



What's in a name?

High Spen, a hundred and fifty years ago was just a matter of a few farms - then, the colliery came!! The name *Spēn* is often found in records of Northern counties.

"Spenne" appears three times in *Hunckeboyespen* (1175-90). The name is derived from the word *Spenne* found in the book of Sir Gawain (Wars of Alexander). The true meaning of the word has not been found. In Sir Gawain a fox is said twice to jump over a *spenne*. This suggests a meaning such as *hedge* and could be a derivative of the old English *spannann* - to clasp or fasten.

The most probable answer is, that it was a boundary - maybe between the Manors of Winlton and Chopwell. The first mention of the Spēn was in 1379 when Katherine de Fery held four *messuages* (houses) and 100 acres in Barlow and Spēn.

These buildings and the land changed hands many times before being bought by William Tempest of the Manor of Thornley then passing to the Clavering Estate.

The Coming of Coal

In 1838 Spēn increased in size for houses were built to house the miners working at Garesfield Colliery (later named the Bute).

These houses were named Cardiff Square, obviously after the birthplace of the Marquis of Bute who was a large colliery owner and New Row, later called Jawblades Cottages, because a gateway was made up of two Jawblades of a whale brought to the village by a seaman who became a miner. These Jawblades were later removed and were put in place to make a gateway on the hill, south of Towneley Terrace. It then became known as Bone Rill and still retains the name today. Jawblades Cottages, after the erection of more houses became known as the Old Row (Aald Raa). On December 17th, 1865 one of the residents of this Row, Matthew Atkinson murdered his wife in a gruesome manner and was afterwards executed at Durham. 20 years afterwards some more "modern" buildings were erected to the north of the Colliery and were known as Ramsey's Cottages, named after a prominent coal colliery owner and business man. These cottages were back to back and so only had one entrance.

Notes on the Photographs

Aged Miner's homes

All mines were privately owned, with the colliery owners often owning the miners' cottages. If a miner was injured at work he may not be able to afford the rent and



could be turned out of his home. Some charities and the miner's Union began to look after their older folk by building single floor cottages for retired miners.

Bute Arms

Named after the Marquis of Bute, a large colliery owner.

Cooperative Stores

This block was the Blaydon Co-operative Store (High Spen Branch). Originally the store was in the row of buildings now known as Wishart Terrace near "The Bute Arms" but moved to the new location in 1913. The Co-op was the last building on that side of the road till one reached the farms opposite "Bute Arms".

The Coop was the main shop where many people bought their groceries. The Cooperative Society bought their goods more cheaply and passed on the savings to all their members. This would be paid out in the form of a 'dividend' each year.

Doctor's house

In 1914 there was no National Health Service. If you became ill you had to pay for a doctor and pay for medicines. In many instances, people had to suffer their illnesses, afraid to go to the doctor. Miner's often set up their own clubs where

they would help members out if they fell ill.

East Street

The road was a short cut between Towneley Terrace and East and West Streets and Front Street with its shops. It was therefore quite a busy thoroughfare. Busy or not the residents still had to cross it to get to the toilets (netties) when the occasion demanded. It was no strange sight seeing a man cross the street reading a newspaper and return, shirt-tail flapping with half the paper missing; or to hear the muffled tones of, "Bring 'is sum paper!"

Garesfield Hall

The Colliery owners were keen to keep their workforce happy to ensure regular attendance. To assist in this direction they built a reading room, with a library of 130 books in 1858. One must remember, that in those days, books were at a premium and very few people owned books, so a library of 130 books was a great treat for those who could read.

In 1860 a meeting was held in this room and it was crowded. To muster the people, The Tyne and Derwent Rifle Corps (Volunteers) paraded through the village. About 100 people attended the meeting and tea, was served. Afterwards Mr.



Joseph Hardy, a Blaydon schoolmaster addressed the meeting. He was a prominent figure in all local affairs and he urged the people to send their children to school. He maintained that children from 5 years old to 11 years should be taught the 3 "Rs", reading (w)riting and (a)rithmetic, other subjects being of minor importance. (I agree with his sentiments, but unfortunately many educationists today cannot see the wisdom of this).

In about 1898 the Reading Room became an Institute, paid for by a levy of one penny on each miner per week. The Institute consisted of a library, reading room and billiard room. Adjoining the Institute was the Park, also paid for and maintained by the miners out of the levy.

The mine was opened in 1837 and closed in 1962.

Headmaster's house

In 1867 a Methodist Chapel was opened at the western end of Glossop Street. It was here that the children of High Spen first received their education. The Marquis of Bute, who owned the Spen colliery donated £10 per year to help pay for a teacher. He also allowed Mr. Andrew Eltringham, the colliery clerk, being good at figures to do some teaching at the school.

In 1875, Mr. Thomas Armstrong became Head Teacher and remained so till after the new board school was opened in 1894. His salary then was £30 per term and he had six pupil-teachers under him! Four of these were his own children who, having left school as pupils, returned as trainee-teachers.

The wages of the teachers in the early days came from a levy of 1d a week per child. Sometimes the pit was working short-time, so the miners didn't pay their levy, much to the exasperation of the Headmaster.

Inspectors visited the school annually and tested the children on their knowledge. Payments to the teachers were on results, so some teachers flogged the children in their efforts to instil learning into them. Many teachers must have been on the bread-line!!

In 1870 the first Education Act was passed. School Boards were elected and in 1876, the power to enforce compulsory attendance became general and the leaving age was raised from 13 to 14.

It was not till 1894 however that High Spen got its own Board School, for by this time the Chapel building was unable to cope with all the pupils registered in it.

The school still stands today.



Howard Street

Hugar Street

Methodist Chapel

Low Spen can claim to be one of the earliest northern places to be converted to Methodism, for as early as 1743, John Brown, a farmer from Tanfield, moved to Low Spen and invited John Wesley to his house. This visit was the first of many and it was from here that Christopher Hopper of Coalburns was converted and was later to open a Chapel at Barlow in 1744. John Brown continued to hold services in his house, and was a devoted member of the Methodist Society for sixty-four years.

This building is still standing and is used as a wheat-drying shed by Mr. S. Emmerson of Hookergate Farm.

From 1744 onwards the people of High Spen who were of Wesleyan faith had to walk over the hill to Barlow; but now that High Spen had grown - so much bigger than Barlow, these faithful disciples demanded their own chapel. In 1867 the Marquis of Bute allowed the [Primitive] Methodists to build a chapel at the top end of Howard Terrace for a rent of five shillings a year. The building cost £200 and had a day school on the premises. About forty children attended. This chapel

remained in use till 1884 when a new one was built at the West end of East Street, almost opposite the old one. This was a larger chapel and could seat 320 people. The original chapel was sold and became the Old Assembly Rooms for dancing, ending its days as a depot for the Colliery tradesmen. The Wesleyans meanwhile had continued to go to Barlow till in 1899 they met in the house of William Cooper, a butcher in Front Street and for two years worshiped there; till finally they had their own chapel built at a cost of £150 in Front Street. This Chapel blossomed, then the behaviour of the local Minister caused unrest and most of the congregation moved to the Methodist Chapel in East Street.

Ramsay Street

Named after a large colliery owner. These houses were known as 'back to back' because there was no back lane separating the rows of houses.

St Patrick's Church

The Churchgoers of High Spen in the early 19th Century had to walk to Ryton or to Winlton to practise their religion for Barlow and Greenside had no church.

In 1886, the Rector of Winlton extended his work to Barlow and High Spen by renting houses for use as temporary churches, and using curates to preach the



Gospel. These premises were licensed for services and baptisms but for other services, burials and marriages, people had to go to Winlaton or Ryton.

There was a service every Sunday and on one weekday. This was very popular with the local people and soon they were demanding their own Church. Such was the enthusiasm for such a building that in no time at all £1,500 was raised. This was enough and a new church was built in 1890 when it was consecrated as St. Patricks. In 1891 a bell was put into the steeple. The quest was now a vicarage but fortunately the local coal-owners helped the cause and the necessary £600 was raised. The Bishop of Durham himself, came to the service at the Church, at which the new American pedal organ was introduced.

My Father always claimed the honour of being the first baby baptised in the Church. A Church Hall was opened in 1902

Watson Street

West Street