Love's life exemplifies a typical Victorian success story. He was born into a mining family in 1796 at New York, a small village near North Shields. His father, William Love, was a keeper at the colliery there. The Love family moved around the region and eventually Joseph joined his father at the pit (the date is unclear). By the age of nineteen, he was hewing coal at Percy Main Colliery, where his two half-brothers (William Love married twice) became putters for him. In 1820, he abandoned pit life and became a successful hawker of teas, coffee and drapery goods. His religious devotion to the Methodist New Connexion, which dominated the rest of his life, is evident at this time when he became a local preacher. His success as a businessman grew in Lumley, when he opened a shop. Joseph's career escalated with his marriage to Sarah Pearson of North Shields, daughter of timber merchant Isaac Pearson. Tired of selling goods, Joseph began to contract work for building miners' cottages in 1829. He then ventured into the milling trade at Shincliffe and nearly lost all of his capital when the Newcastle District Bank collapsed. Not deterred by that financial disaster, he moved to North Shields and assumed Isaac Pearson's timber business after the latter's death. It was at this point that he became the associate of Joseph and John Straker, thriving shipbuilders and timber merchants. Within a year of the Straker/Love partnership, they turned their attention to the Durham coalfield. With Love's experience as a pitman, and the Strakers' connection in supplying colliery timber, along with rumours of the vast amount of coal

in Durham, their partnership was destined to succeed. Together with some Durham City businessmen, they formed a consortium to purchase the Brancepeth Coal Royalty. After the businessmen deserted the consortium, they formed the firm Straker and Love in 1841. To manage the collieries more effectively, Love moved to Durham City and later to Willington. He began to capitalize on his profits by purchasing more collieries in County Durham.

His only son, Isaac Pearson Love, died young, leaving one heir, Joseph Horatio Love (b.1853). Isaac's wife remarried Robinson Ferens (1822-1892), another player in Joseph's business dealings. Ferens, from a Durham family of drapers, formed a partnership with Love called Ferens and Love. This partnership soon began to acquire mining assets. When Joseph moved to his newly built mansion near Durham City, Ferens became head of the old Love household and assumed the paternalistic views and attitudes Love had over Willington and district.

Joseph Love was a county magistrate and on the Durham Board Guardians, although he only took part in the proceedings when it affected his business interests. He generously supported the New Connexion and other churches and organizations in Willington, but for his own purposes. He patronized his relatives at the collieries. Joseph's funeral in 1875 was the largest ever seen. More than fifty vehicles arrived at St. Brandon's Church. Even the bells at Durham Cathedral rang a mourning peel. Joseph Love's legacy differed within the community. Peers lauded him for his beneficence, while employees were glad to be rid of a tyrant.

## APPENDIX B

### Brancepeth A Pit Disaster 1896

Brancepeth Colliery employed a skeleton crew of stonemen, pumpers, shifters, drivers and hewers on the nightshift to repair and ready the mine for the next morning's shift. John Mould, brakesman, lowered the two relief backshift hewers at 9.30pm as usual. After a few minutes, Mould realized something was wrong, and before he could do anything, a tremendous explosion occurred. Officials on the bank alerted other villagers and a rescue party was hastily formed. The rescuers found the rapperman Wilson unconscious at the bottom of the shaft. Within a few minutes they found seven workers in the Brockwell and two in the Jet Seam alive, which left twenty workers still missing.

No one can read, unmoved, of the rush of volunteers eagerly competing for the perilous honour of descending into the yawning hell, already the grave of many of their fellow-workmen, in the hope that, at least, some might still be left alive, to save; or what more pathetic incident was ever penned, that of the brave old overman, in charge of the relief party, who, finding his own son amongst the first slain, pushed resolutely onward, lest haply there might be others, not yet like his loved one, past all human aid.<sup>2</sup>

Unfortunately all the missing men were discovered dead a few days later. John Foster, working on the engineplane could only be identified by a remnant of his shirt. Officials of the DMA were on the scene as soon as the news reached them. John Wilson, M.P. and financial secretary of the DMA, joined the search party everyday until all the bodies were found.

The coroner's inquest at Brancepeth Colliery Literary Institute attracted much attention. Among those present were John Wilson, John Forman (DMA president), Hugh Boyle (Miners'

Federation of Great Britain), the inspectors of mines (Durham and Newcastle Districts), and barristers representing both Straker and Love and the deceased. The inquest found:

That a shot was fired, but by whom we know not, and that the said shot ignited the coal dust and caused an explosion in the Cross-Cut way, culminating in the deaths of the twenty men and boys accidentally.<sup>3</sup>

After the inquest, the House of Commons Select Committee investigated the cause of the explosion.

The findings of both bodies were inconclusive and hotly debated. John Rogerson, mastershifter and nightshift overman, who died in the disaster, fell under attack. It was suspected that he had tried to fire a shot to remove a roof obstruction in spite of the fact he was not qualified to handle explosives. The angle of the hole, bored for the gunpowder, was faulty and resulted in a misfire. Rogerson died instantly. Straker and Love adamantly refused to accept that Rogerson, with twenty-two years experience in mining, placed the charge. After the findings of the committees, Straker and Love forbade shot firing on main roads.

The Brancepeth A Pit Disaster had caused twenty deaths, creating eleven widows and twenty-six orphans. A public subscription raised over £2,000. Subscribers included Straker and Love (£500), Viscount Boyne (£500) and the Bishop of Durham (£25). The money extended over fourteen years to provide an income for the bereaved families. The explosion cost the Durham Miners' Permanent Relief Fund £3007, and Straker and Love £2863 in funeral, transportation, livestock (30 ponies died in the explosion) and labour costs. The effect of the explosion on

Willington residents is revealed in a teacher's log entry.

On Tuesday there was a very poor attendance owing to a terrible explosion at the A Pit, Brancepeth Colliery. The work in school has been but ill carried on, the teachers and scholars alike sharing in the general air of depression pervading the whole neighbourhood. The incidents in connection with the recovery of the bodies have been highly sensational and the effect of this has been very marked in the attendance behaviour, and attention of the scholars.<sup>4</sup>

Joseph H. Straker unveiled a memorial plaque in 1897 to commemorate the dead. Today one can see it in the entrance to Brancepeth Miners' Welfare (now Spectrum Leisure Complex).

#### ENDNOTES

1

This biographical sketch is based on Geoffrey Milburn, *Piety, Profit and Paternalism* (Cheshire, 1983), p.8-35 and Love's obituary in the DC, 26 February 1875

2

Durham Miners' Association Monthly Circular, March 1896

3

Parliament. House of Commons Select Committee. Brancepeth A Pit Disaster. 1896 XVIII.521

4

DCRO, School Board Records, E/W64 vol. 3

# Lines on the Brancepeth Explosion,

—> APRIL 13th, 1896. <—

Long, long will the tale of Brancepeth be told,  
When young men and maidens grow feeble and old,  
Some brave gallant Miners who met with their fate  
In a fearful disaster; so sad to relate.

On a bright afternoon without fear dread,  
Went to toil in the mine for their daily bread;  
Bidding their loved ones "good bye" with good cheer,  
Hoping soon to return to them they love dear.

But alas, indications, that something had come,  
Before the shift ended which caused fear and gloom;  
Yet not at the moment, no one could define,  
What had happened so suddenly to those in the mine.

The first one alarmed that something was wrong,  
Was John Mould the brakesman, with convictions so  
strong;

When left alone he heard a strange sound,  
With suspicions it had come from under ground.

The sound was so low to which he referred,  
At the houses close by it could not be heard,  
Like a strong gust of wind and then it was past,  
Just but for a moment did it seem to last.

Had that been the worst how glad would he been,  
It would have prevented the sights that was seen;  
The brave men and boys that met with their fate,  
Would have saved the disaster, so sad to relate.

As time still went on, till thirty past nine,  
He lowered two men down into the mine  
Expecting a signal for others to ride,  
But the returning signal was never applied.

Again alone, these words he did say  
His companion had gone a short distance away,  
Attending to duty but soon did return,  
To hear the sad news which made him to mourn.

Then on to the heap with firm step but slow,  
And what he saw there proved to him that below,  
An explosion was raging, he saw in a glance,  
As the smoke and the dust up the pit did advance.

A summons was sent to the overman then,  
To come with all speed which he did not refrain,  
Expecting in hope that all would be well,  
But alas, O how dreadful a tale for to tell.

Looking then down the pit, both Dowson and Mould,  
Known the lights if still burning could plainly behold;  
Though gazing so eager with sight strong and keen,  
Filled their minds with confusion as no lights could  
be seen.

Mr. Dowson no longer his feelings could hold,  
Bring the cage up and I will descend Mr. Mould;  
When he reached the dark mine by his light he was  
led

To the rapper man Wilson, with a wound in his head.  
He soon gave the signal again for to ride  
With the man who was bleeding in the cage by his  
side;

He then was convinced what had been the cause,  
And could not withhold it from the Overman Laws.

With grief overwhelming he then calmly said,  
Our sons who down the mine are both dead,  
To meet this great trial, let us be prepared,  
For in this disaster they cannot be spared.

Then down in the mine they descended again,  
On the bank where they met they could not remain,  
Their feelings o'er came them, with sorrow and grief,  
Thinking some of the victims they might give relief.

Mr Grieves was the next to come on the scene,  
He could not understand what this summons could  
mean,  
Never suspecting so soon he would hear,  
That a fearful explosion was looming so near.

No, no John don't tell me it cannot be so,  
Misfortunes has happened as we all do know,  
With tears in his eyes made him soon to confess,  
Was seen by his moving too and fro in distress.

Then soon the news spread, when made fully known,  
The relations appeared to look after their own,  
The scene was heartrending, with sad moans and crys,  
By the mothers and children with tear gushing eyes,

As time rolled on excitement arose  
As no one at first could the secret disclose,  
Mr. Weeks, Mr. Grieves, Mr. Down and Laws  
Was the first to explore, not heeding the cause.

Mr. Rutherford then with a gallant crew,  
Came next on the scene with intent to rescue;  
Soon a message came forth from the depth of the mine,  
That some did survive and the number was nine.

This gave some relief to those standing by,  
But did not allay the lamentable cry,  
As it was well known that still their were more  
And with renewed efforts with skill did explore,

Then came such assistance from near and from far,  
O could we but name them to whom we refer,  
They are worthy of praise, as they nobly came forth  
From East and from West, from South and from  
North.

Then onward they prest not a moment was lost  
To save or recover not counting the cost,  
With strong fortitude, hearts noble and true,  
Through dangers undaunted they pressed their way  
through.

When finding the bodies, to give in detail,  
It makes the heart bleed and nature to fail;  
So mangled and bruised we cannot explain,  
O pity the Miners, who in Brancepeth was slain.

When the accident happened, although it was night  
Many thousands of people did witness the sight;  
Mothers and children did cry in despair,  
Known Husbands and Fathers and Brothers were  
there.

The names of the lost who first came in view  
Were Foster, R. Lawson, and Rogerson too,  
W. Cooke too is gone his race it is run,  
And likewise John Dowson, the Overman's Son.

H. Hodgson, T. Nicholson, G. Lauther, and Laws,  
W. Rawlings, T. Spence, but here I must pause,  
T. Lawson, C. Linton, what more shall I say,  
Wearmouth, Jefferson, and Ranson were all in one  
way.

M. Turner, J. Brigham, 'tis a sad tale to tell,  
They are gone B. Newell, and Carling as well;  
Yes, they are gone never more to return,  
Their loved ones are left to weep and to mourn.

What a sorrowful sight when the bodies was laid,  
By thousands of Mourners who saw them conveyed  
To their last resting place, the last tribute to pay,  
Shall meet them no more till the last judgement  
day.

Had it been in the day time, yes, had it been then,  
There might have been sacrificed two hundred brave  
men,

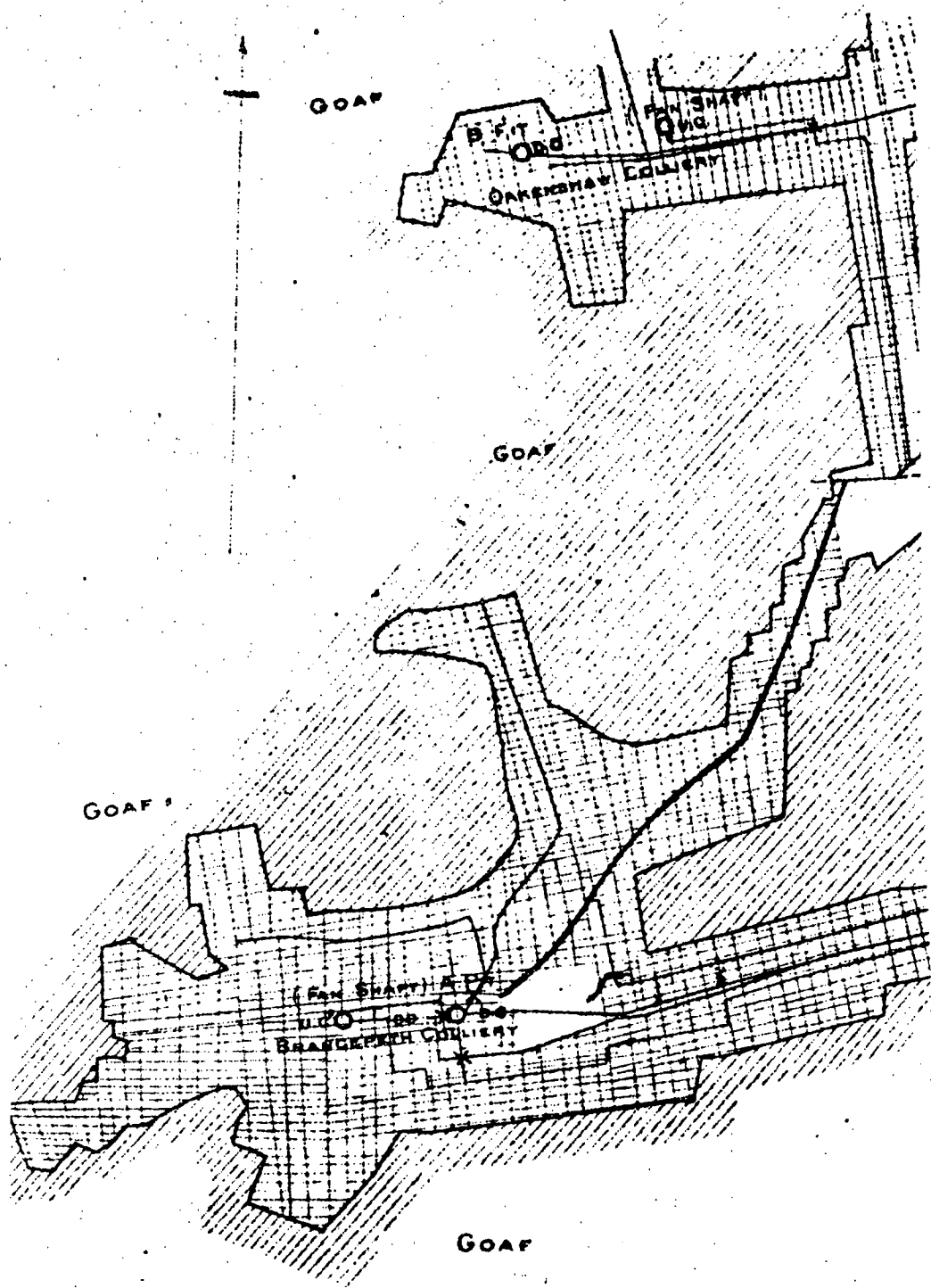
It might have been at the change, at 30 past nine,  
When all men and boys would have been in the  
mine.

Then Miners' take warning, use caution and care,  
Calamities will come, then always beware,  
Your lives are in danger where ever you be,  
Down in the dark Mine, by land or by sea.

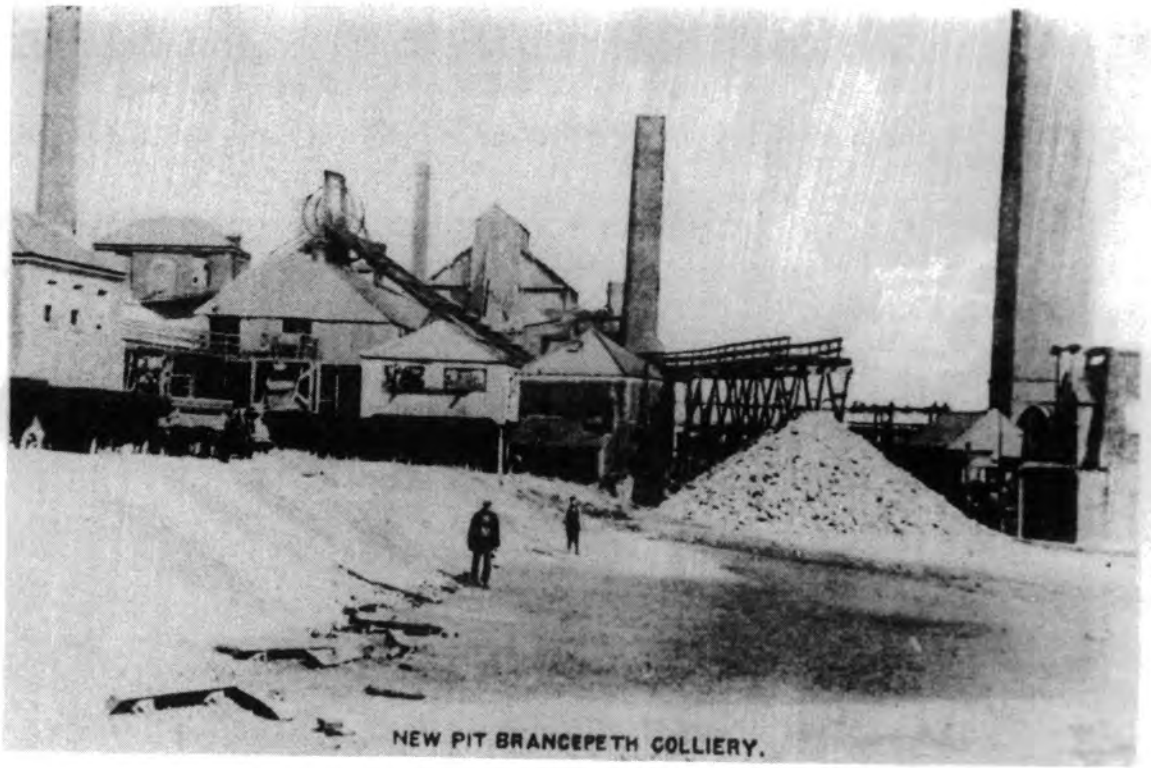
The command to be ready is given to all,  
The rich and the poor, the great and the small,  
When dangers and trials and sufferings are past,  
May all share in the joys which eternally last.

BY M. DAVISON, HEDLEY HILL.

TOM HEDLEY, Printer, BRANDON.







1. Also known as C Pit c.1900.

2. No. 3 Russell Place (19?). A colliery cottage for workers. Notice the lace curtains in the window.





3. Boyne Street (1989). A row of colliery cottages for workers.

4. The back view of Victoria Street (1989). In earlier times the slag heap was clearly visible at the bottom of the street.





5. Low Willington c.1930s. Early Willington housing. Notice the iron railings, which was prevalent throughout the village.

6. Brancepeth Terrace (1989). Colliery cottages for officials. In contrast to the workers' cottages, these houses have a large front garden and bay windows.





7. United Sunday School Outing (1906) on the platform at Wellington Station. At the right, one can see the children lined up the stairs and across the railway bridge.

8. The Church Lads' Brigade (19?). The uniforms are indeed very military. Dr. E.J. Brewis, the leader, is seated in the centre.



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Durham Coal Owners Mutual Protection Association D/DCOMPA  
Durham County Colliery Enginemens', Boilerminders' and Firemens' Association D/EBF  
Durham Miners' Association D/DMA  
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