

Radical Roots

An introduction to the heritage of human rights
and community cohesion in North-east England 1750-2000

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Chapter One

Murray, Spence and Bewick

Newcastle was a very different place in 1750 from the city we see today. This was a time when the Town Moor was outside the city, a time before railways and a time before the vast majority of people had the vote. It seemed like a few families would continue to rule over the North-east just as they had done for so long, families who owned large tracts of land, which were now helping to make some of them wealthy coalowners. Over the next few decades, however, three men would challenge this situation, with a process of questioning and challenging the way power was concentrated in such a small number of hands. It was also a time when the old ways of working with individual craftsmen formed loosely into guilds, was being replaced by larger workforces in mines and factories.

Imagine you could go back to the second half of the 18th century. You would find a North-east of England where the political power was in the hands of a few powerful families, the Brandlings, Liddells, Russells, Ridleys, Wortleys, Bells, and Strathmores, families who were the great coalowners of the time. These families were part of the 'Grand Alliance' formed in 1726, who carved up much of the land and power in North-east England between them. One of their early triumphs was the building of Causey Arch, the world's first 'railway' bridge in 1725-6, which allowed coal to be taken by horse-drawn wagons over the Derwent Valley. Very few men and no women in the region, had the vote and so it was very difficult to change any of the laws, and this helped to keep the power and wealth in such a small number of families. In the country as a whole, only 435 000 men could vote and they were always those with property. They were also the people who received a decent education and consequently saw themselves as the only ones who understood enough about the country and how it was run. Others were not happy about this, and on numerous occasions they protested, including the 1740 Corn Riots in Newcastle, when people were aggrieved at the high price of corn and the riots were only put down by the raising of the local militia and an official promise that the price of corn would be reduced. However it was hard to really change things as the political system was established to try and make sure that all the wealth and power was kept by those who owned a lot of land or other property. It might have seemed like this situation would go on forever, but in the second half of the 18th century, a whiff of change was in the air.

Our story starts with the Rev. James Murray: He was born in Fans in Roxburghshire, just over the border in Scotland. Murray became a Presbyterian preacher, part of a Christian tradition whose members were generally anti-authoritarian. Murray's first position was in Alnwick, before he moved south to the Newcastle Meeting House in Silver Street, Newcastle in 1765.

Murray held Sunday services and weekday lectures, where he put forward his opinions on what he saw in society around him and he was very much on the

side of the poor against the powerful. He saw a lot of poverty and a lot of suffering in North-east England, whilst a few rich families lived in big houses on large estates in the lap of luxury. He was not alone in wanting change. This was the time of the Enlightenment, when across Western Europe and North America the old ideas about how society should be run were being questioned. There was a tide of new thinking which led to the French Revolution and the American War of Independence and this wave of new ideas about greater freedom and equality, lapped upon the shores of Newcastle and influenced Murray and others. Even the usually conservative-minded City Burgesses joined in, when in November 1769, a petition was drafted by a Committee from the Burgesses' Party in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The Burgesses' Party could be said to represent the rank and file of the City Burgesses, who roughly played the same role as councillors do now and the aim of the petition was the dissolution of Parliament.

It was the time when coffee houses were beginning to spring up all over the country and Newcastle was no exception in this. These were not merely cafes; they often became informal debating clubs where the new ideas spread by the Enlightenment could be discussed. New clubs which developed included Swarley's Club in Newcastle's Groat Market, which was known as 'Newcastle's House of Lords' and in a time before political parties as we would recognise them today, there were other political debating clubs, such as the Independent Club and the Constitutional Club, where men argued about how to reform society. The city was also a welcoming place to radicals such as Swiss-born physician and political theorist Jean-Paul Marat who chose Newcastle as the site for the launching of his revolutionary tract, *The Chains of Slavery*, in 1774, in which Marat wrote out about the way he felt the ruling-classes held ordinary people in bondage. Marat was to go back to France and become a vociferous defender of the sans-culottes, the working-class revolutionaries of the French Revolution. It was the murderous excesses of the Terror in the French Revolution which helped to galvanise the aristocracy in Britain into wanting to hang on to power, so that they would not share the fate of their aristocratic cousins across the English Channel.

The time when *The Chains of Slavery* was released was a period when the publishing industry in general was greatly expanding and Newcastle was at the forefront of this as well. More grammar books were published in Newcastle in the 18th century than in any other English-speaking city outside of London and along with the coffee houses, Sands' circulating library in the Bigg Market and bookshops such as Charnley's and Barker's also became popular meeting places. In 1793 the Newcastle Literary and Philosophical Society was opened and this provided another outlet for progressive-minded people in Newcastle to discuss how society could be improved. All this encouraged an atmosphere of debate.

As a preacher, Murray used Bible stories to question how things were. On one occasion, Murray told the story of the tyrant King Moab, who defecated his throne

when the people rose up against him. Murray used this a metaphor for what he perceived to be the corruption in a political system where there was no real democratic accountability at all and the wealthy, who believed that they knew best, could make laws just to suit themselves. By preaching from the Bible and using his position as a minister in this way, Murray could preach about people resisting the ruling classes, whilst not getting into trouble himself. The people in his congregation understood very well what he was saying and loved his down to earth language and the way he poked fun at the ruling classes, whilst making serious points. It was this kind of straight-forward language that Murray used when he protested against the conservative-minded Common Council of Newcastle taking what he saw was an inordinate amount of time, to replace the old Tyne Bridge, which had been washed away in a huge flood in 1772

Murray was also a writer, his most famous book being *Sermons to the Asses*. The front cover tells us a lot about the views he expressed in this book. It depicted an ass weighed down by two panniers, one with the word politics written on it and the other with the word religion on it.. This was not because Murray was against either religion or politics; rather he was speaking out against the leaders of these professions. He had no time for the two main political parties of the time, the Whigs and Tories.

Both parties were made up of people with a range of political positions, but generally speaking, the Whigs represented the interests of trade, mercantilism, parliament, modernism and in religion, non-conformity, those who might be described as the 'nouveau riche' and limited reform while the Tories were for the monarchy, landowners, the established church and the status quo, with absolutely nothing by way of reform. In Murray's eyes they were both only interested in relatively small sections of society and not the kind of people who packed out his services and lectures at the Meeting House.

One member of Murray's congregation was Jeremiah Spence, a fellow Scotsman, from Aberdeen. Spence brought his children up to read the Bible and then asked them what different passages meant. In this way Jeremiah was able to instill questioning habits in his children and especially his son Thomas.

Thomas Spence was born on 21st June 1750 and grew up in Newcastle by the banks of the River Tyne. His questioning nature led him to challenge the way that society was run and the way that property and land was concentrated in the hands of such a small number of people. This was especially pertinent during what became known as the Enclosures, a time when the rich and powerful were enclosing more and more of what used to be common land, taking over what had been land shared between ordinary people, where they could graze their cattle, forcing them into poverty. Newcastle Corporation, run by and for the powerful and wealthy in the city soon had their eyes on a large area of open space they would like to enclose.

In the 1771 Newcastle Corporation attempted to enclose the Town Moor on the outskirts of the city, but campaigners successfully stopped it. Inspired by this, Spence developed his plan, which he introduced at a lecture in November 1775. In the plan there would be an end to aristocracy, a guaranteed income for those unable to work and everyone, men and women, would get the vote. After the victory against the enclosure of the Town Moor, the plan also stated that the inhabitants of each parish should establish an organisation to lease out or otherwise exploit the land, mines, forests, waters and the revenue from these natural resources should be used for their common needs with any surplus being shared equally amongst all. Here was a direct challenge to the ruling, landed classes, who expected to make a personal profit from their land, coming from a son of Newcastle.

Spence was also a prolific pamphleteer and his plan was written about in a pamphlet entitled *Property in Land Everyone's Right*. This was another direct challenge to the propertied classes and they were not happy about it. In 1787 Spence left Newcastle for London and in 1794 he was sentenced to seven months in Newgate Gaol on a charge of high treason. Spence then spent 12 months in prison in 1801 for seditious libel. It was the time of the Napoleonic Wars against France and the ruling classes in Britain were very worried that the contagion of revolutionary ideas would come north across the English Channel. So harsh were the anti-sedition laws, that in a letter dated 21st November 1795, the Duke of Northumberland commented that, "if the people agreed to this surrender of their Rights and Liberties, I can only say they deserve the chains which Ministers have been inclined to forge for them".

Spence however was not cowed by this treatment. In 1807 he wrote *Constitution*, putting forward a new constitution which moved on from the idea of an improved English constitution, which could be seen to date from either the 1689 Bill of Rights, or to be based on a much earlier Saxon system of government. Like Murray, Spence didn't like either the Whigs or Tories. He thought that the Whigs merely indulged in piecemeal reforms, to give the impression that they were going to change society, while not really changing anything, whilst many Tories tried to resist any change at all.

Nor was Spence interested in the usual slogans of those on the reformist wing of English politics, such as no taxation without representation, the right of petition and the rule of Habeas Corpus. It was not enough to merely tinker with the system as it was. Instead he saw the experience in France and the new French Constitution as a precedent to start again from the ground up. In Spence's constitution, the triple hierarchy of King, Lords and Commons would be abolished and new laws would need the approval of nine-tenths of the parishes in more than half the counties of England. Added to this, most public offices were to be elected for short terms, magistrates would be elected annually and criminal judges appointed for short terms. For those members of the British establishment who looked across the English Channel at the Terror, this must have sent serious

shivers down their spines. The *Constitution* was never going to be seriously considered by those in power at the time, but it did act as a signpost to the future for later reformers.

Spence's notoriety meant that he was not only put in prison; he was also mentioned disparagingly in parliament in 1817, three years after his death. George Canning M.P., a future Tory Prime Minister, rose in the House of Commons on 29th January 1817 and firmly criticised parliamentary reformers, talking metaphorically of storms and whirlwinds and of twilight assassins, using as his evidence for all this mayhem, Spence's plan. Spence, who had died in poverty in 1814, was never to see his plan come to fruition in his lifetime, but he did help to set a precedent, that the North-east was a radical and egalitarian-minded region.

New ideas were beginning to develop as North-east England was moving towards being a progressive and egalitarian region whilst at the same time there was the growth of a large working-class, many coming from outside the region, attracted by the extension of the coal industry and its connected industries. Much of the North-east was still countryside, however and it was from this background that our third great Radical emerged.

This was the artist Thomas Bewick, who was born in Cherryburn near Prudhoe. He is most famous for books of drawings of the natural world, inspired by the countryside he grew up amongst, along the Tyne Valley, printed using innovative wooden printing machinery. Although he is best known for this, Bewick was not just interested in the natural world. Interspersed between the lapwings and the plovers, the local cattle and the barn owls were drawings of the poor, struggling through life and living very frugally, slipped in quietly but determinedly, the pain of their difficult lives literally etched in their faces. As it was only the rich who could afford these books, so it was a way of ensuring that they could see the suffering of the poor.

Bewick came to live in Newcastle and spent time at the new debating clubs, becoming a friend of Thomas Spence. Spence's views were particularly radical for his time, more radical indeed than Bewick's and this was to lead to a fight between the pair. Having developed his views, Spence sought to propose the topic, 'property in land being everyone's right', for a debate at a debating club, both Spence and Bewick frequented. Spence assumed that Bewick would support him in the debate, but this was not to be, as Bewick was from the old school of radical thought, which valued 'liberty and property' over the work of public officials and which valued traditions and saw ownership of land as part of a well-functioning society. Spence lost the debate and consequently turned on his old friend, Bewick, who being a strong six-footer, compared to the considerably smaller and bow-legged Spence, proceeded to give Spence a good beating.

Spence and Bewick did patch up their relationship and at the end of the day they were both on the same side. Spence has been seen by some as an early Socialist, but it is perhaps more accurate to say that both he and Bewick were really looking back not forwards, to some idyllic Anglo-Saxon past before the Norman Invasion of 1066, although Spence's *Constitution* did attempt to say something new. This rosy Anglo-Saxon past had never really happened, but it gave both Spence and Bewick an ideal to work towards. Preserving ancient freedoms, for themselves, would also have been uppermost in the minds of those who wished to keep the status quo.

Murray, Spence and Bewick were three men who projected a new kind of politics for the North-east, one based on empathy and concern for the poor, the powerless, the marginalised. They challenged the view of the aristocracy in the region and in Spence's case the nation, who thought that only they were educated enough and so equipped, to rule. The decades to come would see the desire for fairness develop in North-east England amongst a growing working-class, who would find themselves working in a regional economy which became highly inter-linked. They were to a large extent an immigrant population, incomers from Scotland or Ireland, Cornwall or other parts of the North of England. It was also a region where people began to think about a better life for people who lived thousands of miles away, on the other side of the Atlantic Ocean.

Timeline

1726 'Grand Alliance' of landowners and coalowners formed.

1732 Birth of Rev James Murray

1740 Corn Riots in Newcastle

1750 Thomas Spence born in Newcastle-upon-Tyne

1765 Rev James Murray begins preaching in Newcastle-upon-Tyne at the Silver Street Meeting House

1769 Petition of Newcastle Burgesses calls for dissolution of parliament

1771 Newcastle Corporation attempt to enclose Town Moor preventing ordinary people using it

1772 Tyne Bridge at Newcastle washed away in flood – Murray protests at inordinate time spent in building replacement

1774 Jean-Paul Marat's Chains of Slavery published in Newcastle

1775 Thomas Spence launches his Plan

1787 Spence leaves Newcastle for London

1791 Thomas Paine's Rights of Man published – read by many in North-east –
once claimed that every pitman had a copy in his back pocket

1794 Spence imprisoned for seven months for High Treason

1801 Spence imprisoned for twelve months for seditious libel

1807 Spence publishes his Constitution

1814 Spence dies

1817 Spence denounced in parliament by George Canning M.P.

Chapter Two

The Anti-Slavery Movement

Slavery was a major business in Britain in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. It was accepted by many as natural and perfectly reasonable. It is difficult two centuries later to really see into the mindset of people of the time and many activities which we see as abominable now were readily accepted by society in the past.. There were also those who saw the income from the production of sugar as vital in the struggle against France and her imperial ambitions. We have seen that the political system was weighted heavily in favour of those with property and many of these had commercial interests in the slave trade, particularly in London and the major ports of the west coast. There were many who saw the trade as immoral, but it was always going to be an uphill task across Britain to get it abolished. Parliament was in the hands of a small number of powerful and wealthy men, some of whom profited from the trade. The Presbyterian church in Berwick took the risky step of sending an ant-slavery letter to their M.P., who was himself involved in the slave trade. There were also those who claimed that if Britain abandoned the slave trade, it would not help the slaves, as France, the great enemy at the time, would merely step in and take over British slavery interests. In the North-east of England, there were a number of families who were involved in the slave trade in various ways, whilst many others actively campaigned against slavery

Some wealthy North-east families owned slaves and plantations in the Caribbean at which slaves toiled. Ralph Carr is the earliest known slave owner from the region, his activity dating from the 1720's. The most prominent slave-owners in the region however, were the Trevelyans of Wallington Hall. Through what has been described as a 'fortunate marriage', they became sugar producers in Grenada, the sugar plantations employing slaves to harvest the crop. The family of Ward Cadogan was also involved in this kind of business, as they owned the Pickerings Plantation in Barbados. The most active of all the slave-owning families from the region were the Clarke family who were linked by marriage to the Barretts and Parkinsons, two old Jamaican planter families. John Graham Clarke was a Newcastle West India merchant, banker and owner of a glass works and a coal mine.

Those who owned slaves thought that it was a perfectly reasonable thing to do. They even found numerous passages of Scripture, which seemed to justify the practice, to back up what they were saying. Indeed many considered themselves to be devout Christians who would go to church every Sunday. At the time many slave owners thought that treating Africans in this way was just the natural order of things.

Some industrial buildings in the North-east were linked to the slave trade. Clarke owned two of three sugar refineries found in Newcastle and Gateshead and

another in Stockton-on-Tees. Restraints for slaves, to help stop them from running away, were produced in Crowley's iron foundries in Winlaton and Swalwell. Money from Clarke's activities in the area of slavery went into the local economy. Clarke was a major shareholder in the Newcastle bank, Burdon and Surtees and this investment, along with that from others involved in the slave trade, all helped to fuel the local industrial economy. However, it acted as a supplement to the main income, not as the main income itself as in other places in Britain. The coal trade was where the real money was being made in North-east England and being on the east coast, the region was not as highly involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade as some areas in the west of Britain..

Whilst some wealthy North-east families were involved in and profited from the slave trade, so there were also many in the region who campaigned against it, including many Christians. The first religious group in the North East to oppose the slave trade was the Quakers in the 1730's., whilst the Methodists were also involved in anti-slavery campaigning in the 18th century. One of the first abolition organisations outside London was the Newcastle Abolition Society. This was founded in 1791 and was established by a Unitarian minister, William Turner. The Unitarians were another dissenting Christian group. The North-east was an important centre for the dissenting traditions of Quakerism and Unitarians and this helped the anti-slavery cause in the region. These dissenting traditions, whilst not politically very radical, were not part of the established church and with their general anti-authoritarian stance, contained many who did not agree with those Christians of the time who used Scripture to back up their support for slavery.

By the late 18th century, the opposition to the slave trade in Newcastle had spread to mainstream Anglicans and political conservatives. In February 1788, the Common Council of Newcastle, a conservative-minded body made up of merchants including sugar traders, carried a resolution calling for a petition to be drawn up calling for an end to the suffering of the slave trade, to be presented to the House of Commons and further calling on parliament to conduct an urgent enquiry into it.

In its first year, the Newcastle Abolition Society published 2 000 copies of a report which Thomas Clarkson presented to the House of Commons inquiring into the slave trade. William Wilberforce, the leading M.P. campaigning against the trade, had set out his intentions, to end the Transatlantic Slave Trade, in 1787 and three years later, in 1790 and then again in 1791, the leading anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson presented evidence against the slave trade before a select committee of the House of Commons. This evidence was compiled into an abstract, the printing paid for by the Society in Newcastle for promoting the Abolition of the Slave Trade. Some of the evidence came from a Dr. Trotter, who in 1783, had worked on the *Brooks* an infamous slave ship from Liverpool, before becoming a prominent physician, firstly in Wooler in Northumberland and then on Pilgrim Street in Newcastle.

In 1792 the Guildhall in Newcastle, by the banks of the River Tyne, was the site of an anti-slavery petition. Up to 1 in 3 of the people of Newcastle signed it, which probably made it the largest outside London and Manchester. There were six bookshops which also made it available. Not only were the 3 000 signatories, out of the possible 12-15 000, a healthy percentage, it was one third more than the number of eligible voters in Newcastle at the time. At the same time there were also petitions in Berwick, North and South Shields, Sunderland, Durham, and Stockton-on-Tees. Even smaller settlements such as Belford and Wooler, which had 400 signatories each, and Alnwick where there were 600, saw successful petitions, so it is estimated that the total number of signatories around the region outside Newcastle was greater than that of Newcastle alone.

There was also considerable anti-slavery activity in Sunderland in the late 18th century, particularly around the character of James Field Stanfield. Stanfield, born in Dublin in 1749, had gone to sea in early 1770's. In 1774 he joined a slave ship sailing out of Liverpool for Benin. A decade after leaving the sea in 1777, and after settling in Sunderland, Stanfield contacted Thomas Clarkson and became the first ordinary seaman, who was involved in the Transatlantic trade to write about what it was really like. This happened after his experience of being on one particular slave ship he described as a 'floating dungeon'. Stanfield wrote seven letters to Thomas Clarkson and these letters were published in a pamphlet entitled *Observations on a Guinea Voyage*, which was able to reach a wide readership and dismantled the idea that the trade was somehow benevolent. A plaque has been erected on the site of Stanfield's House at Boddlewell House in Sunderland, on which he is described as a 'Campaigner against the Slave Trade'

After a long struggle across Britain, on 25th March 1807, the Slave Trade Act was passed, abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire. Two North-east M.P.s were involved in the passing of the Act. It was proposed by Earl Grey of Northumberland and seconded by Ralph Milbanke, the M.P. for Durham. Now the struggle would move to the area of abolishing slavery altogether within the British Empire and setting free those who had already become slaves.

One of the arguments of those in favour of the slave trade was that France would just take over Britain's business and the slaves would be no better off, whilst Britain would be at a disadvantage at a time when France was the enemy. Consequently there were many meetings in towns around the region between 1810 and 1814 to discuss slave trade issues, regarding the peace settlement with France. This issue was finally resolved when, at the Congress of Vienna in 1815, it was decided that French colonies would not be permitted to import slaves.

The campaign for the abolition of slavery within the British Empire continued in the ensuing years. 1823 saw another region-wide effort being made as an anti-slavery petition came in from many centres of population, both large and small.

Reverend James Collinson from the Gateshead Parish Church hosted a meeting in May 1823 for the launch of a Gateshead Petition for the Abolition of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. A similar petition also was signed in Newcastle, Tynemouth, Jarrow, South Shields, Alnwick, Blyth, Hexham, Sunderland, Chester-le Street, Durham, Darlington, Barnard Castle, Stockton and even the tiny and somewhat remote village of Staindrop. May 1823 also saw 6 293 females, in Newcastle, Gateshead and surrounding areas signing the Ladies' Petition for the Immediate Abolition of Slavery.

The following year saw a meeting in Newcastle, which saw the establishment of the Newcastle Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions. This organisation maintained a moderate stance and the resolutions at the meeting, at which James Losh was a major spokesman, echoed the measured stance taken by the London Committee. The Newcastle society remained moderate throughout 1824 and 1825, while at the same time a number of stories appeared in the *Tyne Mercury*, aimed at encouraging readers to take up the abolitionist cause.

On Tuesday 29th April 1823, a meeting was held by the muddy banks of the River Tyne at the Guildhall, to petition parliament to consider the condition of slaves and to mitigate their condition with a view to abolishing slavery altogether. One of the principal speakers, James Losh, whose statue adorns the staircase into the Literary and Philosophical Society Library to this day, proposed a number of resolutions. It had been hoped after the 1807 Act had been passed that there would be no more need for parliamentary action to improve the condition of the slaves, but this was clearly not the case. The sugar merchants had been unable or unwilling to see that they could harvest their crop without the use of slaves and had accepted new slaves from other powers after the transporting of slaves by British ships had been outlawed in 1807.

A number of evils of the slave trade were mentioned by Losh. One of these was the discouragement of marriage amongst slaves leading to a state of degradation and rejected children. Secondly, there was the legal status of slaves as nothing but property of the owner, who might sell his slaves as if they were horses. Losh also argued that it could not be expected that those held in slavery would work as efficiently as those who were freemen and therefore the West Indian merchants charged a higher price for their sugar than should have been necessary.

Losh spoke again the following year, on 31st March 1824, again at the Guildhall in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. In this speech he attacked the idea, put forward by the slave owners, that the slaves were better off than the peasants of Great Britain, making the point that, whilst many working people in Britain were in difficult circumstances, they surely could not be pitied more than “than men, and I am ashamed to add, than women, who are liable to be flogged with the cart whip at the will of their owners – than persons who may be sold and separated from their wives and children, at the caprice or for the debts of their masters?” Losh

even had some sympathy for the slave owners, talking about the brutalising of the slave owners which went with being involved in the slave trade and the damage it was doing them.

A Newcastle surgeon Christopher Wawn questioned another aspect of slavery. He got involved in a dispute with Lord Stowell, who was a senior judge and also a native of Newcastle. In 1827, Wawn wrote a pamphlet which challenged Lord Stowell's judgment that a slave called Grace could be free whilst in England, but must become a slave again on returning to Antigua. This was particularly important as the planters on the island had taken this judgment as affirming their right to hold slaves as property. Wawn could see the anomaly in the situation Grace found herself in and his pamphlet was part of the developing argument against slavery.

There was a large reading public in and around Newcastle and the local press also got involved in the arguments about slavery. We have seen that a number of stories appeared in the *Tyne Mercury*, aimed at encouraging readers to take up the abolitionist cause, whilst another member of the regional press family reacted to the issue differently. *The Newcastle Courant* published a report on slavery, which was heavily criticised by the anti-slavery campaigner John Fenwick, who claimed that the report on the events in Jamaica was merely repeating the views of the Jamaican authorities.

By 1830 the national campaign to end slavery was very much in full swing and the North-east was part of this. There was a meeting on 11th Aug 1830 at the newly opened Brunswick Methodist Church where the main speaker was Henry Brougham MP, who had been a leading parliamentarian and campaigner against slavery and a friend of Newcastle anti-slavery campaigner James Losh. A number of resolutions were passed expressing frustration at lack of progress – there were still 800 000 in bondage whilst the Colonial legislators were not trusted to do the job of freeing them. In the Newcastle election, of the same year, one 'address to the electors and people of the United Kingdom', made it clear that slavery was an unchristian cause. The build-up of support for the abolition of the slave trade in areas like North-east England now just needed support in parliament.

More sympathetic listeners in the House of Commons would arrive after the Great Reform Act of 1832. Many of the anti-slavery campaigners were also staunch supporters of the Reform Act. While the subsequent election saw a lot of newly elected M.P.s who were strongly against slavery. The election of 1833 produced a great victory for the Reformers, including 104 M.P.s pledged to abolition. Now an Act abolishing slavery could be passed.

By the summer of 1833, as it seemed clear that the Abolition of Slavery Act would be passed, a number of celebratory events took place. One summer's day, the events in Newcastle began with 70 campaigners coming together to take tea,

before 300 met during the day in the Music Hall while the same evening, as many were present at a meeting at Brunswick Chapel with hymns and speeches, including one given by a Mr Matthews, a former national secretary of the Anti-Slavery Society. In South Shields similar events began with a foundation stone being laid, before at ten o'clock a group of men sat down for a hearty breakfast at the Golden Lion. The meal was presided over by Dr. Thomas Winterbottom who had served as the medical officer in the colony in Sierra Leone all the way back in the mid -1790's and had campaigned against slavery for nigh on 40 years.

Yet even with the passing of the 1833 Act, supposedly abolishing slavery, the fight wasn't completely over. The Emancipation Bill received Royal Assent on 28th August 1833 and had provisions which saw all slaves under the age of six being freed immediately, but older slaves were to remain as 'apprentices' for up to a further ten years, although they would be paid wages for work done during part of their working week. The government also promised £20 million as compensation to slave owners for the loss of their 'human property'. Many across the country saw these provisions as unfair, and in the North-east the campaign would go on. A popular anti-slavery speaker across the country at this time was George Thompson and he visited the region many times, suggesting that he thought that it was fertile ground for recruiting campaigners against slavery.

In 1838 another major speech was delivered at the Wesleyan Chapel, in Brunswick Place in Newcastle. The main speaker, Reverend Everett, made a number of points. Many bills had been brought before parliament, but Everett claimed, they were biased towards the slave owners. Everett argued that it was extremely unjust that the owner who had, "suffered the least and fared the best" , was to be showered with money, whilst the slave who had, "suffered most and fared the worst, must still remain penniless and in bonds".

Everett also pointed out that the from the compensation money which had been paid to the slave owners, not a penny had gone towards improving the lives of the slaves: "Not a school has been erected for his education! Not a chapel to afford him the consolations of religion, under his ignominy and his sufferings! Not an almshouse, to soothe and to support him in the decline of life!" Everett also argued that humans were equal and that those who were now slaves could go on to live fruitful lives if only they were given the chance. This undermined one of the slave-owners arguments, that Negroes were somehow inferior and it was 'natural' that they should be slaves.

The Newcastle Society met at Salem Chapel on 1st August 1838 after surprising news had come from Jamaica. The Jamaican Assembly had met in June to announce an end to the apprenticeship system. The meeting in Newcastle went on to demand an end to slavery in a number of other areas, including the hiring of Indians to work in Guyana. These struggles, along with the fight against slavery in the United States would continue but for many of the campaigners in the North-east the end of the apprenticeship scheme must have brought a happy

sense of closure. It was a successful climax to a long campaign stretching way back into the previous century.

There was however to be one more notable victory for the anti-slavery movement in North-east England. This concerned the story of Frederick Douglass

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in early 1818, in Talbot County, Maryland in the east of the United States of America. It might seem like he would have the desolate life of so many other slaves ahead of him, but Frederick went on to become a great social reformer, orator, writer and statesman. How did this happen?

Frederick had already tried unsuccessfully to escape from slavery when on 3rd September 1838, he boarded a train to Havre de Grace, Maryland. He was dressed in a sailor's uniform. In 1846, Douglass travelled to Britain, although he was still legally owed by the slave owner Hugh Auld of Baltimore in the United States. However help was at hand. British supporters of Frederick raised the money so that his freedom could be bought from Hugh Auld. These supporters were led by Ellen Richardson from Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Douglass was then free to go back to the United States to write and speak out against the slavery of his fellow black people. He ran a number of abolitionist newspapers, He supported women's rights and also pointed out that the constitution of the United States, which says that "all men are created equal" was very much against slavery. This point was taken up 100 years later by the Civil Rights campaigner Martin Luther King.

In 1846, Hugh Auld of Baltimore, who despite Douglass' escape was still technically his owner, wrote a deed of manumission to Walter Lowrie of New York in the sale of a Frederick Baily, alias Frederick Douglass, for \$711.66. This amount of money would be enough to set Frederick free from slavery on December 5, 1846.

A Quaker, Mary Richardson, the wife of Henry Richardson of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, England, had written to Hugh Auld asking him whether Douglass's freedom had a price. Hugh Auld replied in October of 1846 that he would manumit or free Douglass for £150 sterling.

Ellen Richardson raised the money to free Douglass, along with her sister-in-law Anna Richardson. They were both from Newcastle-upon-Tyne. The two women made arrangements with American abolitionist, Ellis Gray Loring of Boston to handle the negotiations.

On November 24, 1846, Walter Lowrie of New York City, another abolitionist, also involved in the negotiations, notified Hugh Auld that the £150 had arrived in New York. He directed Auld to produce proof of legal ownership of Douglass. A

few days later Thomas Auld filed a bill of sale (FRDO 3861) in Talbot County signifying the transfer of Douglass to Hugh Auld.

On December 5, 1846 Hugh Auld filed Douglass's manumission [literally, "releasing the hand of authority"] papers in Baltimore County. One week later the transaction was completed.

Douglass became a confidant of President Lincoln during the difficult days of the American Civil War, from 1861 to 1865. As a radical abolitionist, Douglass was not happy with Lincoln's policies during the first year of the war, when Lincoln appeared to soften his line on complete abolition of slavery in the southern states. However Douglass was at ease when speaking to Lincoln and did feel respected. Indeed Douglass wrote of the president's, "earnestness and fluency which I had not expected ...to vindicate his policy respecting the whole slavery question and especially that in reference to employing coloured troops."

In 1868 Douglass supported the presidential campaign of Ulysses S. Grant, who on becoming president enacted the Klan Act, which enabled Grant to send troops into the south, resulting in 5 000 arrests and dealing the Ku Klux Klan a serious blow. Then in the next presidential election in 1872, Douglass became the first black person to be nominated for the Vice-presidency of the United States when he was nominated as Victoria Woodhull's running mate on the Equal Rights Party ticket. However, Douglass had no knowledge of his nomination beforehand and did not campaign or even acknowledge it.

As white racists began to make life more difficult for former slaves after their emancipation in 1865, Douglass continued to campaign against them and it has been said that, "Douglass' stump speech for 25 years after the end of the Civil War was to emphasize work to counter the racism that was then prevalent in unions" Douglass also campaigned for the rights of women.

On 20th February 1895, Douglass was at a meeting of National Council of Women in Washington D.C. when he was brought to the stage and given a standing ovation. It was only short time after he returned home that Douglass suffered a massive heart attack that killed him. He was 77 years old. Douglass has been described as the "father of the civil rights movement" in the United States, which was led by Dr Martin Luther King in the 1950's and 1960's. On 13th November 1967, the wheel came full circle when Newcastle University became the only university in Britain to honour Martin Luther King in his lifetime, when he was awarded an honorary degree in law. It has been noted that young black students learnt about Frederick Douglass and his work during the Freedom Summer campaign in the southern states of the United States in 1964.

There were slave owners in North-east England, who saw owning slaves as a perfectly reasonable thing to do, but there were many others who campaigned against it. Some of the wealthier families in the region did make some of their

money from the slave trade, but, although the money from the slave trade did go back into the local economy, it only supplemented what was already there; it did not act as the major source of investment. There were also many others who actively campaigned against slavery. These included James Field Stanfield, Dr. Thomas Winterbottom, Dr. Thomas Trotter, James Losh, Reverend Everett and many other ordinary people in the region. In the end the campaigners against the slave trade from the North-east joined with their colleagues from other parts of the country in celebrating the successful end to their campaigning. Meanwhile people in North-east England were also concerned about their own rights.

Timeline

1730's Quakers in the North-east begin campaigning against slavery

1780 William Wilberforce becomes M.P. for Hull

1787 William Wilberforce becomes dedicated to abolishing the slave trade

1791 Newcastle Abolition Society formed

1792 1 in 3 Newcastle residents sign Anti-slavery petition

1792 Large numbers also sign anti-slavery petitions in Berwick, North and South Shields, Sunderland, Durham, Stockton-on-Tees, Belford and Wooler

1807 Slave Trade Act is passed, abolishing the slave trade in the British Empire

1823 James Losh speaks at Anti-slavery meeting at the Guildhall, Newcastle

1824 Losh speaks out against slavery again at the Guildhall

1824 Establishment of the Newcastle Society for Mitigating and Gradually Abolishing the State of Slavery Throughout the British Dominions

1827 Newcastle surgeon Christopher Wawn writes pamphlet against Lord Stowell's pro-slavery judgment

1830 – Large anti-slavery rallies Brunswick Methodist Church Newcastle – Henry Brougham M.P. speaks at one of these

1830 Election address in Newcastle election calls slavery 'unchristian'

1830 Earl Grey becomes Prime Minister

1832 Great Reform Act passed

- 1833 Abolition of Slavery in the British Empire - Emancipation Bill receives Royal Assent on 28th August
- 1834 First meeting of newly named Newcastle upon Tyne Society for Abolishing Slavery All Over the World.
- 1838 Rev Everett speaks out against slavery at Brunswick Methodist Church Newcastle
- 1838 June – Jamaican Assembly meet to announce end to Slaves apprenticeship system
- 1846 Frederick Douglass wins his freedom after he is bought out with money raised by two Newcastle women
- 1865 Slavery abolished at the end of the American Civil War – Frederick Douglass helps President Lincoln to achieve this.
- 1967 13th November – Newcastle University becomes the only university in Britain to honour Dr Martin Luther King in his lifetime

Chapter Three

The Great Reform Act

We have seen how the national government were worried by the effects of the French Revolution and used the Napoleonic Wars as a reason to clampdown on voices of dissent such as that of Thomas Spence. Even after the Battle of Waterloo they maintained the same attitude, with newspapers heavily taxed to stop ordinary working people from reading them. As in the time of Murray, Spence and Bewick, there was still a great fear amongst the propertied classes that all they had ever known and valued would be swept away by a tide of violent revenge on the part of the illiterate masses. This did not stop people voicing their discontent with the corruption in government and the way they lacked a voice in it. One of the catalysts for new action came in 1819 after the Peterloo Massacre. In the end limited reform did come and it arrived with a strong North-east connection

This part of our story starts, not in the North-east but over the other side of the Pennines with what became known, in ironic homage to the Battle of Waterloo, as the Peterloo Massacre. At St Peter's Fields, just outside Manchester, on 16th August 1819 a large crowd had gathered to hear Henry Hunt and others speaking out for parliamentary reform. Hunt was a landowner and entrepreneur who had been a supporter of the radical wing of the Whigs, but had become disillusioned with the lack of progress towards a wider distribution of power and had become more radical. In an attempt to arrest Hunt, the crowd were attacked by a detachment of the Yeomanry, volunteer regiments raised to help combat the threat of invasion from France during the Napoleonic Wars. The Yeomen slashed through crowd to arrest Hunt and in so doing they trampled a young girl to death. An angry crowd surrounded the Yeomanry causing regular troops to cut through the crowd and another eleven were killed. A witness to the events that day, Samuel Bamford, later recalled that there were bonnets, hats, shawls and shoes left strewn all over the ground in the aftermath, while all was silent, except for the occasional sound from one of the horses. The massacre resulted in a wave of protests spreading throughout England and the North-East was no exception to this.

Another sign of the apprehension felt by the establishment during a time of the Napoleonic Wars and their aftermath was the heavy tax placed on newspapers, in an attempt to stifle public debate. Newspapers had first been taxed a hundred years earlier in 1712, and as successive governments became more concerned about the freedom of the press and the ideas it might spread, so this was increased. In 1814 the tax was set a fourpence for each newspaper as part of the Stamp Act. A newspaper would then cost between seven and eight pence, so putting it far beyond the reach of the average working-class family. It was only after years of campaigning that pamphlet duty was cut in 1833, newspaper duty in 1853 and newspaper tax finally repealed in 1861.

For those who could afford to read it, or could borrow it, the Tyne Mercury reported a meeting on 8th October 1819, in Newcastle. At the meeting speakers maintained that the only answer to war, taxation, corruption and misrepresentation was radical reform of the House of Commons. A meeting would be held on 11th October, to protest what had happened at St Peter's Fields. It was originally to be held at the Parade Ground at what is now the Haymarket in Newcastle, but the size of the crowd was so big that it was moved to the Town Moor.

The procession for the mass meeting took an hour and quarter to pass Barras Bridge, which was then a real bridge over Pandon Burn. The spread of the demonstrators from places outside Newcastle can be shown by the fact that, amongst others, there was a banner from the The Winlaton Reform Society proclaiming, "Evil to him that evil thinks", whilst another banner from North Shields paid homage, "to the immortal memory of the Reformers massacred at Manchester on 16th Aug. 1819"

Conservative estimates of the crowd size put it at between 25 000 and 30 000, whilst another estimate at four to a square yard, suggested that the crowd was 76 000. This would be a huge turnout today, but in 1819 it was even more impressive. At the beginning of the 19th century, the population of Northumberland was 168 078, while the population of County Durham was 149 384, and the first census in 1801 gave Newcastle's population as 28 000.

The meeting heard condemnation of the actions of the authorities at St Peter's Fields and of the entire political system, with warnings against trusting any political parties of the time from radical Thomas Hodgson of Winlaton. Eneas Mackenzie denounced national and local government, claiming that people were groaning under monstrous debt, 1 in 5 being pauperised, whilst taxes for ordinary people were multiplying.

In the same year of 1819 there was a violent reaction to industrial action as a keelmen's strike on the Tyne saw troops firing on a stone-throwing crowd and it didn't take long for the local establishment to respond to the challenges laid down at the big meeting on the Town Moor. In December 1819, they formed the Northumberland and Durham Volunteer Cavalry, with Charles John Brandling, the region's leading Pittite acting as Lieutenant-Colonel. The Pittites were the followers of the two Pitts who had been Prime Ministers, William Pitt the Elder and his son William Pitt the Younger who was Prime Minister during the Napoleonic Wars from 1783 to 1801 and again from 1804 until his death in 1806. Even 13 years later, to be described as a Pittite, put you very much in the heart of the political establishment and very much against any changes to the status quo.

Despite this presence, agitation continued throughout the 1820's with scorn being poured on some candidates at elections. One example of this was a

satirical notice which appeared, in the Durham-based *College Gazette*, aimed at candidate in Durham by the name of Richard Wharton who was also called 'Pensioner Dick': It claimed that he was happy to stand for any party who could give him good wages. Mr Walker, a printer from Durham, who was responsible for producing the *College Gazette* also produced a ballad about the same candidate, which claimed that he would support putting taxes up for the poor, whilst claiming a good pension for himself. The ballad ended with the following rhyme:

"In BRIBING and JOBBING and TAXING,
For a Placeman so skilful and clever,
To vote for you can need no more asking,
So cry, "WHARTON AND PENSIONS FOR EVER".

The system was becoming untenable and in the end reform did come, led by a son of Northumberland, but it was limited and just left many people in North-east England wanting more. In 1830 Earl Grey from Northumberland was elected as a reforming Whig P.M. and it was his government which passed what became known as the Great Reform Act, but questions remain as to why he did it and whether it was really so great at all.

It did make a start to dealing with corruption and it did extend the franchise. The centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne is still to be found around the huge monument paid for by public subscription to commemorate the achievement of Earl Grey in overseeing the passage of the 1832 Reform Act. The inscription on the monument reads as follows:

"This column was erected in 1838 to commemorate the services rendered to his country by Charles Earl Grey, K.C., who during an active political career of nearly half a century was the constant advocate of peace and the fearless and consistent champion of civil and religious liberty. He first directed his efforts to the amendment of the representation of the people in 1792 and was the minister by whose advice and under whose guidance the great measure of parliamentary reform was, after an arduous and protracted struggle safely and triumphantly achieved in the year 1832."

Before the Act was passed, the Government allowed no influence or say from ordinary people and was not representative of them.. Two-thirds of M.P.s in the Commons were appointed by peers, or other influential persons and it was estimated that three hundred members of parliament, were returned by just 160 people. At the same time new large industrial cities such as Leeds, Birmingham and Manchester were unrepresented. Seats were often offered for sale quite openly and Hastings was known to 'cost' £6 000 because it had been sold for that price so often.

An extra 200 000 men of property added to electorate propertied males, mostly the 40s freeholders in the counties and the £10 householders in the boroughs.

This raised the total electorate from 435 000 to 632 000, all males. Did ordinary people have any more say? Owning property was still the key to being involved in the political process and the Act was designed to give the impression of reform, without really changing the power structure in the country. What would Spence have thought?

The Great Reform Act did get rid of 56 Rotten Boroughs, those which had very few voters, such as Old Sarum in Wiltshire, which in 1831 had eleven voters all of whom were landowners who lived elsewhere. This opened up the possibility for more North-east towns to gain an M.P. and the Act did give M.P.s to Newcastle's rivals at Gateshead, Tynemouth and South Shields, starting a process so that by mid-century all these towns had corporations under the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, which were capable of acting energetically on the town's behalf against over-mighty Newcastle.

For 200 years the River Tyne had been effectively part of Newcastle, from its mouth to the furthest point to which the tide rose at Hedwin Sreams, west of Newcastle at the time. It had all come under the jurisdiction of Newcastle Common Council. For two long centuries other towns on the river including North and South Shields had fought against this. Now they could finally challenge this and the domination of Newcastle came to an end with the establishment of the Tyne Improvement Commission in 1850.

One place in the region which did benefit directly from the 1832 act was Sunderland, which before then had not had any representation in parliament as a town. Up until 1832, the growing town of Sunderland had been represented by MPs who represented County Durham as a whole. It has been reported that "the fact that Sunderland was now to have its own representatives was a cause of great rejoicing among the townfolk who had pressed for such representation". Sunderland's first M.P.s were elected on 14th December 1832. So the man on the statue in the middle of Newcastle was responsible for the people of Sunderland gaining their first M.P.

The Great Reform Act did begin the process of making the government of Britain more accountable, but only made a small start. There was still a long way to go and 1832 did not herald in some brave new democratic world into the political affairs of North-east England or any other part of Britain for that matter. Indeed it was only a few more of the wealthier section of society who gained the vote and by opting for a reform which had a £10 property qualification rather than a ratepayer franchise, Earl Grey and his fellow reformers actually took the vote away from many working class voters who were not property owners.

The Act didn't really help the working classes, who made up a large percentage of the North-East, as the industrial base grew from inward migration into a region, which was beginning to resemble the Yukon at the time of the Gold Rush. The vast majority of those who were living in the region, workers and families who

had come to work in the coal mines and their attendant industries were not helped by the 1832 Act. It left the interests of the aristocracy in the counties intact and whilst modern party-based politics was really launched by the act, it was only in a system, where the vast majority of men and all the women of the land had no say

The motives for Earl Grey's reform have also been questioned. Writing over 100 years later, the North-east writer Sid Chaplin commented that, "at that time the whole of Britain was in open revolutionary ferment" and it could be said that the real reason for the Act was to dampen down this ferment and stop real change from taking place. As Earl Grey was a Whig, so this argument takes us back to the work of Spence and Murray who distrusted all politicians of their time, seeing Whigs as those who would grant reforms, but only when they really had to and only as small as they could get away with. Indeed some of the reformers believed that the Great Reform Act would be the end of the reform process and the fears of the propertied classes, of being overwhelmed by the mob, could now be put to rest.. Grey himself was distrustful of popular initiatives and, whilst he thought that more reform could take place, this would only be in the distant future. Grey was to be proved wrong; the Act was only to be the beginning. The passing of the Great Reform Act showed that change could take place and it gave campaigners hope that, with further pushes against the system, real change could take place It opened the door for many more who would come rushing through over the ensuing decades.

The early decades of the 19th century saw slow progress towards the kind of universal suffrage we take for granted in Britain today. The years of the Napoleonic Wars saw the government using the conflict as a reason to pass harsh laws which made any attempts to demand a wider distribution of power both seditious and highly dangerous. Even newspapers were heavily taxed to try and put them out of the reach of working people. This could not stop a build-up of pressure from ordinary people demanding change and this pressure was finally released at St Peter's Fields and in the way people round the country responded to the massacre which took place there in August 1819. The huge turnout at the protest meeting in Newcastle in October 1819 showed the depth of feelings amongst ordinary people in North-east England, feelings which could only be dealt with by some concessions from the ruling classes. This led to the Northumbrian Earl Grey overseeing the passage of the Great Reform Act of 1832. This Act only really tinkered with the system, but it did open the door for more reform later.

Timeline

1819 August – Peterloo Massacre St.Peter's Fields, Manchester

1819 October – Up to 76 000 attend Peterloo protest rally Town Moor
Newcastle-upon-Tyne

1819 Striking Keelmen shot at by troops

1830 Earl Grey becomes Prime Minister

1832 Great Reform Act passed – a number of North-east towns including
Sunderland gain their first M.P.s

Chapter Four

The Trade Unions

As the economy of the North-east developed during the 19th century, so the coal industry and those industries linked to it, such as iron and steel, shipbuilding, engineering and the railways became dominant. These provided jobs, but, especially in the case of mining, they were often very dangerous jobs. At least as far back as 1621, accidents had been recorded in North-east mines. The 19th century would see a long struggle by the employees in the coal-mining industry in the region to gain safer working conditions. There would also be a fight to overturn the obligation of miners signing the annual bond, which once signed required miners by law to stay working at the same mine for the whole year. To help them in their struggle, miners would form a series of trade unions, so that they could come together to take collective action. At the same time, many of the mineowners would strenuously oppose the efforts of the unions; to the mineowners the coal was theirs, as it was found under the land they owned and they had no obligation to share any of the profit from the selling of the coal.

The coal, found in abundance under the ground in the region, fired the industrial revolution in North-east England. It was mentioned as far back as the Boldon Book of 1183 and coal was shipped from River Wear during the reign of Richard II in the late -fourteenth century. The industry really took off between 1565 and 1625 after the end of the Border troubles. London was expanding in size dramatically during the sixteenth century and it was coal from the North-east which was used to heat the city during the cold Tudor winters. London was still the main destination for North-east coal up to the introduction of the Clean Air Acts in the 1950's.

The coal trade was to become so successful that William Ellis writing in *News from Newcastle* stated that

“England's a perfect world! Has Indies too!
Correct your maps: Newcastle is Peru!”

As the coal industry became more important so the miners became aware of how important their work was. This was to lead to the development of a vibrant and self-confident working-class culture on the coalfield, who saw combining together as the best way to further their interests. The development of trade unions in the region can be traced back to the second half of the 18th century.

Although it was dangerous to be a trade unionist in North-east England in the 18th century, their growing self-confidence could help them to overcome their fears. There was a clear desire for people to come together to demand better conditions, and a strike as far back as 1731, showed pitmen working together as one in a common cause. The Tyne Water Men and the Wear Water Men came together to meet in the woods around Chester-le-Street, away from the gaze of

the mineowners and their henchmen and organise the strike. As the strike continued, there were sporadic outbursts of violence and more meetings of pitmen from throughout the coalfield, in the woods around Chester-le-Street. One can perhaps imagine these miners meeting, in the dark of night, always fearful of discovery by those representing the powers in the region or indeed of being betrayed by one of their own. Yet they continued and in so doing and by winning the strike, were able to establish a regional solidarity, which would become important in future struggles. This was followed by the 1765 Pitmen's Great Stand, which saw miners in the region, gaining a lot of support in their battle to stop the Annual Bond, whereby miners could not move from one job to another during the year when they were bound to the mine they had signed up to work in for the year. This meant that mine owners could make them work in conditions that suited the mine owners, but not necessarily the pitmen.

This victory and the miners' growing self-confidence led to the concept of what has been called the true-bred pitmen as pitmen were viewed as being such highly skilled and important members of the workforce that only miners who came from pit families could be trusted to do the job properly and safely. To a large extent it was a closed community in which the pitmen lived. This helped to give them a solidarity and helped in the development of the imagined community of miners across the coalfield, who saw themselves as having common cause, which could help them to come together to demand their rights. It was also a part of the identity of the coalfield that was to last as can be exemplified by the north-eastern writer, Sid Chaplin, writing about miners working much later than the first half of the eighteenth century, still echoing the same feeling when he wrote;

“ it takes all sorts of men to win coal and 40 years ago that
meant an aristocracy of coal-hewers with picks and
shovels,putters with broad backs keeping up the supply of
tubs with the help of stout little ponies, ropemen and
enginemen who guided the speeding tubs of coal through
the many miles of tunnels, and craftsmen whose care it was
to keep the wheels in motion”.

At the same time as becoming more aware of the importance of their work, the miners of the region were becoming more aware of the wider flowering of ideas, which had been ushered in by the Enlightenment. In 1791, Thomas Paine had been able to publish his *Rights of Man*, and this was to be a widely admired book in the North-east of England. Indeed it has been noted that, “a hostile report claimed that every pitmen (in the region) carried it in his back pocket”. This is doubtless something of an exaggeration, but this raising of consciousness was to have important consequences over the next few decades as miners challenged the status quo.

Trade unions had been banned as part of the crackdown on sedition which accompanied the Napoleonic Wars. Their development was viewed by the ruling classes, like the extension of the franchise, as another threat to a civilised nation. In 1824 the Combinations Act, outlawing trade unions, was repealed and the United Association of Northumberland and Durham Miners was subsequently formed in 1825, the same year as four men were shot during a seaman's strike on Wearside. This union did not last very long, but a stronger union was formed in 1830, largely due to the efforts of Thomas Hepburn. Hepburn had been born in Pelton in County Durham in the last decade of the 18th century and had started work as a miner at the tender age of 8. An intelligent man, he moved to Jarrow and then Hetton collieries before forming the Northern Union of Pitmen with Martin Jude.

At the time, the miners and the colliery owners each signed a bond on an annual basis, which prevented miners from moving to another pit during that year. When it came to that time again in March 1831 there were meetings in Gateshead and Newcastle's Town Moor. At these meetings the miners were spurred on by the newly formed union's leaders to demand regular wages and work and for shorter hours for boys who worked underground. Archibald Reed, the mayor of Newcastle-upon-Tyne was asked to act as a mediator. The bitterness of the dispute can be seen by the way a strikebreaker and a magistrate were both murdered in 1832. As for the negotiations, at first it is reported that the coal owners "stood firm" as not every mine in the region came out on strike, but by April the pitmen had managed to pressurise the other mines to join the strike. Consequently, the strike led to a victory for the miners as, "after seven weeks the coal owners agreed to a ten per cent increase in wages and the restriction of working hours for boys to twelve hours a day".

In 1844 there was another major strike. The early months of 1844 were a bad time for a strike to begin, as the coal trade was suffering from a severe depression and coal was not as vital a commodity as usual. As a result of the downturn the coal owners decided not to grant the miners in the region a wage increase and they were expecting trouble when the bond was due to be renewed. On 6th April 1844, the mine owners wrote to magistrates asking for support. The result was that the 37th regiment and the 8th Hussars were called up to deal with any potential trouble. Not that they were needed; the striking miners were determined to keep the peace. Another large meeting was held on Newcastle's Town Moor on 1st August. The *Tyne Mercury* estimated that between 25 000 and 30 000 people were present

Another meeting was held on 13th August, some 18 weeks after the strike had begun, but this time only 1 200 attended. There was a larger attendance the next day in Durham, where it is reported 10 000 attended, but the drift to work, which had already begun on Wearside continued. Eventually the union leaders, including Martin Jude, decided that they had to end the strike, with a

considerable amount of bitterness being expressed towards those who had broken the strike.

The bitterness of some of the miners' disputes can also be illustrated by the 1859 strike at Seaton Delaval in Northumberland. Some of the men were against the strike because of the threat of legal sanctions, but the strike went ahead anyway. Consequently, nine of the most respected miners in the community were chosen by the mine owner. They were then arrested, tried and given two month sentences at the jail in Morpeth. This happened despite the fact that all nine of them had opposed the strike, none of them drank alcohol and most of them were leaders of local chapels. One of those detained was the uncle of the future Liberal M.P. Thomas Burt, who was arrested at the bedside of his dying wife. The harshness of the action is underlined by the following quote from the manager, who knew that he was punishing respectable men and responded to criticism of his actions by saying, "I know they are respectable men, and that is why I put them in prison. It is no use sending those to jail who cannot feel".

On 16th January 1862, when there was a terrible disaster in Hartley Colliery in Northumberland, which saw 204 men and boys killed. This particularly awful disaster prompted the following local song written in the aftermath of the tragedy:

"The sailor on the stormy sea life's perils often shares,
Our soldiers mid the battle's strife, what man can do they dare;
Yet both have got a chance for life, but ah! The miner's doom
Twas sad to sleep the sleep of death closed in the living tomb."

The tragedy did result in two beneficial outcomes. Firstly, there was the development of the Permanent Relief Fund covering, "the whole mining area of the north of England, Cleveland and Cumberland and stepping in with its rich provision whenever death enters the family by accident in the mine, or the breadwinner is shorn of his strength by the same cause." This was established after a public meeting had been held in the Guildhall down by the Quayside in Newcastle. The next day two resolutions were submitted at a meeting at Lecture Hall in Nelson Street, Newcastle. One resolution asked miners in Northumberland and Durham to make collections for the bereaved at their collieries.

The other beneficial outcome of the disaster came with the second resolution submitted at the Lecture Hall in Nelson Street. It was affirmed at the meeting that it would be desirable for Parliament to be petitioned to "appoint a committee to inquire into the accidents in mines and expressing the opinion that no colliery should be worked without two shafts having been first sunk for the security of the workmen". The outcome of this was successful as it became compulsory for all pits in the future to have two shafts

By examining the events which took place in Haswell, County Durham in 1863-4 we can see what lengths some mineowners would go to to stop the development

of the union at their mine. Free drinks were provided for miners not joining the union and this helped to keep the pit union free. At the same time, the Northumberland and Durham Miners Association collapsed, possibly because it was not militant enough. North of the Tyne the Northumberland Miners Association continued under the moderate leadership of Thomas Burt whilst in County Durham, William Crawford another moderate, set up the Durham Miners Association. Initially he found gaining new members hard work as many of the miners were seen as 'indifferent'.

Back in Haswell Crawford and others in the union had to come up against various management strategies to stop it, including bribes and intimidation. Mineowners were often the landed gentry, such as the notorious Lord Londondery and they saw any union organising as the harbinger of mob rule and anarchy. To combat the opposition to the union at Haswell, notes were pinned on pit props with messages such as "Men of Haswell, how long will you bear tyranny and oppression? How long will you submit to dictation as to the price of your labour? Have you not a right to a voice in fixing the conditions in which you work and the amount you should be paid? Look around you; see how men are uniting everywhere. Why do you hesitate? Arise and assert your manhood. Be not like dumb-driven cattle, but be heroes in the strife." Crawford himself often had to move from one house to another, barely spending more than a night in the same house.

At about the same time, there was a bitter strike north of the Tyne at Cramlington. In June 1865, the miners of the Cramlington Colliery Company struck after they were refused an increase in wages of 1d or 2d per ton of coal, to put them in parity with workers in surrounding pits. Four months after the strike had begun, in October the owners offered more arbitration, but to no avail. Consequently, the owners began to evict the miners and their families from the colliery company houses. Twelve families were evicted in East Cramlington on 12th October 1865 and this led to a violent response.

To restore order, police were brought in from Newcastle and then on October 17th, a company of the 64th regiment of Foot was brought by rail to the barracks in Newcastle in readiness. In the face of this provocation and the civil disorder and fines which had been handed out after men began to be arrested on 15th October, an emerging young leader, Thomas Burt called for passive resistance. This was agreed to, but the evictions continued nonetheless.

To return to what was happening in the autumn of 1865, men from Ayrshire arrived in early November, but were persuaded to return to Scotland, without breaking the strike. The owners then turned to tin miners from Cornwall. They arrived on a train to Newcastle on 5th December 1865. On making contact with local men they claimed that they did not know that they would be strike-breaking, although it was later revealed that a Plymouth newspaper had made it clear that the strike-breaking was what was intended. The union still offered to pay the

miners from Cornwall their return fare home and some 85 men and their families took up the offer on December 7th. The same day, however, 150 men from Cornwall began work at the Ann pit, with another 128 men arriving from Cornwall on December 27th. Some local men responded by going back to work, whilst others looked for work elsewhere. The mine owners were winning the struggle as they had support from the Steam Collieries Association to offset losses from both the lower productivity and early financial losses. The union accepted that the strike was over within a few months of the beginning of 1866. A defeat then for the miners of Northumberland in their struggle for better pay, but things were looking up for the miners south of the River Tyne.

In County Durham, the first annual meeting of the Durham Miners Association was held on 3rd December 1870, with the first council meeting less than four months later on 25th March 1871. 1871 also saw the first 'Big Meeting' of County Durham miners at Wharton Park, with around 5 000 attending to listen to speakers from Staffordshire, Scotland and South Yorkshire. This would soon be transferred to the Riverside setting where it still takes place today and would grow ultimately to see as many as 250 000 attending by the 1940's, a huge celebration of mining culture and political aspirations, with banners held proudly aloft and colliery brass bands accompanying those marching through the city. The political aspirations would see further expression in 1872, with the establishment of the Miners' Political Reform Association formed to get working men elected to parliament. In 1874, a Northumberland miner, Thomas Burt, would become one of the first two working-class Members of Parliament, when elected as Liberal M.P. for Morpeth, a seat he held until 1918.

Trade union development was spreading to other trades and in 1871, an engineering strike on Tyneside went on to have national consequences as it heralded an agreement to limiting the working day to nine hours across the country.

1874 saw a great fall in coal prices. The owners across the country responded by introducing a 'sliding scale' which tied the wages of the miners to the price of coal. This was to have disastrous consequences for many miners as the price continued to fall. As the 1880's continued, so this trend also continued, with the result that the owners demanded increased production to compensate for the lack of income from coal sales. It was a tough time for the mining unions. The unions in North-east England still had some influence, as "collective bargaining only survived in Durham, Northumberland and two Scottish districts". Indeed it has also been argued that the two county unions from north-east England had come to dominate the Miners National Union by this time.

As men continued to die in accidents down the mines, whilst working in difficult conditions for wages which were not as great as they could have been, they knew that they must keep building the unions, as it was the only way by which ordinary people could be involved in decisions affecting their working lives.

Slowly they made headway, as mineowners gradually allowed more concessions, whilst the seemingly ever-expanding Northumberland and Durham coalfield continued to give mineowners the opportunities to expand their businesses.

It is clear that a lot of hard work was done in North-east England during the 19th century aimed at improving working conditions, gaining more people the vote and improving the human rights of the ordinary people who lived there. Most of this work was done by a well organised and militant working-class, who were living in one of the first major industrial regions in the world. Indeed this 'imagined community' of miners across the region had become so strong that it was celebrated between September 1872 and February 1874 when Joseph Cowen's *Weekly Chronicle* published a series entitled 'our Colliery Villages' helping to strengthen feeling of community amongst miners across the region.

The North-East had become a region, with a vibrant working-class culture, which fostered a self-belief in the ordinary people that they didn't have to put up with being treated badly, by either employers or the government. They had learnt to articulate their grievances and to effectively campaign for them. To be sure there was still much that needed to be done, notably in the areas of women's rights and working-class housing and a human rights activist from today going back in a time machine, might still be shocked by the lack of civil liberties, which we take for granted. By the end of the 19th century, over 20% of the workforce in North-east England, were members of trade unions, the highest of any region in Britain. Others at the time were also concerned about working and living conditions. As well as the unions, other social movements were being developed and Joseph Cowen was at the centre of many of them.

Timeline

1183	Coal-mining mentioned in the Boldon Book
1565 – 1625	North-east coal industry begins to expand
1621	Accident recorded on North-east coalmine
1765	Strike of the Tyne Water Men and Wear Water Men
1791	Rights of Man published – it is read by many miners
1824	Combinations Act repealed
1825	United Association of Northumberland and Durham Miners formed

- 1830 Formation of Northern Union of Pitmen led by Thomas Hepburn and Martin Jude
- 1831 Mass meetings in Newcastle and Gateshead to protest the Annual Bond
- 1832 Strikebreaker and magistrate murdered
- 1844 Major strike across coalfield
- 1862 204 men and boys killed at Hartley Colliery Disaster in Northumberland – law changed so that all pits had to have two shafts
- 1865-6 Bitter strike at Cramlington ends in defeat for miners
- 1870 First meeting of Durham Miners Association
- 1871 First Durham Miners Gala, Wharton Park, Durham
- 1872 Durham Miners Gala moves to the Racecourse in Durham
- 1873 Establishment of Miners Political Reform Association
- 1874 Thomas Burt elected as M.P. for Morpeth

Chapter 5

Joseph Cowen and Radical Newcastle

Joseph Cowen (1829 – 18 February 1900) was born at Stella Hall, Blaydon. He was educated privately in Ryton and at Edinburgh University, where he interested himself in European revolutionary movements. This was the man who would emerge as the dominant figure in the second half of the nineteenth century in North-east English radical politics. Cowen was greatly influenced by Thomas Paines' book 'The Rights of Man'. It gave Cowen and his followers inspiration in the fight for greater democracy, when the franchise was restricted to a small minority of men. Another important factor in the radical politics, during Cowen's formative years, were big meetings on the Town Moor in Newcastle.

One of the largest of these took place on Coronation Day in 1838. On that day a crowd, which some estimates put at more than 80 000, gathered to demand their rights. It was seen as a particularly important day to be gathering in such huge numbers, rather than gazing at the 'useless and idle pageant' of the coronation". The size of the crowd shows the depth of feelings, which so many in the region had about the desire to improve their position, be it in terms of pay and conditions at work or demands to be given the vote. It was this desire which Cowen would go on to try and meet.

Cowen was only a young boy on the day of the huge meeting in 1838. Having completed his extensive education, he went on to join his father in his Blaydon brick business. His father was also a Liberal M.P. and Joseph went on to succeed his father as Newcastle M.P. in 1874.

Cowen became involved in radical politics whilst still in his twenties. He bought the Daily Chronicle (now the Evening Chronicle) and used it to promote a fairer and stronger society: Cowen established the Northern Reform Union, in an attempt to help ordinary working men gain the vote. Cowen helped to organise both a petition and a number of protests, so that more people could have the vote and 1858 was marked by the Northern Reform Union petition. Cowen supported votes for women, but the Union's call was only for wider suffrage in terms of extending the number of men who could vote

The petition gathered 34 456 signatures for electoral reform throughout the North-east. This regional support was as part of a national crusade for more men to be given the vote, but it was a particularly high number from the North-east. Throughout all of his radical work in the 19th century, Cowen gained a great

deal of important support from the network of committed and loyal activists in organisations such as the Reform Union and the Newcastle and Gateshead Republican clubs. These clubs were made up of committed radicals who were determined to change society.

Cowen was also able to gain support for his causes through the pages of his newspapers, including the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* and *The Weekly Chronicle*. One example of this is shown by the fact that, as the chairman of the Universal Manhood Suffrage Committee when it planned a massive demonstration in London, he was able to give it unprecedented coverage in the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle*. The Cowenite press helped the demonstration by ensuring that “the timetable of special trains reserved for the demonstrators, the order of the procession, and declarations of support were all given prominent space in.....(his) papers.”

The Cowenite press was also able to help the development of a regional identity through a series of articles in *The Weekly Chronicle* which were published between September 1872 and February 1874, called ‘Our Colliery Villages’. The effect of the series was to project the identity of the village onto a regional platform. It has been noted that he was able to use his ownership of the *Chronicle* newspapers, to spread his messages with articles such as the weekly portraits of mining villages in 1873 and on the local co-operative societies in 1867. Through the *Chronicle* he was able to promote the view that trade unions, co-op stores and mechanics’ institutes went hand in glove with radical policies.

Just as Cowen was using the newspapers he owned to put forward a radical vision on Tyneside, similar events were also taking place on the River Wear. As far back as 28th May 1831, the *Sunderland Herald* had appeared, shortly after Sunderland’s first newspaper, the short-lived and catchily titled, *Sunderland General Shipping Gazette and Advertiser* had been established. The *Sunderland Herald* was strongly pro-Liberal, although it soon had competition from the other side with the appearance of the *Sunderland Beacon*. This newspaper would counter the arguments from the *Herald*, which would dismiss the Tories as “an unintelligent set”. Another of the town’s newspapers was the *Sunderland Times*. It had been founded in 1844 and in its early years had supported the Tories, but in 1859 it was bought by James Williams. He turned it into what has been described as “an effective mouthpiece for the Radicals”. It continued in this vein, extending its output from a biweekly paper to a daily newspaper until 1878, when it folded in the face of strong competition, particularly from the *Sunderland Echo*, which had been founded five years earlier.

Returning to Cowen, he also campaigned against the Death Penalty, through his proprietorship of the *Daily Chronicle*, 100 years before its final abolition in Britain in December 1969. It was as early as 6th January 1869, that, “the *Chronicle* published a leading article against capital punishment, deploying the arguments

familiar to present-day abolitionists". This leader coincided with the issue being brought before parliament by Charles Gilpin and it is reported that the, "*Chronicle* confidently predicted:

'it will be the glory of the first Household Suffrage Parliament to finish the work Sir Samuel Romilly so gloriously inaugurated.'

Two weeks later another editorial was equally confident that the bill would be passed. However, Gilpin's Bill was defeated on the second reading and, despite the support of Joseph Cowen Senior and other members from the region.

Cowen helped to build the Co-operative Movement so that working people could buy food at a fair price. At the same time, people campaigned in the mining areas against the use of 'tommy shops' which the mineowners, such as Lord Londonderry used, to claw back some of the wages they had paid to the miners. They did this by paying part of the miners' wages in tokens, which could only be used in the 'tommy shops', which were naturally owned by the mineowners.

It has been noted that early North-east co-operative stores, including those on Tyneside, Wearside and Teesside all failed in their early days. This, however, was to prove to be just a blip, in the progress of the co-operative movement in North-east England during the second half of the 19th century.

By 1873, the Co-operative Movement in Northumberland and Durham, had more members as a proportion of the population than anywhere else in the country, with 43 615 members. This compared favourably with only 128 members in Birmingham out of a population of 343 000, and 600 members out of a population of 240 00 in Sheffield. The popularity of the Co-operative Movement was so great that membership of the North East Coast Societies by 1900 was proportionately highest in England at 200 000, of whom 82 000 were from the Durham coalfield and 53 000 from Tyneside. The development of the Co-operative Society in north-east England took place for a number of reasons. There were certain key societies in places such as Blaydon, West Cramlington, Sunderland and Wallsend and key individuals, one of whom was Joseph Cowen.

Cowen's *Newcastle Chronicle* also took up the cause of better housing. In 1850 it published an article, in a series on social conditions, which declared that, "too few houses have been built for the working class and too many for the middle class, hence the rents of the latter are cheaper in proportion than those of the former." Reformers were further emboldened two years later when, after there had been a third outbreak of cholera in twenty years, a Cholera Commission of inquiry produced what was described as a, "very rigorous investigation and report which concentrated on housing conditions. The Commissioners reported that, 'we shall not probably be over-stating the case, if we compute that about half the families in Newcastle are confined exclusively to the occupancy or joint occupancy of exceedingly over-crowded single-room tenements'"

It was in 1873 that the tide began to turn against unsanitary housing conditions. John Gibson Youll, who was later to be an election agent for Joseph Cowen, was elected as a Liberal in the St John's Ward of Newcastle. From the same year, it was possible to gain a more regular and precise account of living conditions, as it was then that a Medical Officer was appointed for Newcastle. However, two years of pressure only led to what has been described as a "modest plan for the demolition of the unhealthy Pandon group of houses", leading Youll to complain in the Newcastle Corporation Proceedings of, "cold obstruction's apathy". It is also claimed that poor attendance at Sanitary Committee meetings was another reason why there was such a delay.

No great improvement was made during the 1880's and it was not until the 1890 *Housing of the Working Classes Act*, that real progress could begin to be made. This act helped the delivery of decent working-class housing, by simplifying procedures and this helped Councillor Riley Lord to take up the baton for working-class housing in Newcastle in his positions as the north-east's principal representative of the Prudential Assurance Company and as councilor for the predominantly working-class district of Byker. He proposed that the council build Model Common Lodging Houses, as he argued at Newcastle Corporation Proceedings in 1891 that, "it was very difficult for any woman at present to keep herself decent – driven into neighbourhoods where decency was not to be found." Again however, the Corporation stalled, fearful of "getting themselves on an inclined plane which would lead them into the vortex of municipal socialism", so that by the beginning of 1895 the Improvement Committee was in a position to no longer recommend going ahead with the scheme.

Cowen was also an internationalist who helped refugees from other countries. having many friends from Europe, who were struggling for radical causes, including Mazzini, Louis Blanc and Ledru-Rollin, as well as Herzen and Bakunin. Garibaldi, Felice Orsini and Lajos Kossuth came to visit him in Blaydon. Cowen helped them to fight for liberty and human rights in their countries. Garibaldi, the Italian independence leader, was given a civic procession in Newcastle in 1861, whilst a small white plaque on the corner of Nelson Street and Grainger Street commemorates the site of a bookshop which he visited in 1854.

Cowen died in 1900. A fine bronze statue of him stands at the bottom of Westgate Road, in Fenkle Street in Newcastle and his letters were published by his daughter in 1909. He left an important legacy of radical work and also helped the region to become more interconnected as he developed networks such as the Co-operative Movement and the Mechanics' Institutes. By his death in 1900, Joseph Cowen had seen the North-East become a region, with a vibrant working-class culture and a solidarity, which had helped ordinary working people to articulate their needs and campaign for ways by which they could be addressed.

Any civil rights' campaigner going back in time to 1900 might find the time to be

oppressive and still perceive a lot of injustice. However, it is fairer to look back at the situation in 1750 and see how much had changed by 1900. Many men in the region had the vote and while conditions down the mines were dangerous enough for there be still too many terrible disasters in the region's mines well into the 20th century, many struggles for better pay and working conditions had been won. It has also been noted that for all the vast increase in population and social changes which had taken place during the 19th century, the people of the region had been able to maintain a commendable degree of social cohesion. McCord has commented that, "the many links of sympathy and co-operation between different elements of the community, often weak and limited in isolation, but cumulatively very strong, proved in the long run more significant and formative than any factors leading to the community's disruption" The common bonds of humanity, those feelings of empathy with others were strong in the region. If someone from 1750, interested in the people's living conditions, had been able to go on a time machine and go forward to 1900, they would have been very impressed by the changes which had taken place. Let us now turn to the group of people, who had not seen their rights grow as much as they could have done; the group who made up more than half of the population of the region – women.

Timeline

1829	Joseph Cowen born at Stella Hall, Blaydon
1838	80 000 meet on Newcastle's Town Moor to demand greater human rights
1850	Cowen begins to campaign for better housing
1850's	Cowen buys the Daily Chronicle
1858	Northern Reform Union petition launched
1861	Garibaldi given civic procession through Newcastle
1867	Daily Chronicle supports co-operatives
1869	Cowen declares his opposition to the death penalty
1872-4	'Our Colliery Villages' series in the Daily Chronicle
1873	Co-operative Movement has more members per head of population in North-east than any other part of the country
1873	Medical officer appointed for Newcastle-upon-Tyne

1874 Joseph Cowen succeeds his father as M.P. for Newcastle-upon-Tyne

1900 Joseph Cowen dies

Chapter Six

The Suffragette Movement

Women in North-east England played their part in the Suffragette Movement, which campaigned in the years leading up to the outbreak of the First World War for the rights of women to be able to vote in parliamentary elections. They used direct action methods to get their message across and harassed government ministers. The region also provided the movement with its martyr, Emily Davidson, who came from a Northumbrian family.

There is a long history of women from North-east England determined to be given the chance to live on an equal footing with men. Indeed the struggle for women's rights in North-east England can be traced back to at least 1417. Two young women, Matilda Usher and Margaret Burgh struck a blow for women's rights long before the issue of universal suffrage arose. It was traditionally thought that St. Cuthbert didn't like women around him and after he was buried in Durham Cathedral it was decreed that women were not allowed to approach the shrine at the east end of the hallowed building. Margaret and Matilda dressed up in male clothes and managed to get into the forbidden area. They were caught and forced to walk in the same clothes in front of a procession to St Nicholas' Church, whilst the master and mistress of the two girls were ordered to attend the spiritual court at Durham where they were charged with aiding and abetting the two girls.

As the long struggle for universal male suffrage developed in the 19th century, so it was two women from North-east England who kick-started the parliamentary struggle for female suffrage. Josephine Butler from Dilston in Northumberland and Emily Davies, the daughter of the Rev. John Davies of Gateshead helped to put forward the first women's suffrage petition to parliament in 1866. It was signed by 15000 women and Emily Davies was one of two women chosen to present it to the radical M.P. John Stuart Mill. The petition was successfully presented, and while it did not succeed in bringing any women the vote, at least it raised the issue and laid down a marker for other campaigners in the future.

By the turn of the 20th century, as suffrage was extended to nearly all men, so more women in North-east England were beginning to demand their democratic rights and in 1900 the Newcastle and District Women's Suffrage Society was formed by a forceful woman by the name of Mona Taylor from Chipchase Castle. Soon Mona was busy walking the streets of Tyneside speaking at meetings in workplaces, factories and sometimes in those very same streets.

Ten years earlier in 1890 Mona Taylor had taken part in a conference, “to appeal to M.P.s for women’s rights” and towards the end of the same year she organised a conference of workers at Newcastle and chaired meetings when Millicent Fawcett toured the region on behalf of the Central National Society for Women’s Suffrage. The following year Mona became Vice President of the CNSWS and wrote a leaflet entitled, ‘Why Women Want Suffrage’ and it is reported that the CNSWS was very pleased with her as 45 000 of these leaflets were distributed. However, in those early days, it was still acknowledged that no real headway had been made and most women were still unaware of the suffrage issue. Indeed Mona Taylor summed up 25 years of agitation by stating that there was still a great need to convert the people of the country to the cause of Women’s votes and for people to lead in that work. There were many opponents of the right of women to vote, who thought that women were incapable of making reasoned decisions about who to vote for.

It wasn’t long before Mona began to find a number of influential supporters; other women who were tired of being treated as second-class citizens. This group included, Lisbeth Sim, who was married to an ILP organiser, the schoolmistress Florence Harrison Bell and also two female doctors who shared a practice and the same first name, Ethel Williamns and Ethel Bentham, the latter going on to become a Labour M.P. Their meeting place soon became settled as the Drawing Room café in Fenwick’s department store in Newcastle. This was a genteel setting for this potentially revolutionary movement but, as we shall see, not all the women, who were becoming known as ‘suffragettes’, were to be quite so genteel in their tactics.

Over the ensuing eight years the group grew, to such an extent that as so often happens with successful movements, it split in 1908. Some of them joined the more militant Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU), headed nationally by Emmeline Pankhurst, while the rest went to join the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (NUWSS), who were led by Millicent Fawcett. 1908 was also marked by a major public meeting on the Town Moor in Newcastle, when 3 000 women attended a rally, before, “marching down – banners flying – to Central Station to greet two women who’d just been released from a spell in prison for the cause of women’s suffrage.” Clearly there was still life in the movement. How did the women’s movement fare after the split in 1908?

The NUWSS was originally dominated by Liberal women who didn’t want to embarrass the Liberal government of the early 20th century and was led by Mona Taylor, who drove the organisation on. Unlike other parts of the country, Liberalism in North-east England couldn’t afford to alienate the working-classes. There were too many miners who supported the Liberals in the years leading up to the First World War.

It has been noted that the leadership of the women’s movement in the North-East was “distinctly middle to upper class” Perhaps one of the reasons for this was the male dominated nature of working-class society in North-east England. Unlike

some other industrial regions, such as Lancashire, where the female workforce in the cotton mills was very important, the industrial base of North-East England was dominated by heavy industries which largely employed men in what were seen as very masculine trades, such as coalmining, iron and steel production and shipbuilding. It was the men who tended to earn the money and held the economic power. Consequently, it has been said that life in North-east England, “went hand in hand with an enthusiastic adoption and approval of the Victorian domestic model – the man as bread winner and the woman as wife and mother” and the idea that women didn’t ‘work’ was clearly established as a, “social tenet and community ideal”. This cannot have made it easy for many women to challenge the status quo, where men were seen as ‘worthy’ of being given the vote as they earned the money and the fact that women were not allowed to vote in the early years of the 20th century was in the eyes of many simply reflecting their second-class social status. No wonder then that it was for the most part only the more wealthy and educated women in the region who had the confidence to challenge the male-dominated political system.

Those who did challenge the status quo included the Irish-born Lady Parsons, wife of prominent industrialist Sir Charles Parsons and Lady Blake, the wife of Sir Francis Blake. Perhaps it was the background of so many of the activists, which helped to set the tone of much of their work, including on one occasion, a missive, which asked, “will ladies with large kitchens sometimes arrange a meeting for servants and their friends?”

There are others who argue that as the movement grew however, so the suffragette movement in the region did become more working-class. The Newcastle Society was the first local society to work with the National Union to campaign for a change in election policy from support for the Liberals to the Labour Party. This was not accepted nationally, but recognition was given to the strong position of Labour women in the movement in the North-east. However, there were still several prominent suffragettes in the region who came from Liberal families, so there was a split, even though it has been argued that the Socialists had the most enlightened attitudes towards votes for women. The movement for female suffrage in the region was in danger of failure from its divisions.

The Newcastle Society met in the tearoom of the large department store of Fenwick on Northumberland Street. While naturally, suffragism was the main topic of conversation a range of social issues were discussed, including the state of the workhouses. The kind of campaigning which was planned in Fenwick’s went on throughout the region, while there was often a dilemma in choosing the right candidate at election times, as it wasn’t always clear which man would best take the issue of women’s votes forward.

Not all of the campaigning for women’s suffrage in North-east England was so genteel. There were those who were determined to be more militant and if

necessary strike out at the political establishment by doing damage and being prepared as a consequence to go to prison. Some of the acts which brought women into direct confrontation with the authorities in the North-east included, cutting telephone wires, burning down the pavilion in Heaton Park, smashing windows in the Globe Theatre in Gosforth, pouring corrosive liquid down letter boxes, and breaking windows in an office of the Northumberland Education various places around Tyneside including Barras Bridge Post Office, Gosforth Golf Club and Kenton railway station.”

It is reported that women in the North-east of England were involved in militant action at an early stage; even before the more militant Women’s Social and Political Union was formed. The then Liberal government minister, Winston Churchill was invited to Newcastle on February 4th and 5th 1909 and the Newcastle WPSU was determined to enlighten him on the suffragette issue. Accordingly, he was harassed from the moment he stepped off the train until the following afternoon, when he received a telegram saying, “lest you forget, Votes for Women must be in the King’s speech, signed Newcastle WSPU.” The earlier tactics were being eschewed by a more direct and insistent approach. The tactics were to become more direct when the next cabinet minister dared to come to the city.

Later in 1909, in July, Kathleen Brown, a militant, was released from prison and was met at the Central Station by 3 landaus and 2 brakes, all decked out in the Suffragette colours of green, white and violet along with an enormous crowd of supporters there to greet the returning heroine. The crowd made its way to the Turks Head Hotel where they had a celebration tea, served by staff who all wore ‘Votes for Women’ badges. This was followed by an open air meeting at the Haymarket when Kathleen spoke about her experience to the crowd, after there had been an initial meeting before Kathleen arrived home.

Another radical from the region was Marion Coates-Hanson from Middlesbrough in what was then part of Yorkshire. Deciding that the NUWSS was too sedate and that the WSPU was undemocratic, she joined the Women’s Freedom League (WFL) and helped to make the Middlesbrough branch the most important in Yorkshire. They were joined by Alice Schofield, a teacher, whose interest in suffragism had been aroused when she witnessed a speech by Emmeline Pankhurst in Manchester. Alice worked as a WFL organiser and came to Middlesbrough in 1909. She was speaking at an open-air meeting in Guisborough when she was rescued from a mob throwing rotten eggs and tomatoes, by Charles Coates, the elder brother of Marion Coates- Hanson. Charles and Alice married, and the two sisters-in-law began working together on Teesside for women’s rights. Despite the hostility, they didn’t give up and used some innovative and creative techniques, including drama to get their message across.

Back on Tyneside, on October 9th 1912, another cabinet minister was due in Newcastle. This time it was the Chancellor Lloyd George, who was to speak about

the budget. It was decided that 12 activists would respond by throwing stones in order to invite imprisonment. These twelve disciples of suffragism included the aforementioned Kathleen Brown, Lady Constance Lytton, and Emily Wilding Davison. Four women smashed windows in the Liberal Club on Pilgrim Street, resulting in their immediate arrest, an appearance in front of magistrates the next morning and a sentence of 14 days hard labour. As these women were being tried, so the other eight met and one of them, Winnifred Jones, went to the Palace Theatre where Lloyd George was due to speak. There, she threw a stone through a pane of the glass door and was immediately arrested. It is noted that the scenes that Saturday morning in Newcastle, were unprecedented and the publication, *Votes for Women* commented that, "all the trouble, turmoil and expense was caused by the presence in town of a dozen women who wished to question Lloyd-George on the government's attitude to women's suffrage".

Constance Lytton and Emily Davison were then arrested after Lytton threw a stone at the car carrying Lloyd George. When Lloyd George spoke, men in the audience took up the cause on behalf of the women, causing Lloyd George increasing discomfort leading to him becoming increasingly annoyed as the speech wore on, leading him to angrily say, "there are many ways of advancing a cause, but I think the very worst I ever heard is angering a great audience like this". Were the more militant tactics working? Should the Suffragette Movement use more militant and violent tactics when more peaceful methods have seemed to fail? The new year would see both types of tactic being used, with the more militant tactics leading to a tragedy involving a woman with Northumbrian roots.

1913 saw a lively and expanding NUWSS in the region. Membership increased in Hexham and Morpeth and there were also new societies in Houghton-le-Spring, Blackhill, Consett, Gosforth, Shotley Bridge, Spennymoor and Benton. In June 1913 the NUWSS organised marchers from outlying areas to go to a huge demonstration in Hyde Park, London, on the 26th July. There was a meeting at the Haymarket on June 18th after which the North-east contingent left Newcastle to go to London. In all, 100 Newcastle members, holding their banners aloft marched to London. They held impromptu meetings en route being joined by members of other societies, with the only opposition coming at Spennymoor where some stone throwing towards the women was reported.

Another initiative in 1913 in Newcastle was a Town Meeting called by the Lord Mayor, on 30th October so that the general public could vote on a resolution about women's suffrage. Leading up to the event, there were many meetings held by suffragettes, particularly important for them as anti-suffragist organisers had also recently arrived in the city. The presence of these opponents did not prevent the resolution, proposed by Ethel Williams, being carried by a three-to-one majority.

1913 also saw the most iconic and tragic event of the suffragette movement and there was a strong North-east link. This was the death of Emily Davidson at the Derby in June 1913. Emily was not born in Northumberland as is sometimes thought, but

rather her birthplace was Blackheath in Essex. However, her mother was from Northumberland and arguably Emily's roots were in the North-east. Emily attended Kensington High School and then Holloway College and seemed to have a glittering academic career ahead of her. However, while Emily was at Holloway College, her father died and Emily was forced to pay her own way by becoming a governess. Emily was able to continue her studies on a part-time basis and fulfilled her potential by gaining degrees from both Oxford and London Universities. Emily joined the WSPU in 1906 and by 1909 she had given up teaching to become a full-time worker for the WSPU.

Emily proved herself to be no mere talker in her membership of the WSPU. Indeed between 1909 and 1912, she was imprisoned no less than 7 times and in all but one occasion she went on hunger strike, being forcibly fed during three imprisonments. She rested and convalesced each time at Longhorsley in Northumberland, Emily's mother having returned to her native county to run a bakery and a sweet shop. Emily spoke about women's suffrage on her trips back home and became closer to the Newcastle WSPU members.

Emily's longest spell in prison was in 1912, when she spent six months in prison after being arrested in December 1911 for setting fire to pillar boxes. Emily went on hunger strike and was forcibly fed. She also managed to throw herself over a balcony on three occasions. Emily was very much a woman of action, whose personal motto was 'deeds not words'. She saw the need to suffer extreme hardship as part of the struggle and perhaps more ominously it is argued that she had decided that there was a need for a martyr. In an unpublished letter, Emily wrote: "the sacrifice varies according to circumstance. It may be loss of livelihood, position, wealth, friends, relatives and not least common, loss of health or even possibly life itself."

This perhaps explains why she was willing to take a great personal risk at the Derby on 4th June 1913, but it has been argued that this should not mean that it can be assumed that Davidson deliberately chose to commit suicide. In 1986, the trunk which had belonged to the solicitor appointed by the family at the inquest into Emily's death, was found and inside were located the possessions which Emily had had with her on that fateful June day. They included both a return train ticket and a race card, which was marked with the winners of the previous races. It is indeed hard to believe that a woman preparing to die would have marked all the winners of the day's previous races. Neville also points out that, "the most telling evidence has been produced thanks to modern technology. Image enhancement of the film of the tragedy taken by newsreel cameras clearly shows Emily trying to rein down the horse. Her intention, it seems, was to attach to the horse a WSPU flag which she had wrapped round her body". Whatever the real motivation, Davidson would become the martyr for the movement, which she had predicted would be needed for it to succeed. Emily's funeral was held in London on June 13th, but her body was then brought north by train for burial in Morpeth the following day, where she was buried on a hill in the churchyard of St Mary the Virgin.

1914 saw another by-election in North-west Durham, which was set to be a three-cornered fight. The Liberal candidate Aneurin Williams was a committed suffragist, but the North-east Federation decided to put their support behind the Labour candidate G.H. Stuart. This decision caused a large amount of debate within the suffrage movement. It was clearly a difficult decision but seen as a positive move for the future movement: Millicent Fawcett, argued that it was correct to stick to a policy of supporting socialist candidates: "I believe it would have been the end of the Labour policy if we hadn't supported Mr Stuart.....a good deal of work in preparation has been done in the constituency and our people up there are in close touch with the Labour party."

On 4th July 1914, the Bishop of Durham received a deputation, led by the Secretary of the Newcastle WPSU, who came to protest against the forcible feeding of women on hunger strike, while eight days later on July 12th, the morning service was disrupted by a protesting suffragette. As she was evicted she denounced the established church for not doing more to help suffragettes. The last act of militancy before the outbreak of war came on 14th July 1914, with the attempt to burn down Cocken Hall, the unoccupied residence belonging to the Earl of Durham. Within the month the country had become embroiled in the Great War and suffragism would find itself put on the back burner again. Yet the fact that women had to take up the jobs traditionally carried out by men, because so many of them were away at the war, meant that the end of the conflict in 1918 would see the partial suffrage of women for those aged 30 and above, followed by suffrage on the same basis as men in 1928.

Whilst not perhaps as well known as the work in other regions, the Suffragettes from North-east England played their part in bringing the cause of women's votes to the attention of the lawmakers of the day. The Suffragettes had campaigned in a region, which, in some parts, was also coming to terms with what now may be termed multiculturalism. As more working-class men and women won their democratic right to vote, how were people from different backgrounds learning to live together in North-east England?

Timeline

1417	Matilda Usher and Margaret Burgh 'invade forbidden area' of Durham Cathedral
1866	Emily Davies puts forward the first women's suffrage petition to Parliament
1890	Mona Taylor organises of workers in Newcastle
1906	Emily Davison joins the Women's Political and Social Union (WPSU)

- 1908 Women's Suffrage Movement splits into the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS)
- 1908 3 000 attend rally on Newcastle's Town Moor
- 1909 Emily Davison becomes full-time worker for WPSU
- 1909 Winston Churchill harassed by Newcastle WPSU members on visit to city
- 1909 July – Kathleen Brown released from prison
- 1912 October – Lloyd George harassed by Newcastle WPSU members on visit to city
- 1909-12 Emily Davison imprisoned 7 times – went on hunger strike 6 times - forcibly fed 3 times
- 1912 Emily Davison spends 6 months in prison
- 1913 4th June Emily Davison injured at Derby in Epsom – dies shortly afterwards – funeral in London 13th June – burial in Morpeth the following day
- 1913 June 18th meeting in Newcastle, followed by large contingent going to rally in Hyde Park on July 26th
- 1913 October 30th Town Meeting in Newcastle resolution in favour of Women's Suffrage , proposed by Ethel Williams, being carried by a three-to-one majority
- 1914 4th July - Bishop of Durham receives deputation, led by the Secretary of the Newcastle WPSU, protesting against the forcible feeding of women on hunger strike
- 12th July - the morning service at Durham Cathedral disrupted by a protesting suffragette
- 14th July - attempt to burn down Cocken Hall, the unoccupied residence belonging to the Earl of Durham
- 4th August Britain joins First World War
- 1919 All women in Britain over 30 given the vote

Chapter 7

How the Irish Settled in North-east England

Introduction

There is a large Irish community in North-east England, many of whom are descended from those who came here in the 19th century to escape poverty and the terrible potato famine in Ireland and who came to work in the coalmines and the other new industries which were developing in the region, such as shipbuilding, iron and steel and engineering. Large influxes of Irish to some other parts of Britain caused numerous social problems. North-east England never experienced the same scale of problems as some other areas did. So what did happen?

Early problems

It was not always sweetness and light between the Irish and the local communities on Tyneside and across the region. The Irish had begun to arrive in large numbers in the early years of the 19th century. When the original St Andrew's Church on Pilgrim Street was opened, on 11th February 1798, there were no obvious Irish names among the members. However by 8th December 1823, names of members included McKenna, Connolly, McGuire, Boylan, Donnelly and Brennan. The Irish were becoming established on Tyneside. This was to be only the start as there was a great increase in the Irish population in the decades after 1823.

There was also a sizeable Northern Irish Protestant community in the region from the beginning of the 19th century. As far back as 1817, an Orange March was mentioned in the autobiography of the Tyneside Victorian entertainer Billy Purvis, entitled, '*The Life of Billy Purvis*'. In the same year a book called '*Loyal Orangemen's Song Book*' was published in North Shields, whilst '*The Orangemen's Companion*' was also published in 1817. In the 1840's a local Protestant organisation, the South Shields Loyal Standard Association, held a dinner for seamen at which, the *Gateshead Observer* reported that, "the Rev. Mr Griffiths, curate of St. Hilda's Church, instructed his audience to set a 'good example' when they visited other parts of the world. This was important not just in 'heathen lands', he said, but 'shores where the people were sunk in Roman Catholic idolatry and superstition.'" That this hostile attitude towards the Irish could be expressed in more violent terms, was amply demonstrated in June 1846, when the *Gateshead Observer* reported that between three and four hundred Irishmen had attacked their fellow English workers, who had retaliated, leaving a number of Irish men as casualties. Notably the newspaper refused to get involved in further stoking the fires of prejudice, concluding that, "meanwhile

we will not enter into the causes of the conflict”.

It was just after 1846 that the massive Irish immigration into the region occurred, in the wake of the terrible Potato Famine in Ireland. The 1840's saw further violence between Protestants and Catholics in the Consett area, which was divided almost like modern day Belfast between Protestant Consett and Catholic Blackhill. Then in 1851, came the Sandgate riot, by the banks of the Tyne in Newcastle. This was begun by a Protestant preacher, who went by the name of Ranter Dick, who decided to heavily criticise the Catholic faith. The local Irish were not keen to turn the other cheek on this occasion and were not prepared to tolerate a slight on their faith. Indeed it was quite common that they would spontaneously react in a dramatic way, when they felt offended. It was no wonder then, that there were problems one Sunday evening in May 1851 when, in the words of a song written after the event, “Ranter Dick preached frey a chair/while singing oot wi' cuddy blair/'an gi'en the Pope a canny share/ o' hell-fire comfort and declare, sparked the Horrid war l' Sandgyet”.

According to *The Tablet*, the Irish, “unable to restrain their feelings commenced an attack on the preacher, who had speedily to fly to save himself from a severe chastisement; some of the people present took part with the preacher; the Irish rallied on their side and a general row commenced; for an hour or two in spite of the police, the Irish were in possession of that part of the town...upwards of sixty Irishman were taken into custody”.

The riot in Sandgate in Newcastle on 11th May saw an unlikely alliance between local people and the local police against the Irish. The police confronted the Irish crowd and made it clear that they wanted them to disperse. The Irish crowd refused to disperse, began to fight against the police and were soon on top. However, news of the confrontation quickly spread to the teeming tenements, which wound their way down to the Tyne, housing which was full of local Geordies. These locals, often antagonistic towards the police themselves, came out in support of the police against the Irish and as a result, the combination of local police and local residents proved too strong for the Irish crowd.

Meanwhile in the mid-1850's Lady Londonderry, wife of the notorious landowner and coalmine owner Lord Londonderry, was busy with some anti-Irish work of her own in County Durham. She tried very hard to stop Catholics in Seaham Harbour, who numbered as many as 500 from having a Catholic church on her land.

There was a serious clash between Irish Catholics and their countrymen of an Orange persuasion on 12th July 1856, the 166th anniversary of the victory of William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne and still the main event in the Ulster marching season. On this day, the Orange Lodge at the Black Swan on Clayton Street had arranged a procession to a fellow Orange Lodge in Felling with the

marchers to be joined by members of a third lodge from Gateshead en route. Irish Catholics known as 'Ribbonmen', were waiting and trouble ensued. The procession went from Newcastle to Gateshead making its way along the Sunderland Road, until it got close to the Felling Gate, where the Ribbonmen blocked further passage. As the Orangemen retreated, it has been said that, "the Ribbonmen closed in and 'avenged on the Tyne, the defeat of James on the Boyne."

Another example of violence was in Sunderland on 27th September 1858, when an Irish publican named Michael Digney, lost his license to sell alcohol, while a rival beer seller, Michael Norton was able to continue in his trade. This so enraged Digney, that he went round with some friends to Norton's pub and attacked him. A riot ensued. The result of this trouble was a session at the magistrates. This was reported in racist terms in the *Sunderland Herald* on 1st October 1858; "As complainant after complainant came into this court, and the unmistakable Milesian phiz popped up in the witness box, the display of adhesive plaster was seen to be most abundantly spread over each luckless skull.....(but) the breadth of the plaster did not exactly correspond – a broadly hinted insinuation that Pat trusted more to the number of square inches in the plaster than to the strength of his case on its own unadorned merits"

As late as 1869 there were problems, this time brought about by the visit to North Shields of another notorious anti-Catholic preacher who went by the name of Murphy. It is reported that his visit, "sparked off considerable disorder, shots being fired into the hall where his meeting was taking place, followed by a prolonged combat between police and a crowd of Irish Catholics."

How did the Irish become accepted?

It might seem like the Irish Catholic and British Protestant communities were not likely to forge a healthy relationship in the region, but when one considers that these were isolated incidents, then one can well imagine that things may have been much worse. On Tyneside, the Irish did become a remarkably well-integrated community, to the extent that, long before there was a Green party, the colours of the Labour Party, the dominant party, in Newcastle were as much Irish green as Socialist red.

Perhaps it was actually a major world event, which finally sealed the deal and ensured that sectarianism had no major role to play in North-East life. Both Scots and Irish communities were perceived by the local media as playing a major part in the war effort during the First World War. Indeed in the days after the Easter Rising of 1916, it has been reported that, the *Newcastle Weekly Chronicle* played up the loyalty of the 'local' Irish men in the army in the face of German provocation. Regular reports of their bravery paved the way."

The scale of the sacrifice can be seen by what happened to the Tyneside Irish on 1st July 1916; the first day of the Battle of the Somme. At 7. 40 a.m. the 103rd

Brigade (Tyneside Irish) left its position and advanced towards the front. They were unaware of what was happening ahead as all communication had ceased and a fog in the ground meant that they could not see far ahead. They only went far enough forward to encourage scything machine gun fire and an accurate artillery barrage from the Germans. Despite this, in the words of one account, 'the forward movement was maintained until only a few scattered soldiers were left standing.' Although often described as 'glorious', the martyrdom of the Tyneside Irish was in reality a desperate affair. Some units suffered 70 per cent casualties before even making the front line and it has been noted that, "two years in the making, the Tyneside Irish had lasted just 80 minutes as a fighting formation." This terrible sacrifice had proved just how loyal the Tyneside Irish were.

But then even as far back as the 1840's the potential for mutual respect was there, as positive expressions of Irish identity were well received, from earlier days of Irish settlement in the region. On the 21st March 1846, the *Gateshead Observer* reported that, "On St. Patrick's Day (Tuesday), the members walked in procession through the streets of Newcastle and Gateshead, with music and banners. The number was about two hundred; and they presented a brilliant spectacle, arrayed in their peculiar dresses and decorations, of which green formed the predominant colour."

Roger Cooter has summed up the assimilation of the Irish in North-east English society, by stating that incidents such as the Sandgate riot and the opposition of Lady Londonderry were the exception not the rule. Compared to events in places such as Stockport and Glasgow, the Irish assimilated very well in North-east England. Perhaps ultimately the reason why the Irish assimilated came down to the numbers game. There were pockets of the region where there were a high number of Irish-born people. Jarrow's population in the 1860's was about 3 000; by 1871 it had grown to 18 000 and by 1891 33 000, of whom one-third were Irish, many attracted to work in the chemical works. However, in the middle of the 19th century, while the Irish-born population on Tyneside was as high as 7.9%, it was still less than the 17% in Liverpool, 16% in Glasgow and 12% in Manchester. It may well have been simply that there were not quite enough Irish on Tyneside and in the wider north-east for them to be really perceived as a major threat, especially at a time of expanding industries in the region.

Perhaps another factor was that when North-east miners were hewing coal deep underground, coping with threats to their lives such as gas leaks and roof falls, they weren't too bothered where their work mates or 'marras' came from – not when their life might depend on them. The background of one of these miners, Norman Cornish from Spennymoor, who has gone on to find fame as an artist, neatly shows another feature of North-east life. One of Norman's paternal great grandfathers was William O'Hara who hailed from Sligo, whilst his other paternal great grandfather was called John Cornish who was the son of a tin miner from Cornwall. Norman Cornish also had a maternal great grandfather from

Lancashire. Norman Cornish is perhaps the archetypal North-eastern person with roots in a number of places.

I will leave the final word on the assimilation of Irish people to Harold Heslop, the North-east writer, who wrote in his autobiography about working with Irish immigrants when he went from his home in New Hunwick, near Bishop Auckland to Harton Colliery in South Shields in 1915. Heslop wrote that,

“All my new fellow-workers were of Irish extraction. ... I belonged to that generation which had forgotten to be angry with the invasion. In my time Roman Catholic churches had lost themselves in the clutter of housing where women lived and bred. They were the first Irishmen I had met. Later I was to recognize many of them as consummate miners and far-seeing trade union leaders, even though I was more aware of their being disgruntled, landless peasants.”

Conclusion

The North-east has a proud record on integration. In the long run, the Irish assimilated well into the region and became part of the people of North-east England in a way which didn't always happen so easily in other parts of Britain. If you were working in a place as dangerous as a coalmine and your life depended on your relationship with your workmates, then you didn't have time to worry where they came from. Certainly, there were teething troubles and it wasn't all sweetness and light. But surely that illustrates and even more important point; when new group of people come to our region, there are usually tensions, indeed it is to be expected, but these tensions are traditionally overcome and the incomers go on to play their part in defining what it is to be from North-east England.

Timeline

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1798 | St. Andrew's Church opened on Pilgrim Street – no obviously Irish names in church register |
| 1817 | Orange March mentioned in autobiography of North-east entertainer Billy Purvis |
| 1817 | Loyal Orangeman's Songbook published in North Shields. The Orangeman's Companion also published |
| 1823 | St Andrew's Church register contains numerous Irish names |
| 1840's | Provocative anti-Catholic speech at dinner held by South Shields Loyal Standard Association |

- 1845 Potato Blight occurs in Ireland – leading to Potato Famine
- 1846 Successful St. Patrick's Day March through Newcastle and Sunderland
- 1846 June – large battle between Irish and English workers in Gateshead
- 1840's Violence between Irish and English in the Consett area
- 1851 Sandgate Riot provoked by 'Ranter Dick'
- Mid-1850's Lady Londonderry tries to prevent a Catholic Church being built in Seaham
- Mid-19th century Irish make up 7.9 % of population of Tyneside
- 1856 12th July Clash between Orangemen and Catholics in Felling, Gateshead
- 1858 Riot in Sunderland
- 1869 Disorder in North Shields
- 1871 One-third of population of Jarrow are Irish
- 1916 July - Tyneside Irish Regiment suffer heavy losses at start of the Battle of the Somme

Chapter Eight

The Assimilation of the Yemenis

Yemeni seamen began settling in the port of South Shields from the late 19th Century, finding employment in the coal and shipping industries. They lodged together in boarding houses, because they were prevented by law from staying in private homes with local families. Indeed there was a general distrust of foreign seamen throughout Britain in the years after the turn of the 20th century. with particular anger being aimed towards Chinese seamen. In Cardiff, the *Maritime Herald* claimed that “you know, we know and they know that a Chinaman isn’t worth a toss as a seaman; that his only claim to indulgence is that he is cheap.” They were not to be treated as equals and were not seen as worthy of equal rights. In London, in 1908 the docks saw riots when British seamen expressed their anger at the presence of Chinese competitors. In various parts of Britain a feeling of being threatened economically by foreign seamen prevailed. How would the Yemenis fare in South Shields?

It was in this national atmosphere, as a feeling of loyalty to Britain was arguably at its peak, in the lead-up to and outbreak of the First World War, that the Yemeni community became established in South Shields, in what had previously been an almost exclusively white community. As we have seen, there had been a large influx of Irish into north-east England during the 19th century and, although there were some problems, this had largely passed off without the sectarianism which has long characterized other places. The Irish were arguably following the work and came to Tyneside when jobs were plentiful. How would Arabs, who looked different and followed a very different religion and customs, fare in the more economically and politically more challenging environment of the 1920’s and 1930’s as jobs became more scarce?

For a number of years the Yemenis were refused entry to cafes and other public places, and by the late 1920’s the atmosphere in South Shields towards the Arabs was often hostile. At this time, the letters pages of the *Shields Gazette* regularly contained letters against the Yemeni seamen, often sent in anonymously above pen names such as ‘Freedom’, ‘A Mill Dam White Man’ and ‘One who did his bit’. October 1929 saw the Wall Street Crash in New York and a wave of economic problems and unemployment began to spread around much of the world. In this situation in 1929, the National Union of Seamen (NUS) stepped up its campaign against the number of Arab seamen at British ports. On 9th December, it sent a deputation to the Board of Trade, part of the government, about this matter to complain about the number of Yemeni boatmen being employed. The deputation also attacked Arab boarding-house masters for smuggling men in. It went on to portray the Arabs as a social menace, who had many illegitimate children who would then go on to be a burden on the state.

There was a strain of racism which was noticeable among members of the local council, as demonstrated by a report from a 1929 council meeting when Councillor Cheeseman commented that having examined the Arabs' customs, languages and general conditions he could honestly say that, 'it is not fit for them to live among white people'. *The Seaman*, the NUS house journal, tried to temper these kinds of claims a little by stating that, "we have no kick with the Arabs as such, but charity begins at home." People were becoming scared; for their jobs and their livelihoods, and the Yemenis provided a convenient scapegoat.

This pressure, along with that of the National Union of Seamen, whose right-wing leadership was against the employment of Yemenis, led to a rota system being introduced. This made it more difficult for the Yemenis to gain places on the boats. Responding to this, the left-wing Seamen's Minority Movement, a breakaway from the NUS, established a close relationship with the Yemenis main spokesperson Ali Said and opened an office at 6, Brewery Lane, while many Arab seamen manned the picket line outside the NUS offices. The Minority Movement held a series of meetings at Mill Dam to win support for the cause of the Arab Seamen.

On 24th July 1930 speakers included Peter O'Donnell, the chair of the Committee of Action. O'Donnell strongly condemned the NUS and urged the men to refuse to sign the PC5, which had to be signed to join the rota system. It was stated at the meeting that 1 100 white seamen in South Shields and 900 Arabs and Somalis were supporting the boycott. Some Arab seamen continued to sign on to work on ships during this period, but the picketing of the NUS and Board of Trade offices was generally successful. It has been noted that, "the temperature at the Mill Dam was clearly rising fast.....the explosion came on Saturday 2nd August when a 'riot' broke out at Mill Dam."

By August 1 there were sympathetic strikes in Liverpool and Barry. The big confrontation was to occur the next day, and was to be seen by sections of the local press as a racist incident. The conflict was started by an abusive comment directed towards Yemeni seamen by a white seaman named Hamilton. Hamilton had declined to sign the rota, having taken a place on a boat left free by the Arabs. It was claimed by the Minority Movement that Hamilton was an agent provocateur and if this was indeed the case, then he could be deemed to be an extremely successful one, as he was soon attacked by the Yemenis, who in turn were charged by fifty baton-wielding policemen..There was no direct fighting between white seamen and the Yemenis; rather the fighting was between the Yemenis and the police. In the battle which ensued, P.C. Harry Gash had his lung punctured with what was a near fatal wound, another two constables, Addison and Darling also being stabbed, whilst the Arabs were driven back to their main area of Holborn.

The next day the local press reported the riot in racist terms, almost all of them reporting it as a race riot. This was despite the fact that there was no direct confrontation between Yemenis and white seamen. There was only vague mention of the issue of the work rota.

The *Shields Gazette* even began to report that Constable Gash had been killed in the riot until a young reporter, Jim Slater, corrected the mistake and the newspaper also claimed that the Watch Committee of the local council described the trouble on more than one occasion as an "Arab riot" or "Arab riots". On August 18th, it was reported in the *Shields Gazette* that,

"The case for the prosecution was put forward by Mr. A.G. Flintoff, who alleged that at the meetings under the auspices of the Seamen's Minority Movement men were urged to stop others signing on under P.C. 5 form and the rota system. When two men were about to sign on there was a cry of "Don't let the 'scabs' sign" and "Now's your chance". The rioting followed, knives, stones and sticks being used."

Three months later, in November 1930, the *Shields Gazette* reported the opening of the trial of those accused in connection with the Mill Dam Riot, at Durham Assizes Court; "Assize Court at Durham presented a cosmopolitan appearance today, when as a sequel to the Mill Dam Riot at South Shields on August 2nd, 19 Arabs and six white men were charged before Mr. Justice Roche." It was also noted that the men who had attacked P.C. Gash were described as "childish". This was followed, eight days later, by graphic descriptions in the *Shields Gazette* on 19th November 1930, of the violence alleged to have been perpetrated by Arab men against the police:

"Inspector Goss, of the River Tyne Police, described seeing Ali Anon attack P.C. Walker with a knife, and said that Abduda Saleh attacked him (witness) with a length of chain. He found about sixteen Arabs armed with knives, sticks and stones...."

The same edition did also report the role of Hamilton and another provocative character, who went by the name of Bradford:

"In spite of the provocative attitude of Bradford and Hamilton there was peace until about 1.30, when Hamilton produced a steel lined whip and flourished it before the crowd, shouting, 'Come on you black _____; try to stop me signing on'."

The seamen were provoked beyond endurance and a rush was made towards the Board of Trade offices, in which both white and coloured men participated."

Despite the problems which boiled to the surface in such a violent way during the Mill Dam Riot, the Yemenis were able to establish their community as an integrated part of South Shields. Indeed the riot was to be the turning point. Thirty-eight Arabs who spent one night in the Poor House were deported and the Arabs' spirit was crushed. It was now hard for them to be portrayed as a threat.

In the event it was an interview in the *Newcastle Evening Chronicle* which was to see their fortunes improve. Hassan Mohamed from the Arab community reported the situation for the Arabs as follows, poignantly published on Christmas Eve 1931;

“I do not think the public know the extent to which the Arabs are suffering. Many have had to pawn clothing and other personal belongings to buy food. There are scores of Arabs in Holborn who are living on one meal a day. We do not grumble, everything comes from God and the men are suffering quietly; they only want a chance to earn a living and believe that they only have the British flag behind them”

From being perceived to be a threat, the Arabs were now transformed into objects of pity. This is portrayed in the character of George from the Peter Mortimer play *Riot*, who for most of the play is very much against the Arabs saying at one point that the Arab wants to “come here, steal our jobs, seduce our women...”. Towards the end of the play, he is seen trying to stop a policeman from deporting the main Arab character, Yussuf. There was continued prejudice but the incidents and their intensity did gradually diminish as the 1930’s wore on. Perhaps it was the distinctive identity of the people of north-east England which helped this to happen. The Arabs’ children began to speak in Geordie accents, while it has also been noted that “the whole ethos of Tyneside working-class culture was anathema to the bullying on which racism is built.”

This point of view is an echo of the comments of Inspector Crawley, chief of Newcastle police, speaking after huge anti-fascist demonstrations in the city against Mosley’s Blackshirts on May 13th and 14th 1934, which led to considerable disturbances. Inspector Crawley commented to the Home Office that Mosley and his men were provocative to Northern working people, despite the high unemployment in the region at the time. This seems to suggest that while economic fears could provoke a backlash against incomers they were not enough to initiate a long-term political hostility in terms of the growth of fascist politics in the region. The Fascists did attempt to stir trouble up in South Shields on 3rd November 1935, with a meeting addressed by Mosley at the Palace Cinema near to where most of the Yemenis lived. Although Blackshirts arrived from as far away as Leeds, London and Liverpool as well as Newcastle, Mosley’s attempt to stir up trouble for the Yemenis failed. Fighting broke out and the Blackshirts retreated, either being chased away or leaving in buses which were subject to “a shower of stones”. The people of South Shields were showing their new-found solidarity with the Yemenis in no uncertain terms.

In the end the Yemeni community in South Shields did become an accepted part of the town as the twentieth century wore on, and even an example to other parts of the country on how racial integration can work. A number of reasons have been put forward as to why this happened and South Shields became, in the

words of Ussuf Abdullah, the service co-ordinator of the South Shields mosque, “a harmonious mix”.

South Shields in the second half of the 20th century

It can be seen then that the story of the integration of the Arab population in South Shields during the 20th century is an example of local identity changing and causing people to find solidarity with people from overseas, and eventually allowing them to become integrated into an inclusive identity. Indeed South Shields became something of a model for racial integration throughout Britain. In October 1958, an edition of the *Sunday Sun* included a full-page spread about South Shields which was headlined, ‘The Town That has Solved its Colour Problem’ and went on to describe how, “since that fateful day in August 1930, South Shields had become a model of racial harmony, with Arabs, Somalis, Indians and Pakistanis now fully integrated into the community.” Three and a half years later, this theme was picked up by the national press as on 1st March 1962, David Bean informed *Guardian* readers, that “Shields is a study in integration; a place where colour prejudice died years ago”

The mosque in South Shields even became world famous for a moment when heavyweight world champion Muhammad Ali had his third marriage blessed there, by himself, in mid July 1977 as part of a visit to Tyneside, which also saw Ali visit Pendower School for Handicapped Children, Grainger Park Boys Club and Denton Boys Club, all in Newcastle. Ali became the second Afro-American hero to be feted with a procession through Tyneside, following in the redoubtable footsteps of singer, actor and activist, Paul Robeson, who had visited Britain in 1949. Ali also said that he would return, “to raise funds for fellow Muslims on Tyneside...”, although at the time of writing this has not happened. The visit of Muhammad Ali, which had originally also seen a plan for the world champion to perform in a South Shields boxing booth, seemed to cement the successful integration of the Muslim community in South Shields.

The situation today is complicated. There have been some stirrings of trouble since 9/11, including a mosque attacked with a petrol bomb and graffiti scrawled on the wall in the immediate aftermath of the attack on the Twin Towers. However, there can be no doubt that the settlement of the Yemenis has left a positive legacy in South Shields. Racism can be found across Britain and indeed the world. In that context, it would be wrong to suggest that South Shields is a particularly bad area for racist activity today.

Timeline

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|-------------------------------|---|
| Late 19 th Century | Yemeni seamen begin settling in South Shields |
| 1908 | Riots in London against Chinese seamen |

- Late 1920's Atmosphere in South Shields towards Yemenis often Hostile
- 1929 National Union of Seamen step up their campaign against Arab Seamen
- 1929 Hostility to Yemenis expressed at South Shields council meeting
- 1929 Left-wing Seamen's Minority Movement form close relationship with Yemeni seamen in South Shields
- 1930 24th July – meeting held by Seamen's Minority Movement hold one of a number of meetings at Mill Dam, South Shields to win support for Yemenis
- 1930 Late – July -Yemenis and some white seamen boycott new rota system aimed at excluding Yemenis from jobs on boats sailing from South Shields
- 1930 1st August Mill Dam Riot
- 1930 November – 19 Yemenis and 6 white men charged at Durham Assizes Court
- 1931 24th December – Letter from Hassan Mohammad published in Evening Chronicle highlighting plight of Yemenis remaining in South Shields after numerous deportations
- 1935 November – failed attempt by Blackshirts to stir up trouble in South Shields
- 1958 October – Sunday Sun article – 'South Shields; the Town That Solved its Colour Problem'
- 1962 March – South Shields described in The Guardian as a 'study in integration'
- 1977 July – Muhammad Ali has third wedding in mosque in South Shields
- 2001 September - South Shields mosque firebombed and vandalised in wake of 9/11 attacks in USA

Chapter 9

Silencing the Drumbeat

The Wall Street Crash of October 1929 had huge ramifications across the world. All around the globe, people lost their jobs as others had less money to buy the goods, which factories, shipyards and other places of manufacture could build, forcing them to close. The desperation of people in one European country saw the rise of the racist National Socialist (Nazi) Party in Germany, while Britain saw the establishment of the anti-Semitic British Union of Fascists. How would the people of North-east England respond to these developments?

British Union of Fascists (BUF) was established in 1932 out of the ashes of the New Party. Its leader was Oswald Mosley, who had previously been a Labour government minister, but had left the Labour party after his plan for dealing with the depression had been rejected by the Labour government of which he was a minister. The British Union of Fascists, or Blackshirts, quickly built up their membership and were threatening to become a major force in British politics until the public relations disaster provoked by their savagery at dealing with hecklers at a huge rally at Olympia in London in 1934.

By the time of the Olympia meeting of 1934, the BUF had gained a foothold in North-east England. Indeed *The Journal* reported on 9th May 1934 that, “within the past three months, Newcastle has achieved the unfortunate distinction of becoming one of the storm centres of aggressive Fascism in Britain”, going on to say that, “since 1 April this year there have been no less than 14 street fights in Newcastle and Gateshead”. Part of the troubles had been an attempt to break the labour movement in the north-east including the smashing of the plate-glass windows in the Workers’ Bookshop on Westgate Road in Newcastle-upon-Tyne, and the tearing down of Socialist posters at Armstrong College in the city.

It was a similar story of violence in nearby Sunderland, as here BUF meetings were prevented from taking place in February 1934 and again in May. Along the Tyne from Newcastle, in North Shields, the writer Tom Hadaway, recalled the scene, as blackshirted fascists led by a drummer came for a rally, noting that they were met by a “vigorously hostile crowd of dockside people”, who proceeded to charge the Blackshirts’ platform leaving banners getting kicked around whilst the Blackshirts fled. Hadaway concluded his memories by wondering, “what (had) happened to the drum”.

There were more huge anti-fascist demonstrations on the 13th and 14th May 1934, when a Fascist by the name of Mr Beckett appeared, ready to speak.. On 14th May, *The Journal* reported that after altercations on Blackett Street and Westgate Road, “several of the Blackshirts pursued their opponents into

doorways, knocked them down, and were in turn struck down”, while at the monument to Joseph Cowen at the bottom of Westgate Road, “a crowd of ‘several thousands’ was gathering and this ‘enormous crowd refused to give Mr. Beckett a hearing”.

The chief of Newcastle police since 1925 had been an Inspector Crawley, who stated that Mosley was largely to blame for any trouble caused, and that an open meeting , “invites disturbers”, especially, “in the case of a novel, perhaps foreign brand of politics”. Crawley further claimed that Mosley’s style of clothing, and manner were, “definitely provocative to North country types, including a large number of unemployed in this distressed area.” The British Union of Fascists can be said to have always had a hard time in the region, because of the culture of welcoming others which originated from the Liberal and Labour cultures working people had been educated in. This point is backed up by what Crawley wrote to Sir Vernon Kell, on 9th June 1934, that “despite the inspired optimism of the Fascists to Newcastle, it would be difficult for the Police to conceive of an area where Fascism is more at variance with the trend of thought of the general public.”

This opinion was to be supported by a series of events which took place in the summer of 1934, adding to the discomfort of the Blackshirts. On 1st June, their office at Abbey Terrace in Gateshead was completely wrecked. Mosley’s portrait was ripped into tiny pieces and there were many other acts of vandalism blamed on the Greyshirts or Anti-fascist League, who strenuously denied the allegations. Despite their problems, it is estimated that there were 500 BUF members in the region at the time and Mosley still planned a mini Nuremberg Rally on Newcastle’s Town Moor. Antifascists were equally determined to stop it. The AFL and Trades Councils planned counter demonstrations so that by June 11th, *The Journal* was calling on Mosley to cancel his demonstration and by June 21st the *Daily Worker* was reporting that there would be three marches from Mill Lane and Shields Road, both in Newcastle and Windmill Hills in Gateshead. The marches were to meet at a rally in Newcastle’s Haymarket close to the Town Moor and soon the Home Office were informing Mosley that ten Newcastle police could not guarantee the safety of the Blackshirts. It was clear that the Blackshirts would be blamed for any disorder and so Mosley suddenly postponed his event.

One particularly prominent person in the region who opposed fascism was the M.P. for Jarrow, Ellen Wilkinson. Her commitments were both varied and involved helping people suffering in Europe. In the 1930’s the two most important causes for Ellen were the battle against unemployment and the struggle against international fascism. Ellen hated fascism, with its authoritarian structures, without trade unions or socialism and argued that such a system, “led logically to the total denial of human rights, the extermination of liberal ideas and the persecution of all who held them”. What did Ellen do to oppose fascism?

There were two main ways in which Ellen was able to combat fascism, before the outbreak of the Second World War. Firstly, there was her work in connection to the rise of Nazism in Germany. In the late 1920's through her links with the German underground, including German socialists, Ellen was able to foresee the dangers of Hitler before many others. In 1932, just prior to Hitler coming to power, Ellen articulated these fears at the NUDAW conference in a speech, in which, referring to the street violence of the Nazis, she said that in her recent visit to Germany she had seen men, like the delegates who were listening to her, whose eyes had been smashed with steel whips. Ellen also contributed to the British Relief Committee for the Relief of Victims of German fascism. Ellen raised funds and helped them with propaganda to let people know what was happening to those who dared to show dissent in Nazi Germany. To this end Ellen addressed many gatherings across the country to win support for the work of the committee.

In addition to this work, Ellen helped anti-fascist refugees who came to our shores and was saddened by opposition by trade unions who were fearful that refugees would be competition in a jobs market already decimated by the worldwide recession after the Wall Street Crash. Ellen also disagreed with those in the House of Commons who did not see the plight of anti-fascists in Germany as their affair. Ellen's support for German and Spanish anti-fascists led to her being known as the 'Pocket Pasionaria' after the prominent Spanish anti-fascist Dolores Ibarurri, the Spanish Republican leader, who was also a Communist and a Basque. One of Ellen's triumphs in this area was her successful persuasion of Sir Samuel Hoare, a generally unsupportive Home Secretary, to allow in Communist members of the Reichstag who had evaded capture in the crackdown after the Reichstag fire in February 1933.

Along with numerous men from the region who joined the International Brigades, Ellen Wilkinson also helped fight fascism in Spain and in 1937 she phoned the *Sunday Sun* from a besieged Madrid:

“From where I'm speaking, it's deafening,' she shouted. 'There goes another one. Shelling has been continuous all day.... Another shell has fallen – it was very close this time. In the street where we are staying, several houses have been blown up in the last two or three days. This is going to make all our people at home feel terribly nervous. Do please tell them not to worry too much. We are keeping in shelter as much as possible and taking every care of ourselves.”

In the same year, people in the region responded to the crisis in Spain by accepting 20 Basque children as refugees. Some of them stayed in the region long-term, one becoming a shop steward at Swan Hunter's shipyard in Wallsend. Working people of North-east England also showed their anti-fascist credentials over the issue of the SS Linaria. It was believed that the load it was taking from the region on one occasion was that of explosives bound for Franco's armies in Spain and consequently the sailors who were supposed to load it simply refused.

Ellen's anti-fascist work continued during the war. An anti-Nazi refugee whose activities as chairperson of the socialist students at Prague University had come to the attention of the Gestapo and forced her to flee to Britain, was moved to talk about the help she received from Ellen and how despite having a degree, she never got a reply from about 200 applications for work. In desperation she wrote to the Minister of State for Education. Ellen responded by studying her case and deciding to give her the training grant to which her husband would have been eligible for his part in the war effort. In return, the recipient stated that, Ellen's unorthodox act, "not only rescued us from destitution, but restored my shaken belief in human values".

The greatest horrors of this era arguably took place at the Nazi death camps, such as Auschwitz and Belsen-Bergen. Ellen was the chairperson of the Labour Party Conference of 1945 and took time out from the celebration of Labour's victory in the general election of that year to move a resolution which acknowledged the debt which the Labour movement owed to those who had died in the concentration camps and those who had survived after the great fight against fascism. Ellen said:

"The service of these men, women and children to the common cause of human freedom will not be forgotten. These great souls, Socialist, Communists, Jews and a cross-section of all creeds, stood up to torture and....died in secret for faiths that were in them.....They went with their heads held high, each to face the fires of the crematorium".

It is further reported that those listening to this appeal to the qualities of compassion and empathy within the delegates, passed the resolution in silence with every delegate standing as a show of respect to those who had lost their lives in the struggle against fascism.

Ellen Wilkinson was not the only person from North-east England who was involved in notable actions against fascism during the Second World War. On 12 April 1945 the British Second Army were able to break into Germany after the Rhine crossing, and 8 Corps was approached by the German Military Commander at Bergen-Belsen with a view to negotiating a truce and avoiding a battle in the area of Belsen Concentration Camp. There were known to be 45-55,000 internees in the Concentration Camp of whom a very large number were reported to be suffering from typhus, typhoid, tuberculosis and gastro-enteritis. There was no bread and very little food and the electricity and water supply had failed. There were also in occupation of the area 800 Wehrmacht, 1,500 Hungarians with their wives and families, and certain SS Prison Guards. The situation was desperate.

It was the Durham Light Infantry who were the liberators of Belsen, and in particular 113 L.A.A. REGIMENT R.A. (D.L.I.) T.A. The situation at Belsen Concentration Camp between 13 April and 21 May 1945 was dire when the Durham Light Infantry reached it. There was a large concentration camp there with a tank training centre nearby and a p.o.w camp with 800 Russian prisoners and a military hospital. The danger of disease was so great that it was agreed that there should be a truce in the interests of both the British troops involved and the internees, and from the point of view of preventing, the spread of disease, the same typhus which only a month earlier had claimed the life of Anne Frank.

It was agreed on the basis that the German Military Authorities would erect notices and white flags at all the road entrances, marked 'Danger – Typhus' on one side and 'End of Typhus Area' on the reverse, with a disarmed German post at each notice. German and Hungarian troops had to remain at their posts armed, wearing a white arm-band on the left sleeve. The Hungarians were placed at the disposal of the British for such duties as might be required and would be there indefinitely.

The ordinary members of the Wehrmacht were to be released within 6 days and conveyed back to the German lines with their arms, equipment and vehicles. SS Guard personnel were to be removed by 1200 hrs 13 April and any remaining to be treated as POWs. SS Admin personnel would remain at their posts, carry on with their duties, and hand over records. In liberating Belsen and dealing with the terrible threat of disease, the Durham Light Infantry were able to save thousands of lives and release prisoners from the terrible nightmare which they had had to endure.

Meanwhile, the notorious traitor William Joyce, also known as Lord Haw Haw, who became infamous for his broadcasts from Nazi Germany during the war, was captured by the British army. Joyce had tried to speak on behalf of fascism for Mosley's Blackshirts at a meeting on the Town Moor in Newcastle in the mid-1930's, but had not been able to make himself heard over the sound of proetstors singing and soon gave up. It was therefore quite appropriate that it should be a sharp-eyed soldier from Newcastle called Jimmy Evans who should be the one who spotted Joyce, living in Germany near to the Danish border.

When fascism appeared in the 1930's and 1940's, the people of North-east England rejected its doctrines of racism and discrimination. The region kept its quality of social cohesion, which acted as a bulwark against racism and discrimination. It was after all a region which had seen massive immigration in the 19th century when for a while it was the 'Yukon of the North' with its burgeoning industries based on the development of carboniferous capitalism. Consequently, while there were some who supported fascist and racist ideas, there was a solidarity in the region based on the realities of the working lives of the people of the region during the hard years from 1918 to 1945. How else did people respond to the economic problems of the 1930's?

Timeline

- 1929 October – Wall Street Crash
- 1931 March – Oswald Mosley leaves Labour Government
- 1932 British Union of Fascists (BUF) established with Mosley as leader
- 1932 Ellen Wilkinson speaks out about her fears of Nazis coming to power in Germany
- 1933 January – Hitler becomes Chancellor of Germany
- Early months see Newcastle become a ‘storm centre’ of Fascism
 BUF meetings in Newcastle, North Shields and Sunderland broken up by protestors
- May – huge anti-fascist demonstrations in Newcastle
- June – Newcastle Police Chief Inspector describes North-east as area hostile to Fascism
- June – BUF Gateshead office attacked
- 1934 BUF rally witnesses savage treatment of hecklers
- 1935-9 Men from North-east fight for the Republican cause in Spain
- 1937 Ellen Wilkinson helps Republican cause in Spain while Basque refugee children come to North-east
- 1945 March - Durham Light Infantry among forces which liberate Belsen Camp
- Newcastle soldier Jimmy Evans spots William Joyce, otherwise known as Lord Haw Haw

Chapter 10

The Jarrow March

The Wall Street Crash was to cause many problems in North-east England. The export of manufactured goods, for which there was suddenly little or no demand, was the main focus of economic life in the region. The export of ships from Palmer's Yard in Jarrow was a part of this and by 1936 there was terrible unemployment in Jarrow. Many of the men there had worked in Palmer's shipyard, but because of the worldwide economic recession, they were unable to build ships as nobody wanted to buy them. As a result, Palmer's shipyard had to close down. This meant that as many as 70% of the people of Jarrow were unemployed in 1936. There was terrible poverty and many people became ill. One of the two grocery stores in the town was forced to close down.

People in Jarrow thought that things had to change; they couldn't go on like they were. They wanted a new steelworks to be built in the town so that men who had lost their jobs when the shipyard closed could find jobs there. In 1936 it was decided that 200 unemployed men would walk 280 miles to London to tell parliament that the steelworks should be built. They also wanted people in London and the south of England to see that they were responsible people who wanted to work. It was only one of numerous marches for jobs from the region during the period, but did gain the most publicity and it is possible to get a flavour of the march, through an examination of how it was reported in the regional press at the time.

By 1936, the effects of the depression which followed the Wall Street Crash had spread throughout much of the world. As people suddenly had less money to spend, so factories closed and economies contracted and countries stopped much of their trade with each other. With less trade taking place, so there was much less demand for ships to carry goods. A decision having been taken that 200 men would march to London, so it was that in October 1936, they set off from Jarrow and arrived in London four weeks later.

They got a warm welcome in many towns along the way, but it was different when they got to London. They went to parliament, but nobody from the government would speak to them and all they got was a cup of tea. So what actually happened? And did the whole North-east support the march?

There were many in the region who supported the march, but not all. Certainly not all the local press were supportive.

The *Newcastle Journal* went as far as saying that "as we have already suggested the principle of the marches is all wrong. It seeks to override the

principle of the member for a constituency being the channel of any grievance suffered by his constituents." *The Journal's* sister paper the *Evening Chronicle* did talk of the town giving 'a rousing send-off to the men', but a further reading of the article shows that the newspaper, like many of the neighbouring councils was taking a non-interventionist approach to the events, despite their potentially historic nature. There was a feeling that the march was somehow revolutionary and out of place in the democracy, which Britain had become.

The *Evening Chronicle* did appear to give some support to the marchers later in the march as it reported on the 15th October of their determination to ignore the Cabinet's statement that "the Government can give no encouragement to 'processions to London'", and also reported local Jarrow M.P Ellen Wilkinson's uncompromising reply. Ellen Wilkinson was a small woman, but had a steeliness of character which endeared her to the people of Jarrow. Having come from a working-class area of Manchester, Ellen was no stranger to poverty, but she was shaken by the depth of the problems she encountered in her Tyneside constituency. The situation regarding housing and hygiene was desperate, yet the local council was in no position to do anything about it while Palmers shipyard lay idle and there was no major employer in the town. There just wasn't the necessary income coming in from local ratepayers. The article from the *Evening Chronicle*, contains a hint of a feeling of people from north-east England going to London to take on the centralised establishment. The Jarrow March could also have seen a greater uprising of regional discontent in north-east England, but it did not.

On the same day, the *Northern Echo* was also reporting the Jarrow March. Statements from Ellen Wilkinson and the mayor of Jarrow, supporting the march were given prominent places in the middle of the front page. There was also a comment which stated that the government had said that "marches on London are altogether undesirable", and it commented that the government had given no explanation as to why this was the case.

During the march, however, the reporting of the proceedings was a fairly minor news item. For example on Friday October 23rd there was a small report about the fact that the marchers had reached Leicester, which was found, not on the front page but on page 9. A week later on Friday October 30th, page 12 reported that the marchers were nearing London. When the marchers finally did reach London, the news did make it onto the front page, but not as news item. There were quotes from some of the marchers, but no comment made about the fact that the government would not meet them. During this period the march was overshadowed as a news item by foreign affairs, especially the Spanish Civil War and the accompanying arguments concerning re-armament

The *Shields Gazette* did differ quite markedly from the *Northern Echo* and the main Newcastle newspapers regarding the march, in which the *Shields Gazette* showed a strong and positive interest, although this may have been simply

because it was a local South Tyneside paper and so was closer to the people of Jarrow. The leading article on the front page of 6th October 1936 described the march as follows; "the tramp, tramp of Jarrow men, swinging onwards today to Ferryhill marching half the length of England carrying the woes and troubles of not only their town but of all the distressed areas, to the capital is beating out history as it wakens the echoes of the villages and towns on its route."

This suggests a different vision in the reporting of the march, and in a regional sense the march is put into some sort of context, by the inference that the marchers are not only marching for Jarrow but for all the distressed towns and villages of the region. The march was given much greater prominence throughout its duration than was the case in other regional or local newspapers. One article from October 23rd 1936, admittedly found on page 9, even had an accompanying photograph and included this heartwarming and, in terms of the march supportive description of the people of Nottingham and how they reacted to the marchers going through their city; "if they were clad in decent clothes and had the warmth of coinage against the cold of the day, they still had the heart to realise that these were Britishers with a justifiable cause to fight." There was almost a celebratory feel to the edition when the marchers reached London with a full page width headline in the 31st October edition thus; "Jarrow Crusaders' Epic Trek completed". The *Shields Gazette* alone seems to have really supported the march.

In the end in terms of the region it is important to ask what the march actually achieved. The march did at least for a small time put Jarrow and the north-east of England, in the limelight and stimulated interest in trading estates in all the distressed areas, including Team Valley in Gateshead. Perhaps the most important result for the people of Jarrow, and particularly the marchers themselves was that they had tried to do something. One of those involved in the march, Paddy Scullion, said that "it enabled us to keep our self respect".

Bearing in mind the story of the General Strike ten years earlier, and the perception that it was a defeat for the labour movement in the region, perhaps this maintaining of self-respect was the most important result in the end, although it is debatable how much the labour movement in the region as a whole won back its self-respect as a result of the Jarrow March. It has been stated that claims that the march brought Jarrow and the problems of unemployment to the national attention are somewhat exaggerated and that the country had already lived through several years of depression before the march took place, but it may have helped to put more of a focus upon the issue. In the longer term there is the view that it was only the war that got the shipyard workers in north-east England, back to work.

In his introduction to Jack Common's *Freedom of the Streets*, Neil Murray wrote about a propaganda film that Common made during the war entitled *North-East Corner* about which Murray wrote, "we see the Tyne shipyards busy with the war

effort after the depression years. The men have to be coaxed back to the yards and are all too aware that they'll probably be unwanted again after the war." On their return to Jarrow, the marchers even got their wages docked for being technically unavailable for work.

Some support for the town of Jarrow did come from what became known as the Surrey Fund. The unemployment problem in Jarrow had been festering for some time before the march took place in Autumn 1936. Indeed as far back as March 1933, a local Ministry of Labour Report registered unemployment at 90%, more than four times the national average.

In response to this desperate situation there were attempts from outside the north-east of England to help them, notably from Sir John Jarvis, an industrialist from Surrey, who wanted to change the situation by "a combination of philanthropy, new industries and government subsidies" It has been claimed that "Sir John's activities lie at the intersection of employer paternalism and private charity", as this wealthy Surrey businessman attempted to help the people of Jarrow.. In the course of his efforts he put more than £40 000 into trying to help the recovery of the town. One of the men he helped remembered him by saying that,

"he helped the town a lot that man, I must be honest, well he tried to help. He got me a fortnight's work anyway".

Sir John Jarvis first visited Jarrow in an anonymous role in September 1933, and it was exactly a year later that he established the Surrey Fund for Jarrow. It is argued that in effect Jarrow was adopted by Surrey , and that the town's "unemployed were ...passive loyal subjects who deserved these paternalistic endeavours" Sir John Jarvis described what he was attempting to do in the following words;

"The County of Surrey has held out the hand of fellowship, and the result has been magical. May I tell you what has been happening? Under our scheme the people have started redecorating their little houses. We have provided paint, distemper and wallpaper, and the tenants have given the labour. The grimness of their homes is giving place to brightness and cleanliness...."

If this was Sir John Jarvis' view of what he was doing it was not always shared by the people of Jarrow. In reply to Sir John, Ellen Wilkinson said, "it would be a pity if the glow of his pleasuresuggested that Jarrow was now alright". It is also claimed that progress in terms of the public works which Sir John was involved in promoting was slow. Four months after the scheme began 80 jobs had been created at Monkton Dene Park, while the Surrey Fund had also funded a small number of places at the Hylton Farm Training Hostel and 180 of what Sir John called "little houses", had been decorated. By October 1936 when the Jarrow Marchers reached London, there were still only 100 men employed on

the temporary work schemes.

Following the disappointment over the steelworks not being granted in August 1936, at a meeting when the march reached London "Sir John announced the plan for a tube mill on the boiler plant at Palmer's." However although it was promised that this factory would open in the spring of 1937, it did not finally open until the middle of 1938. Having said all that David Dougan, historian of the Jarrow March, stated that the new industries encouraged by Sir John, "helped to reduce unemployment from 70 to 50.8%" On the other hand it is also argued that the main reason why the unemployment level of Jarrow fell, was because the figures for Jarrow were merged with the considerably lower figures of neighbouring Hebburn.

There were others who questioned the very motives for what Sir John did. It has been argued that the government was unwilling to admit just how bleak the picture was for places such as Jarrow and that the Surrey Fund was a welcome diversion for them to take people's minds away from the unemployment figures. It was also seen in some respects as rather degrading for the people of Jarrow to somehow be dependent upon the charity of wealthy citizens in Surrey. This came at a time when public assistance and working-class self-help had seen the status of charity decline, as during the nineteenth century, "workers had established a myriad of friendly societies, co-operative stores, and other self-help associations which allowed 'respectable' workers to avoid the recourse to charity".

As a result the idea of charity was not popular with many Jarrow as the workforce had been skilled men, while the women of the town became indignant when the Surrey Fund sent wool as they felt that it implied that they couldn't knit. In the words of Mayor Thompson, "charity can't give back people their souls". The Labour Councillor, David Riley, leader of Jarrow's unemployed went even further; "A complete change of system would have taken place if there had not been charity to act as a dope. But under the influence of prolonged unemployment a person tends to become weak and will eventually grab at anything. If the people of Jarrow and other parts of the country would only see the thing as a national basis, if they not been so reduced to a form of charity, there would have been no thing as depressed areas."

Perhaps the Jarrow Marchers did win in the long run, as they were one of stories of the Depression that has resonated down the years, to the extent that October 2011 saw a Service of Commemoration and other events in South Tyneside to mark the 75th anniversary of the march, while the march was remembered in the opening Ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics. It can also be argued that the march helped to set the tone of public discourse for the post-war period and the determination to not go back to the 1930's was a major factor in the election of the Attlee government and the establishment of the full Welfare State.

Timeline

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 1929 | October – Wall Street Crash |
| 1933 | onwards Sir John Jarvis tries to help the people of Jarrow |
| 1936 | Unemployment in Jarrow reaches 70% |
| | 1 st August – plan for steelworks for Jarrow turned down |
| | Early October – marchers leave Jarrow |
| | 31 st October – marchers arrive in London |
| | November – marchers not granted audience with any government ministers and just get a cup of tea. |
| 1937 -1939 | Government re-armament drive in lead up to Second World War leads to more jobs for Jarrow |
| 2011 | October – commemorative service held in Jarrow |
| 2012 | 27 th July – Jarrow March remembered in the ~Opening Ceremony for the 2012 London Olympics |

Chapter Eleven

The Durham Development Plan

By the end of the Second World War, the Northumberland and Durham coalfield, was in terminal decline. Many of the original mines were becoming exhausted, without enough coal to make it worthwhile mining it or uneconomic, making it too expensive to keep them open. New forms of work had to be found. At the same time, the election of the Labour government in 1945, coupled with the dominance of Labour locally on County Durham Council, ushered in an era of planning. So it was that County Durham Council saw planning as the answer to the problems that were growing, especially around Bishop Auckland in the south-west of the county.

The huge seam of coal under County Durham, which had been so successfully mined for so long, was not horizontal, but rather slanted downwards from west to east across the county. Consequently, those pits to the west of the county, where the coal was nearest to the surface, had been among the first to be exploited and were becoming exhausted sooner than those further east. The Durham Development Plan was intended to deal with this by facilitating a transfer of population from the old coalfield areas to the west to the east of the county, where there were still numerous pits still open and where it was hoped new industry would also help to replace some of the jobs lost in the pits to the west. A motorway would be built through the centre of the county to attract new industry and new towns built near it.

In 1951 Durham County Council first published its development plan which aimed to deal with the problem of about 350 small mining villages in the county, which had grown up around coal mines, which were becoming uneconomic and exhausted. Many of those villages were threatened with closure and were categorised as “Category D” with the recommendation that they should be allowed to die with no further economic assistance. In order to deal with this scenario, a series of new towns were to be developed to house those who, it was envisaged, would soon be fleeing the colliery villages seeking employment elsewhere. Accordingly, County Durham saw the foundation of Peterlee in 1955, and in the early 1960s Newton Aycliffe and Washington were also established.

It was coal-mining and the accompanying ‘carboniferous capitalism’, which had brought the large influx of people into the region during the 19th century. This saw people moving to North-east England in huge numbers, from Scotland and Ireland, from Cornwall and from other parts of Northern England, to work not only in the mines, but also in the plethora of industries which supported mining. However, by the end of the Second World War, the decline of the physical environment linked to the parallel decline of the coal industry was causing concern. Not only were the mines becoming exhausted and uneconomic; the

housing stock in many of the old pit villages was becoming dilapidated and was far behind what was expected in the second half of the 20th century.

All of this was to have a large impact upon the Durham Development Plan. The motivation behind the Durham Development Plan was to try to help people have better lives, near to new sources of employment and to help them to escape from the poor housing. However, it is still the case that those designing the plan could have done more to ask the people what they needed and wanted and what can look great on a piece of paper in a council office can be the cause of great anguish when implemented on the ground. Those who were involved in the planning of the era were often not those who lived in the places they were planning and there was sometimes a reluctance to take into account their views. Perhaps there is some truth in the old saying that, 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'.

The 1951 County Durham Development Plan, stated that the main job for planners was to, "adjust the whole fabric of the settlement pattern to the likely future change in employment". This change was to involve some 350 settlements, half of which were villages connected to mines established during the course of the 19th century. The years since each pit was established had seen unplanned development, the kind of which was now frowned upon in the brave new post-war world. The alternative was seen as being to regroup the population, creating more physically, economically and socially attractive centres. Fully one-third of the villages were designated as 'D' villages to be closed, where no new residences were permitted. An action committee against the plan was formed in South-west Durham, where the coal had been nearest to the surface and so had been the first to become exhausted. Despite this committee being formed, the plan prevailed anyway. The plan was re-affirmed in the 1964 Review of the Plan, although the cold clinical sounding letters had now been replaced with descriptive labels.

As the coalfield was beginning to be exhausted, especially in the west, so this resulted in the villages, which had housed the mining families in the west of the coalfield losing the reason for their existence, in the eyes of the county council, as the pits, which had been the economic lifeblood of the villages began to close. This happened in so many villages that Durham County Council decided that they must do something about it. Accordingly, they decreed that, "many of the rows of houses which grew up around the pitheads have outlived their usefulness and as uneconomic pits close.... a gradual regrouping of the population should take place".

This was no idle boast. In all, the plan envisaged that 357 towns and villages throughout the county would be classified as either A, B, C, or D class villages. It was in the fourth, the D, category that those villages which were deemed to be in danger of having no future were found. As many as 121 of the 357 towns and villages were to be found in the D category. The plan decreed that these

villages, with their pubs and community centres, their clubs and football teams, were to be allowed to die.

The pit villages were unique places in many ways. As so many of the families had depended on the mine for their living there had been a sense of shared common purpose, which helped to develop a strong community spirit. It has been suggested that in many cases this spirit outlived the mine and continued after the pits had closed. The pit villages also saw the development of a vibrant associational life, which helped to provide both leisure opportunities and support for villagers in hard times. Many villages had Co-op stores and indeed in the 19th century the North-east had a higher number of Co-op stores per head of population than any other region in England, including Lancashire where the movement had originated in Rochdale

All the community networks and facilities gave the villagers a precious sense of community. Yet this was not a consideration for those who sat and made the plans. Accordingly, rather than being moved out to new towns such as Newton Aycliffe, en masse, keeping their sense of community, they were phased out. Then they were phased into their new streets in anonymous estates, which were nearer to the new industrial estates, which were also being phased in to supply jobs which could replace those lost in the mining industry.

These anonymous estates, might have been nearer to the new sources of work, but to many of the people moved there, but at the time they lacked the old warmth of the villages and the sense of community which had developed from the common goal of so many of the families being directly linked to the pit and from the community facilities which grew up with the villages. There were plans to develop more community facilities at Newton Aycliffe, but while a second stage of the new town was completed in 1974, the proposed arts centre fell by the wayside, a victim of government cuts.

The writer Sid Chaplin made the following point about the County Durham and Northumberland new towns:

“The brand new towns such as Killingworth and Washington may teach us to live and work and enjoy our leisure better – and folk at Newton Aycliffe and Peterlee, ignoring the news of the wonderful new computer-information link-up, are demanding votes and representation. Embarrassingly, they’re citizens not students, and something may have to be done.”

There were those who tried to resist the march of progress. At one D category village there was a flood and people were advised to evacuate, but refused to leave as they suspected that they would not be allowed to return home. The water was lapping round their houses, threatening to take their television sets away but still they hung on, hanging out signs, whose messages echoed down the years all the way back to the heyday of primitive Methodism in the mid-19th

century; 'never!' and God is with us'. In the end, however, they were shipped out to the new towns.

The result of the plan is summed up by Robert Colls as follows:

"...(the) Plan paid little more than lip service to what the old settlements had already achieved in terms of community building. So much was missed. So much was squandered. It was as if 'comradeship and solidarity' were independent variables. The death villages were assigned 'Category D' status. With the run-down of coalmining in the 1950's and again under a Labour government in the 1960's, a whole generation of North-east writers would dwell on what had been lost"

New Towns did have their positive side. Those built in the North-east did provide new homes, with inside toilets and other modern features, and they also provided jobs in new industries which would attempt to replace the dirty, dangerous occupation of mining and also provide work for women. The New Towns also had open spaces and the houses had gardens, which were seen as being able to give working-class North-east families the opportunity to live in the same manner as those who inhabited what were seen as the leafy suburbs of the South. It can also be argued that more community spirit has since developed in the new towns and what I write here is in no way intended to be a reflection of life in the new towns today.

A similar story was also unfolding north of the River Tyne. In 1962, Jimmy Forsyth photographed the Newcastle Council leader T. Dan Smith unveiling a bronze statue in front of a new block of high-rise flats, which were replacing old terraced houses in the city. It has been reported that the photograph conveys something of the utopian feeling at the time, but Jimmy Forsyth was more sceptical. Looking back later he commented that, "the planners actually believed that they could build communities, but instead the community was scattered to the four winds, people were sent to far-flung estates and a community was lost forever."

This was not unique to North-east England at the time. The same point was made by the writer Shelagh Delaney about the home town of Salford near Manchester. On a BBC programme in 1960, Delaney stated that,

"They're tearing down whole parts of Salford and building them again. They're tearing them down and again they're not putting the people back there...they're sending them away. Far away to places where there's no city, to sort of sterile places.....nobody knows anybody on it and when they're building these places they never think of putting anything in them like a theatre or something." No doubt the planners and architects of the particular estate of high-rise flats shown in the programme lived some distance away. It was a problem of the era, across Britain and Delaney's views seem to accurately reflect those of many.

It has been noted that County Durham Council could have done everything so differently, if they had just thought about the sense of community which they were destroying. The old terraced houses could have been restored and new bus routes established to take people from the old villages to the new jobs. However, this never occurred to those planners living away from the old villages. As John Pilger has pointed out, the idea of restoring the terraces and having new bus routes, “was such an obvious solution that it needed no Plan and was therefore never a consideration. The people were to be moved within sight and smell of the new industrial compounds, just as people had been moved in the 19th century.”

The result of the plan has been summed up by noting that little more than lip service was paid to the community spirit which had grown in the old villages. This sense of solidarity was squandered leaving a whole generation of writers from North-east England with the job of reflecting on what had been lost. Perhaps there is still hope; the riots of the summer of 2011 never reached the region and as long as the people of North-east England truly value solidarity between ourselves then the future can still be bright..

Planning, in full consultation with those on whose behalf the planning is being conducted, can have a lot to recommend it. It can be a way of ensuring things are done fairly, with the best use made of resources, human and otherwise. I have no doubt that William Geenty, who devised the plan, meant well and that on paper, in the quiet of his office, poring over a map of the county, with the shallow seams of the west, and the proposed new A1 (M) motorway cutting like a knife through the heart of the county, it all made sense. The only place it didn't make sense was where it really mattered, in the villages which were effectively killed off.

Timeline

19 th century	Coalfield in west of County Durham developed extensively
1 st half of 20 th century	Pits in western County Durham begin to be exhausted and uneconomic
1920's	Labour Party takes control of Durham County Council
1945	Labour government elected under Attlee
1951	First Durham Development Plan written by William Geenty
1955	Peterlee New Town established
Early 1960's	Newton Aycliffe and Washington New Towns established

Conclusion

The stories in this book took place over a 200 year period and as a result it is quite difficult to knit them all together with a common thread. The nature of society in North-east England changed dramatically between the late 18th and late 20th centuries, so the stories represent people's actions in very different times. However, I do think that we can find three common threads, which link the stories and actions, namely solidarity, fairness and tolerance.

Solidarity was seen in the way the region reacted towards the slave trade. While there were slave owners in the region, there were many who felt a kinship with the slaves thousands of miles away, who they would never meet and could never be personally thanked by. It was seen again in the development of the first trade unions, as the region became the leading area for trade unionism in the country, despite the dangers and set-backs those involved encountered. The feeling of solidarity was also seen in the development of the Co-operative Movement in the 19th century and in the work of people like Joseph Cowen. It was precisely that kind of solidarity which was also that was arguably under threat when the Durham Development Plan was implemented.

The struggle for justice can be seen in the way thousands of people in the region attended mass meetings to demand the vote in the first half of the 19th century and before that in the pioneering work of people like Murray, Spence and Bewick. It was there again in the anti-slave trade campaigning and the trade union work, especially in actions such as that which ended with two shaft mines becoming the law after the Hartley Pit Disaster of 1862. Fairness can also be seen as a cornerstone of life in the region by the way that the Jarrow Marchers went down to London and nearer to home people questioned the wisdom of the Durham Development Plan. The fight for a fairer world can also be seen in the way that women in the region played their part in the struggle for votes that included the martyrdom of Emily Davison.

Finally there is the element of tolerance. It is true that the assimilation of groups such as the Irish and the Yemenis did not always take place without there being problems, just as there are some racial tensions in the region today. However the bigger story is surely that groups such as the Irish and the Yemenis did end up integrating well, often a lot better than in other parts of country. Mosley's Blackshirts were thoroughly rejected by the people of the region, which also had a proud record in opposing fascism in Spain and Nazi Germany.. The traditional North-east still seen every second Saturday in July at the Durham Miners' Gala, was really made up of different groups of people who migrated into the region in the late 18th and 19th centuries as the North-east resembled the Yukon, with the black gold of coal being the great prize.

In the 19th century, people flocked to the region, tempted by some of the highest industrial wages in the world. Since the First World War however, the North-east of England has become synonymous with poverty. It has been suggested that the real wealth in this corner of England is now its people and the principles of solidarity, fairness and tolerance, with which it has been associated for so long. It was interesting to hear Daoud Zaaroura from the North of England Refugee Service state in October 2011 that 80% of asylum seekers dispersed to the region in the early years of the new century had decided to stay in North-east England, citing the friendliness of people as the main reason for this decision. Clearly the heritage is still alive.

If it is true that the way we perceive the past, changes from time to time, as circumstances change, so there should always be time for the people of North-east England to remember these stories with pride. It is a shame that they are not better known. This book is a small attempt at trying to remedy that situation. If you have enjoyed the stories, there are numerous sources, through which you can learn more and read into them in more depth.

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