

LIFE
IN
WITTON GILBERT
ABOUT 1900

by

MEMBERS OF WITTON GILBERT
WOMEN'S INSTITUTE

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INTRODUCTION

Witton Gilbert lies in the Browney Valley, three miles from Durham on the Consett road. It was settled early, and is mentioned in the Boldon Book of the late twelfth century. There were then two large farms with surrounding cottages, both belonging to the Bishop of Durham, one at Fulforth, and the other beside the Church, which was built about 1175 on a peninsula of higher ground, protected by the boggy land of the Browney flood-plain. There must have been sufficient people at this time to warrant the building of a church for their special needs. Some would, no doubt, work on the Prior of Durham's Bearpark estate, about a mile downstream. The Lord of the Manor was Gilbert de la Ley, a tenant of the Bishop. He never lived at Witton, and there was never a Manor House. However, he founded a small leper Hospital near the Church, under the control of the Almoner of Durham Priory.

For most of its history, Witton's interests were primarily agricultural, with the chief effort going into stock rearing. Durham Market was a reasonable distance away for a day's trip. In the fourteenth century, Witton men were supplying Bearpark estate with produce, and in the mid-nineteenth century, three Witton farmers had butchery stalls in Durham market. There was some coal-mining, evidence for which goes back to the fifteenth century, and by the eighteenth century, there were four small pits, all probably drifts, at Charlaw, Blackburn, Fulforth and West Hall.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the centre of the village seems to have moved to where it is now, either side of the road from Durham to Lanchester, and the population increased. There is evidence by the eighteenth century, of a fairly good proportion of craftsmen and tradesmen amongst the agricultural population; masons, tailors, carpenters, blacksmiths, shoemakers, glaziers, weavers, cartwrights, and even a leather dresser and a hatter. No doubt men sold their surplus produce in Durham, a convenient distance away. Witton was a pleasant place to live, with a reputation for being "healthy", and so some gentlemen, an attorney, and a Durham Alderman, came to settle here. The village had a new pit at "New Close". It had a school, built about 1730 by public subscription. The villagers managed it themselves and even appointed the schoolmaster, much to the clergyman's disgust. In the eighteenth century too, the road through the village became a turnpike road, and a gatehouse was built at the bottom of Nor Lane.

The village began to grow dramatically in the 1830s. In 1831, the population was 417, not many more than it had been throughout the

previous century, but by 1841 it had grown to 1,243, and by 1861 to 2,098. This was due to the opening of new and bigger pits in the area, at Bearpark, Burnhope, Kimblesworth, Langley Park and Sacriston. In 1856 there were four shopkeepers and six public houses, as well as the village craftsmen, to cater for the increase in demand. A brick and tile works was opened up behind where the village shop now stands to provide building materials for the new houses. In 1862 a Railway Station was built just outside the village, and now farm produce could be sent by rail. The Post came to the Station, instead of coming by special messenger from Durham. It became profitable to start another brick and tile works at Kaysburn, not far from the Station. New pit shafts were opened, one on the Clink Bank to connect with the Bearpark Pit, and one at Kaysburn to connect with the Langley Park Pit. The Witton Drift opened in 1911, sending its coal by rail to Dunston Power Station and Washington.

Kelly's Directory for 1910 describes Witton Gilbert as a "parish occupying a pleasant situation in a warm and sheltered valley on the road from Durham to Lanchester, with a station about one mile from the village, on the Durham and Consett branch of the North-Eastern Railway." There were 3,240 acres of land, and 15 of water, and there was a population of 5,300. There were four general shops, two grocers, two butchers, a confectioner and a draper. Village craftsmen comprised a smith, a joiner, a tailor and a carter. Witton had a Post Office, a Police Station, a Workmen's Club and six public houses. There were two resident gentlemen, John Graham, Coroner for Chester Ward, at Findon Cottage, and John Ritson J.P. at Sniperley. Many of the men now living in the village were pitmen, and because most of them went out of the village to work, Witton never became like the usual pit-villages, but still retained its county atmosphere.

We have tried to describe the various aspects of life in the village of Witton Gilbert around the turn of the century. At that time Witton had close connections with Sacriston – the two villages formed a joint Civil Parish. Entertainments, employment, the Volunteers, and the telegraph were all to be had in Sacriston. Witton was connected with Kimblesworth as a joint Ecclesiastical Parish, even though a separate "Mission Church" was opened at Kimblesworth in 1893, and run by the Curate of Witton and his wife from the Clergy House there. The village was to grow a little more in population before the First War, but it had reached a high point in its development. The National School flourished, as did the County Industrial School at Earl's House. The Church and Methodist Chapel were well attended and active in social affairs. Entertainments were varied, and travel by rail was comparatively easy and cheap, widening

everyone's horizons. There was plenty of work in both agriculture and industry for the men, although there was a certain amount of poverty. There was some piped water, some main drainage, and there was street electric lighting. Horses were still much in evidence for transport of goods and for farm work. The farmers rode horses, and the gentlemen like John Graham kept carriages. The Rector drove a phaeton, pulled by his pony Blackie. Roads were still made with Whin-stone and soil, packed hard and rolled. Affairs outside the village impinged on its consciousness during the Boer War, when some of its men had their first taste of foreign travel.

The village has changed considerably since our period. Few of the men now work in the pits. There is a new, young population drawn from outside the County, and there are three housing estates, Witton still being considered a pleasant place to live. Now however, people work in offices and shops in Durham. There are two general stores, a Post Office, a Junior School and three public houses. The only work in the village is now agricultural, and here too there is change as some farms are sold, and some merge into larger units. The main road has become a noisy menace from the constant through traffic, and there are gaps in Front Street where old cottages have been demolished. The village centre is moving yet again!

We have been greatly helped and inspired by the wonderful memory of Mr. Benjamin Bailey, who was born here in 1888, and has lived here ever since. His career spans our period and typifies the way of life and work here. When he was a boy, he lived at Glen Hall, an old eighteenth century whitewashed farmhouse in the main street of the village. His father worked in the pit, and lost an eye there in an accident. His mother was a good nurse, and helped neighbours in similar straits. He attended the village school and was a keen churchgoer, singing in the Choir, and going with them on their annual trips. He left school at the age of twelve to start work at Kaysburn Brick Works. When brick sales slumped five years later, he started work at Langley Park Pit, eventually working up to the position of engineman. He transferred to the winding house at the Kaysburn Shaft, where he worked for four years. He was threatened with being laid off when the Busty seam was worked out, and by great good fortune was taken on at Langley Park Pit again on the orders of Head Office at Medomsley. He worked the generator there in the power station. His turn had come at last for a colliery house in East Block, and there he has lived since 1931, and now enjoys a healthy and happy retirement.

HOME AFFAIRS AND WITTON PEOPLE

Witton Gilbert in 1900 was a rather overcrowded village. The population, which was 4,400 in 1891, had risen to 5,300 by 1901. The houses were mainly clustered along the road from Durham to Lanchester, [see plan] and scattered farms and gentlemen's residences stood on higher ground, possibly on or near the site of older houses, long since tumbled down. Cottages were usually built in groups, and were rented. They were often tied to jobs, as were farm labourer's cottages and colliery houses. Langley Park and Charlaw Collieries rented existing village houses for some of their men, and Bearpark Colliery built eighty houses on the Clink Bank to house their pitmen. There were three almshouses rented from the Church at 6p per week.

Thatched roofs had nearly all disappeared, to be replaced by pantiles. Witton Hall Farm was probably once thatched, the old Schoolhouse certainly was, and a thatched cottage in the Dene was demolished just after the First War. The Glendenning Arms was thatched until a memorable gale in 1839 tore off the roof, and blew down the chimneystack whilst the landlady, Mrs. Betty Glendenning was boiling puddings over the fire. She is reputed to have calmly rescued the puddings, cleaned them and served them up to the guests, alas, still tasting of soot!

There was a Toll House, no longer with its Tollgate, at the bottom of Nor-Lane, and the old Pin Fold still stood to a height of six feet, in the middle of the road where Park View was later to be built. In the middle of the road at the other end of Front Street, the old Finney Charity School still stood, now used as a Lending Library. On Front Street were the shops; butcher, draper, blacksmith, baker, photographer, hosier, confectioner and grocer. The tailor lived up the Nor Lane. Newton Street was a private road with a gate at each end, and led to the stables and cart-house belonging to Cuthbert Green, and used in furtherance of his grocery business. On Front Street too were the public houses, the Methodist Chapel, the Post Office, and three farms.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century many workers had moved into the village to work in the newly opened pits around it, at Sacriston, Bearpark and Langley Park. The building of the Durham-Consett Railway had stimulated the growth of brick and tile making at Kaysburn, and former farm labourers turned to more lucrative employment.

Some house building was done around the turn of the century to accommodate the extra population. Bottlers' Yard, Bests' Yard and Hobson's Terrace would house about twenty extra families [see plan]

Mr. Moralee remembers the village when he was a boy before the First War. This is his list of houses and residents.

South Side

Snook Acres	.....	Cummings
Blacksmiths'	.....	Bainbridges
Three houses	.....	Dick Bainbridge
		I. White
		Joe Bainbridge
Travellers' Rest	.....	J. Lowe
Cottage	.....	Mrs. Greenwood
Top of Bottlers' Yard	.....	Mrs. Ward
		Mrs. Duffy
Shop	.....	Mrs. Beatty
		Mrs. Bailey
		Mrs. Houldsworth
House before Garage	.....	Martin
		Mrs. Blackburn
Shop	.....	S. Falkous
Three Tuns	.....	X
		X
		W. Brown
Small Shop	.....	Belle Burns
Small Farm	.....	Tom Brown
		Walker
Top of Best's Yard	.....	Potter
		Wardman
		X
		Martin Smith
The Glendenning Arms	.....	Mrs. Midgely
Small Shop	.....	Renwicks
		Mrs. Brown
Oak Cottage	.....	Jilly Robson
Butcher's Shop	.....	John Green
Small Shop	.....	Mrs. Lindsay
Cottage at top of Fold	.....	Mrs. Murphy
Orchard	.....	Ralph Hall

North Side

Gatehouse	.....	Jack Surtees
Park View	.....	Bailey
		Hannah

		Petch
		Simpson
		Wadge
		Greenwell
		Martin
		Shorter
West Street	.....	Tim Thomas
		Dover
		Holmes
Glen Hall	.....	Bailey
Hopper's House	.....	Appleton
Bug Row	.....	Robinson
		Smith
		Smart
		Harvey
Witton Farm	.....	Miss Robson
		Ellisons
		Mrs. Blenkinsop
		Mrs. Moralee
Oddfellows' Arms	.....	X
Colliery Farm	.....	Robinson – Hind
		Tindale – Manager
Up to the Well		
Pump House	.....	Wades
Next House	.....	Mrs. Robinson
		Mrs. Dodds
		Mrs. Hall
		Mrs. Smith
Three Alms Cottages, rent 6d. per week	.....	Mr. Scott
		Mr. Ward
		Mr. Coates
Big House	.....	Mr. Phillips
		Mr. Hutchinson
		Mr. Woods
Shop	.....	Shorts
		Jane Amos
		Kit Peverly
Club	.....	George Egerton
Marvel House		
Third Block	.....	Mrs. Yates
		Mrs. Tulip
		Maggie Cook
Falkous Terrace		
Hotel	.....	Briggs
Two Cottages	.....	X
		X
		Parkins

		Crockers
		Browns
Post Office	.....	Miss Wilson
		Mrs. Davison
		X
		X
Corner House	.....	Bob Chicken
Newton Street		
Shop	.....	Cuthbert Green
		X
		X
Black Lion Pub		
Shop	.....	Mrs. Hedley
		X
Dean Terrace	.....	Ben Bailey
		Joe Jackson
		Bella Thompson
		X
Pit House	.....	Carr
Three houses on Clink Bank.....		Jackson
		Hall
		Nettlethorp
The Clink	.....	Houses belonging to Bearpark Colliery Co.

The cottages usually had one large room leading straight off the streets, or with a small lobby, a scullery downstairs, [probably a lean-to] with a coal-fired boiler or 'set-pot' in the corner. Upstairs, there was a large bedroom and an attic. In Bug Row, the upper floor was reached by ladder, though other houses had a steep staircase and Hopper's House boasted a spiral staircase. Often the large room would be partitioned to make two rooms. Some houses had a big kitchen and a parlour downstairs and two bedrooms upstairs. A common sight in the backyards was a large tin bath hanging on a huge nail, a big clippie mat on the clothes line airing in the sun, and alongside, a pair of pit hoppers, fustian trousers and long thick woollen stockings. These clothes were worn by the miners at work and would be topped by an old jacket, flat cap and muffler or scarf, for outdoor wear, the jacket pockets being stuffed with sandwiches and a tin water bottle to take to work.

Since the men worked in shifts, their wives and mothers were often working very early in the morning or late into the night, and the men's dinner was often left in the oven to keep warm until they returned. They were so accustomed to the special flavours this produced, that some men would not eat a freshly cooked dinner.

The fires would be “damped down” with slack, or fine coal dust, to make it last a long time, and a big kettle of water would stand on the bar in front of the fire so that it would be boiling when needed. The stove would be polished with blacklead until it shone, and the steel parts with emery paper or fine ash. The ash tidy or Tidy Betty, as it was known, often made with strips of copper or brass, would be rubbed with lemon juice until gleaming, and then carefully washed and dried. The long handled fire irons, poker, tongs, brush and shovel, were usually steel or brass. The fender was steel with a flat top cut out into a pattern. At either end of the fender stood a wooden cracker [stool]. The stove itself would have a high shelf at the top with a steel or brass rod suspended from it, used for airing clothes. At the side of the fire would be a square oven and opposite, a small boiler with a tap or a lid for bailing out the water. A trivet for pans was often clipped onto the fire bars, if a long iron bar hob was not part of the stove.

The floor of the kitchen, either wood, flagged or even cinders, would be covered with linoleum and rag rugs. Net or lace curtains hung at the windows, with heavy curtains, pleated at the top with pins and attached to rings on a pole, at the side. Outside, wooden shutters were held in place at night with an iron bar when shut. Oak Windsor, or wooden chairs or stools, would be placed around a large white-topped table, which would be scrubbed daily. A side table was usually placed under the kitchen window. Often there would be a settle [a high backed wooden seat for two or three people] at one side of the fireplace, and a wooden rocking, or nursing chair at the other. Sometimes, there would be a horsehair, or leather-covered chair and settee in front of a table, and a desk-bed stood against a wall, usually if the house had a parlour. Antimacassars covered the chairbacks. A serge or plush cover with a braided or fringed edge was attached to the mantelshelf. Favourite bric-a-brac and photographs held pride of place on the “what-not”, a tiered shelf arrangement.

Bedrooms were sparsely furnished with a chair, chest and bed, sometimes several beds, children often sleeping “tops to tails”. As prosperity increased, wardrobes were purchased or handed down in families, and the little houses were like little palaces, spotlessly clean, and polished till gleaming, their tiny gardens ablaze with flowers.

Friday was usually the polishing day, when the fire irons were first polished, and then wrapped in newspaper and put away, while the family took turns to have a bath in front of the fire, in the big tin bath, having first

been dosed with physic [sulphur and treacle in Spring, and senna pods in Winter]. Saturday often meant a trip into Durham, very often on foot. Monday being washday, out came the big wooden poss tub and poss stick. The latter would probably be made at Ebchester Poss Stick Mill. The poss stick was shaped like a wooden club with a cross cut in the end and a handle at the top. The fire under the set pot was lit, and after a soaking, scrubbing, possing, scrubbing again, rinsing and boiling, the clothes were put through a mangle with huge wooden rollers, and hung on lines across the streets and garths.

The irons, mostly flat, heated on the bar, were cleaned on bath-brick or fire ash, and dusted down before use. Testing the heat was a fine art – a swift touch with a wet finger. Box irons contained a metal brick with a hole at each end, which enabled the brick to be heated in the fire, and returned to its casing before use.

Most families had a baking-day, when meat pies and pasties, fruit pies and cake, were made after the bread came out of the oven. Rice, Spice, Sandwich and Seed cake were the usual mix. Children were sent out of the way, usually in the care of older children, to play in the Dene or by the river Browney, in summertime carrying a bundle of sandwiches and a bottle of liquorice water.

In wintertime, young girls, often from the age of five, would help their parents to make rag rugs. Each winter a new mat went into the frame, the hessian stretched and pegged down with a pattern marked out, ready rolled for working on. Children cut the strips of material and sorted the colours into boxes. A “clippie” mat was made with short strips pushed through holes and then trimmed level, while a “proggie” mat was made with long strips pushed up and down without being cut. Girls would also help to make rattles out of rushes, to amuse the babies and small children. Quilting was another winter pastime, traditional patterns being used from generation to generation. A Durham Quilt is still a valued gift, much sought after. For those who didn't like sewing their own quilt, or simply hadn't the time to do so, there were Quilt Clubs, where members paid a shilling per week until the quilt was paid for. The quilters wore clean white calico or lawn aprons over their dresses, and some wore white cuffs too.

Everyday wear for ladies was a dark cotton or serge dress, with underneath, cotton or thick flannel petticoats, long drawers and whalebone corsets or 'stays'. They wore buttoned boots and cotton or woollen stockings. When doing dirty work around the house, a harn or

hessian apron was used. Girls wore pinafores – white aprons with frills over the shoulders for school. They also wore high boots which could be made at Witton by Mr. Bell, the shoemaker.

Various itinerant traders made shopping easier for villagers. Fisher Nellie came from Shields in cap, shawl and apron, balancing a big basket of fish on her head. There was Irish Annie, the Spice Man, the Tin Man, the Rag Man, the Muffin Man, the Knife Grinder, and a pedlar who sold collar studs, buttons and laces, and gypsies with flowers made of paper and wood, ribbons, pins, pegs and fortune telling.

Another important person who travelled the village daily was the “knocker-up”. It was his job to make sure that the pitmen got up in time for work. Slates were put outside each door with the desired rising time chalked on them. Mrs. Hood’s mother did this job, a most unusual one for a woman, in Sacriston for many years.

People in Witton still talk about characters they remember well. Among characters remembered by Mr. Moralee was Joe Plews, who worked a night shift in the pit for thirty-eight years. He and Jack Smith drove a horse and trap in and out of Durham. They were the last to provide this kind of transport service before the bus service began. “Old Moody” is remembered for his drunken bouts, and the rubbish he talked when inebriated. Glen Stevenson was a real old horseman, and Sammy Dent was famous for shouting aloud when he prayed in Chapel, so strong were his religious transports. Tom Brown and Matty Martin were ash-pit men, who were the last to perform the necessary service of removing the contents of the privies by horse and cart, before proper sewerage was installed in the village. Mrs. Greenwell was always called in to help with births and deaths. Poor Maggie Cook, who was a bit simple, is remembered for always attending all the funerals so that she could have a free tea. She provided herself with firing by coal picking on nearby tips. There was Mrs. Beatty too, a good old lady who lived in a “one up and one down” cottage of Front Street. She had about eight adopted children – the big ones slept in the bed, and the smaller ones in the table turned upside down for the purpose. She tried to support them all by selling sweets.

Some other inhabitants are remembered for their official positions in the community. Mr. Bruce Yates was the Sexton. When he was appointed, the Rector remarked that, as Mr. Yates was a young man, he hoped they would have the benefit of his services for many years! Mr. Thomas Moralee was a Parish Councillor, and a staunch Methodist. In 1908, he

was a founder member of the Workingmen's Club, which held its first meeting in a garden on Front Street. The members raised funds to build a Club on Front Street, [Hall's Glass Warehouse now], and finished paying for it in 1920, when commemorative walking sticks with inlaid silver engraved bands, were presented to him and two other founder-members, for "services rendered". Mr. Moralee was a photographer too. Perhaps he took some of the photographs in this volume, and it is to be greatly regretted that his son put the old glass-plate negatives to "good use", by making them into a greenhouse. He was a hosier too, selling stockings knitted on machines in a room behind the shop, by two girls employed for the purpose.

Mr. White ran a taxi service, and had the only telephone in Witton. Mr. Butcher of Sacriston and Mr. Craig, were Undertakers and Funeral Furnishers, hirers out of hearses, cabs and brakes, sellers of general hardware, and as equally willing to remove household furniture as corpses! Joseph Craggs was an Assurance Agent, and Miss Hodgson gave lessons "to beginners in pianoforte or harmonium".

The Post-master and Tax Collector was Mr. James Wilson, the former Schoolmaster. His two daughters, Miss May Wilson and Miss Annie Wilson, collected mail from, and took it to Witton Station. May delivered mail in the village, and Annie delivered to the farms. When she retired, she reckoned that she had walked 88,000 miles over the years. Newspapers were also delivered from the Post Office.

The Blacksmith was Mr. Bainbridge, and the Smithy where he worked, still exists as part of Snook Acres Farm. He is commonly supposed to have invented spoked wheels for bicycles – certainly bicycles were made at the Smithy. It is said that during the First World War, five men worked at the Smithy making horseshoes for use by the Army.

The village tailor was Mr. Turner, who had quite a large establishment at Fell House. The same family had served the tailoring needs of the village for at least fifty years. People came from all the farms around to be measured for best suits and working clothes. Fustian and corduroy made very hardwearing trousers. During the First World War, the tailor's shop burned down – the sight of fire engines roaring down Sacriston Bank is still remembered, and trade was never quite the same again afterwards.

Mrs. Jane Clegg was for thirty-four years, the caretaker of the village school and Clink Cottages. She sent fortnightly reports to the Bearpark Colliery Company regarding the properties, and had the workmen's

Repair Shop at the bottom of her garden, to enable repairs to be carried out promptly. She was formerly a keen Chapelgoer, but once, when sitting in a back pew so that she could hear if the baby cried, [it was in its pram in the porch], she was asked to move, because she wasn't paying rent for the pew. She was so upset, that she went to Church instead, because she said that there the seats were free. At the school, the coalscuttles had to be filled nightly to be ready for the next day: each scuttle contained three pails of coal, and pails were much larger than they are now. In this task, her granddaughter, Eleanor, assisted Mrs. Clegg. Mrs. Clegg also, provided a surgery for the doctor in her own home, and would take messages for him, a service that her granddaughter provided until recently.

Some Witton people had obituary notices in newspapers or the Church magazine. Mr. Cuthbert Green, who had a grocery shop in Witton, had other shops at Sacriston and Hamsterley. His goods came by train to Witton Station, whence they came by a wagon and two horses to the shop. He was an imposing Lay Preacher in the Methodist Church, and twice was Circuit Steward. Keenly interested in public affairs, he was on the Parish Council, Chester-le-Street Rural District Council and the County Education Sub-Committee. He died at sea in 1914, whilst on a voyage to improve his health. When he was about ten years old he had run away to sea, only reaching as far as Gateshead, before his father had found him, and made him walk in front of the trap all the way back to Satley, after which, a week on bread and water had completed the cure. John Green, his brother, was a butcher like his father, who was also a well-known preacher.

Mr. Peter Pearson, the village joiner, died in 1907. The Rector wrote about him, "He will be greatly missed, for everyone knew him, and he has rarely left the village through his long life. For forty-six years he was Rector's Churchwarden, and has always taken a keen interest in Church and School". His father had been an innkeeper at the "White Smocks" Posting Inn, which used to stand on the site of Western Lodge, on the old A1. When the opening of the local railways killed the stage wagon trade, he came to live in Witton at Fell House. Peter Pearson, who had a fine set of whiskers, and his brother John, made cars and wheels for the village in their workshop behind the Three Tuns. When the spokes had been fitted into the rims, the wheels were bowled through the archway on to Front Street, and down to the blacksmith's to have their iron bands shrunk tightly on.

George Jackson, who lived in Dene Terrace, was the village stonemason. He was deaf, but a very clever sculptor. He made tombstones of "Frosterley marble", polishing them by the age-old method of rubbing with a hafted stone, lubricated with water. Whenever strong winds blew loose pantiles off village houses, he would be very busy replacing them during the following days. He built the wall for the churchyard when it was enlarged in 1903. His father had been a stonemason too, and helped in the enlargement of the Church fifty years before.

The Rector, the Rev. Arthur Watts, was a much loved and respected man in Witton. He came from Warwickshire, was educated at Durham University, and became Vice-Principal of Bede College and a Tutor of St. Hild's. He was Curate of St. Giles' Durham, and after being Curate of Shincliffe, came to Witton as Rector in 1889. His special interests were in education, science, astronomy, geology and history. He found a flint axe near St. John's Green and presented it to Newcastle Museum. He gave a handsome stained glass window to the Church in 1901, in memory of his parents. He was a man deeply concerned for the welfare of his fellow men, a man of great patriotism, and considerable eloquence. Even so, he could have his miserly side. It is said of him in the village, that he used to count out the potatoes for the maid to peel for Sunday lunch, before setting out for Morning Service. He retired in 1922 and died eleven years later, aged ninety-five.

Another well-known character was Coroner John Graham of Findon Cottage. Twice former President of Sunderland Incorporated Law Society, Vice President, and then President of the Royal English Arboricultural Society, a member of both Durham and Newcastle Antiquarian Societies, he became Coroner for the Chester Ward in 1915. He fought for jurors' expenses, but lost his case against the county council; so he paid all the jurors' expenses out of his own pocket. He was a recognised authority on Coroners' Law. He became Organising Officer for Chester-le-Street for the National Reserve, and initiated drills and practices. He was also Deputy Lieutenant for the Boy Scouts and had Jamborees at Findon Cottage. A man of social conscience and kindly disposition, he once bought Mr. B. Bailey a pair of strong shoes when he was working on the Dene clearance – a project initiated by Mr. Graham to help men in a time of unemployment – a kindness that Mr. Bailey has never forgotten.

In 1903, Mr. Graham bought a field beside the Church, to enable Witton Churchyard to be enlarged. It was rather ironical that Mrs. Graham was the first to be buried in the new ground. She died in July 1903, on the

way home from a trip with her husband, to Europe. Mr. Graham set up a fine red marble memorial to his first two wives, and inscribed his own name, but no date of burial for himself, which was fortunate, as he died in Bournemouth and his third wife buried him there!

There is an interesting pamphlet written by the second Mrs. Graham, about Findon Cottage. It was built about 1613, a small house of two rooms and an attic. It was much enlarged by Captain Ellis from whom Mr. Graham bought it, and continued improving it. He had the former kitchen transformed into "The Oak Room", and furnished it with antique pieces. When the new mantelpiece, made of old cherry wood grown on his land, was installed, the old smoke jack used for turning the spit, was found in the chimney. An old Kail pot was found under the hearthstone. Alas, it contained no treasure. The Hall mantel and jamb were made from old, pollarded oak. The motto carved on the Morning Room mantel, bought in Newcastle, was "Think and Thank" the same as that over the stables at Barton Abbey. The house boasts a "Priest Hole", where two priests were reputed to have taken refuge. Today, the house has at least one ghost, a small woman dressed like a nun, who appears in the room below the Priests' Room.

EDUCATION

THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS

The Witton Gilbert National School, built in 1850, was situated on the Lanchester to Durham road, between the Coach Road leading to the Parish Church and where the present Rectory stands. There was one main building plus a Schoolmaster's house, and the school catered for children of all ages, but was very overcrowded. The Government inspector obviously thought so too, and mentioned it in his report for February 1895.

"Mixed School

In all classes of the School except the Second Standard, the quality of instruction hardly reached fair, the Reading in the upper Standards is wanting in accuracy and intelligent expression, Handwriting, Spelling, Composition and Arithmetic are far from satisfactory. The Girls' Needlework might be much cleaner and neater. The Class Subjects are fairly successful, and the singing by note passable.

Infants' Class

Though the numbers in attendance have been somewhat smaller than they were during the previous year, yet they are still too large for the accommodation and for effective organisation. The Teacher, approved under Article 68, teaches vigorously, and in Reading, Writing and Needlework has produced some good results". This is just an extract from the 1895 report, and was published in the Parish Magazine. The Rector of the time, the Reverend Watts took a great interest in the schools, visited them frequently and gave a lot of school news in the Church Magazines.

The main event of 1895 was the building of a new Infants' School. Although we have a plan of the Mixed School, there is unfortunately no record of the plan of the Infants' School. A local firm, Messrs. Lodge & Sons won the contract, and it was hoped the school would be ready for use by August, but the actual opening was on October 9th. It was built in the Schoolmaster's garden, and opened by Mrs. W.C. Blackett of Acorn Close. After the official opening and speeches, the children went in and made it look more like a school. They gave a little entertainment to mark the opening, and then 80 children settled in with their former teacher Miss Allison, and a new second teacher, Miss Forster, who very soon took charge when Miss Allison left. The school was paid for largely by donations, from Consett Iron Co., the owners of Charlaw and Sacriston

Collieries, the University of Durham, and the Diocesan Fund [as it was a church school], among others. The village organised a Sale of Work to help, and by Easter 1896, the total cost of £500 was paid.

Unfortunately the records of the Mixed School were destroyed by fire, but the logbook of the Infants' School is in the Record Office in Durham and makes fascinating reading. It is a diary of the school, kept by the Headmistresses from 1895-1966, and we can learn a lot about the school from this. One of the first alterations in the curriculum of the Infants' School was the substitution of drawing instead of needlework for the boys; a popular one I should think! Each year the classes had a list of Object Lessons; we should call it Project Work today. The 1896 list was:

"ANIMALS	Cat, cow, sheep, horse, monkey, elephant, camel, lion, reindeer
BIRDS AND INSECTS	Ducks and geese, owl, ostrich, bees
TRADES	Baker, carpenter, blacksmith, farmer
MISCELLANEOUS	Water, ship, coal, iron, sugar, wild flowers, the town, the country, the seaside".

The "Kindergarten Occupations" for 1896 were as follows:

"Class I	Basket weaving, mat weaving, embroidered mats.
Class II	Paper folding, stick laying, straw and paper threading.
Class III	Needle drill, bead threading, fraying out, straw and paper threading".

There was also a certain amount of religious teaching, and a Diocesan Inspector came each year to test the schools, as the amount of support from Church Funds depended on the results. This is his report for 1896:

"MIXED SCHOOL	Old Testament decidedly good New Testament good Catechism good Liturgy very good Repetition very good
INFANTS' SCHOOL	Bible fair Repetition decidedly good
GENERAL REMARKS	The singing was distinctly successful and careful attention has been given to home prayers.

[signed] Sydney M. Reynolds.”

The Infants' School had a qualified teacher and a pupil teacher or monitress sometimes both. At the age of thirteen bright pupils could be chosen to serve a five-year apprenticeship as monitresses. They attended classes in Durham regularly, being given an afternoon off for that purpose, and were examined each year. They were paid £15 p.a. rising by £3 p.a. if they passed their exams. Annie Kendall was a monitress, and she seemed to be away from school more than she was there, so there was this sad entry in the School logbook:

“December 24th.

School closed for Christmas, Annie Kendall failed at the recent examinations [held October 17th] for candidates and pupil teachers.

December 29th.

School reopens after Christmas Holidays.

December 31st.

School closed this afternoon. Annie Kendall left school [the monitress]”

There was also mention of another girl who was appointed monitress, and after a few months it was discovered she was not thirteen, so she was sent back to school.

The Schools at this time were heated by open fires, which were not very efficient, as there are several references to the low temperatures in the Infants' school, 38°F being quite common. The school was shut quite often in the winter due to snowstorms, or closed in the afternoon in order to get the children home safely. They would probably have difficult journeys to farms and outlying houses along lanes and footpaths, and of course they would have to walk. Attendances were also very low during the several epidemics that swept the school; whooping cough, fever [presumably scarlet fever or typhoid], and the school was actually closed for four weeks in November/December 1904 by a very severe outbreak of measles, in which three children under five died. The Reverend Watts wrote in the Church magazine:

“Personally I very much question whether closing the school does not favour the spread of such contagious diseases as Measles, for the children are constantly in front of the houses where the sick ones lie”.

In the summer, the older children would be kept at home to help with the seasonal farm work, haymaking and harvesting, and so missed school.

Equipment seemed to be in very short supply, and the lack of it was noted in an Inspector's Report for 1896, and he recommended that, "Cupboards, Reading Books, Reading Sheets, and an Alphabet Stand should be obtained; the slates clearly and suitable ruled, and at least a large part of the playground levelled and gravelled". The cupboard was mentioned in several following inspections, and in 1900, this was part of his report: There is no School Clock, the Musical Instrument in its present state is quite useless for Teaching purposes, and the Cupboard mentioned in last year's report has yet to be supplied. These particulars should receive the earliest attention of the managers". This seems to have had some effect, as the next month the harmonium was repaired, and a little later a cupboard fixed in the Schoolroom.

When the Infants' School was built, there was a gallery in the room, which, according to a local inhabitant aged ninety, who remembers the school, consisted of a series of wide steps, on which forms were placed. The idea was that as a child improved, he moved his place along and up, so that the good and clever children were recognisable from their place in the gallery. In the Inspector's report for 1905, the recommendation was that, "The existing galleries should be removed and suitable desks provided, and the open fireplaces should be furnished with guards". The Reverend Watts was most indignant when the gallery was taken down in 1907. He wrote, "The infants have lost their gallery, for Mr. Paxton has, at the request of the School Managers, removed it. This is the latest act of levelling down, and in the eyes of teachers of all grades is a craze, educationally wholly unjustifiable.

One entry in the logbook for February 26th 1902, must have added a touch of drama to the every day routine. "When we came to school this morning, it was found that the key for the Infant School had been mislaid, and in consequence the cleaner had not been able to get in on the previous night to sweep up, or to attend to the fires the next morning. I at once went up to acquaint Mr. Watts [the Rector] of the matter, but found him away from home, so I sent for a local joiner to pick the lock. After waiting till 10.30 for him, I sent the children home, as some were crying with the cold. The joiner did not come until 1 o'clock, and he managed to get a key to fit, so the Teacher put on the fires and we had school in the afternoon.

27th February This morning one of the big boys found the key lying in the hedge. It must have been Thrown There".

School holidays were shorter than at present, just a week being given at Christmas, with perhaps a half day on New Year's Eve and New Year's Day. Half days were also given on Shrove Tuesday and Ash Wednesday, about ten days at Easter and four weeks in the Summer. There were extra days off for special occasions, such as two days on June 21st and 22nd 1897 for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee, and a week in June 1902, to celebrate the Coronation of King Edward VII. They were also given a day off to celebrate the consecration of the new churchyard in September 1903, which underlines the close links between the Schools and the Church.

The mixed School was altered in 1904 and as can be seen from the architect's plan, the main additions were toilet facilities, and two entrances, one for boys, and one for girls, were provided. There were only three rooms, and according to a ninety year old, who attended the school, there were four classes in the Main Long Room, Standard III was in the classroom leading from it, and the Infants had the other room with a tiered gallery for seats. The older children sat at desks, and he remembers that the ink froze in the inkwells in winter.

There were six Standards in the school, and the children had to pass an examination each year to reach the next Standard. Also the grant from the Education Committee was dependent upon results, so the children were encouraged to work. Up until 1893, children could leave school at the age of 10 if they reached Standard V, or took the Labour Examination and had a Labour certificate, or if they had enough attendances for a "Dunce's pass". In 1893 the leaving age was raised to 11, in 1899 it was raised to 12, and in 1918 to 14.

The Headmaster of 30 years standing, Mr. James Wilson resigned in 1894. His wife and his son and daughter had taught in the school. A Mr. Bartley was appointed soon after, and was called "Black Jack" by the children, because of his black hair and side-whiskers. Then came a Mr. Brewis, and in 1901 Mr. Bainbridge was appointed. The Diocesan Inspector remarked at the time that, "The general tone of the school was distinctly good, and the highest class passed a thoroughly satisfactory examination. I have every confidence that I shall find the work of the two lower classes satisfactory when the new headmaster has had time to thoroughly organise the work".

Reverend Watts visited the Mixed School regularly and sometimes had to reprimand the children for robbing rooks' nests in the Dene, which he records with "profound regret", and sometimes for stealing his apples. In 1900 he says, "I had the pleasure of sharing my crop of apples with the

children of the village and of the Industrial School, and that, in spite of the thievish visits to my garden". Several of our older residents remember being given an apple as they came out of school, by the Rector. Prize-givings were held annually, where prizes were given for good work and regular attendance. The Rector said at the ceremony in 1903 that, "One child has only missed one day in three years and so gets the best prize. Every child who attends every time in a year shall always have a prize". The Mixed School had a 'Glee Party', which was organized by Mr. R. Bainbridge [who became head in 1904] and performed at Benefit Concerts held at the school for the poor, or for injured miners.

One of the very few documents that survived the fire at the Junior School, as it became, was the Punishment book, in which all corporal punishment administered to the children had to be entered. The earliest date in it is 1920, but I shouldn't think children and their misdemeanours have changed very much. The most common offences were inattention, persistent talking, insubordination, copying, lateness, and some truancy. The usual punishment was one stroke of the cane on each palm, though more could be given for repeated offences, and even strokes on the posterior for something really serious! [I would like to thank the present headmaster of Witton Gilbert School for lending me the Punishment book].

After further alterations in 1908, the school survived in this form until after the 1914-1918 War, when it became unsafe because of subsidence from the local pits, so a new school was put up made of corrugated iron, across the Coach Road [opposite to where the War Memorial used to stand]. The old school building became the Church Hall and the Infants' School higher up the bank, the Scout Hut. The new school was built in 1932, on the site of the present Primary School in Sacriston Lane, and since a certain amount of re-building after a fire in 1966, and other additions, is in use today.

EARL'S HOUSE INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL FOR BOYS

Earl's house School lies about a mile from Witton Gilbert on the Lanchester Road, in the direction of Durham. It is at present used as a hospital for mentally handicapped people, but was built in 1885 as an Industrial School, a cross between an orphanage and a reformatory, under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, to take in boys who had committed petty crimes, who were persistent truants, or came from bad home backgrounds, and they stayed at the school until they were sixteen years old.

There were about sixty acres of land which were farmed by the school, providing the boys with farming experience, and also helping to feed the boys, and providing extra revenue for the school from the sale of various items. The boys were taught carpentry, shoe repairing, tailoring, and helped in the Blacksmith's Shop and Laundry. The younger ones not capable of these jobs, knitted socks on a knitting machine, but later this was discontinued and socks were bought. Ordinary school subjects were also taught. A band was formed, and football and cricket were played. A hundred and fifty boys were resident at the school, and as they were more or less serving a sentence, the rules and regulations were pretty strict.

The following extracts are from the Management Committee's Minute Books.

Regulations for Officers

The Superintendent or in his absence, the Schoolmaster, shall have full authority over all the other officers and boys, keep all Registers, Account Books etc., order and receive all goods for the School, Farm, Garden and Trade Shops.

The Matron shall have control of the Kitchen, Laundry, Linen and Bedding. She shall also issue to the female servants all articles at such times as they are required.

The Schoolmaster shall receive all orders regarding the School work from the Superintendent, and shall be responsible for the progress of the boys placed under their charge.

<u>The Medical Officer</u>	shall examine all boys upon admission, and enter in a journal all cases of sickness that may be brought to his notice.
<u>The Hind</u>	shall have charge of all Farm Stock, Implements, Farm and Dairy Produce, and shall be responsible for the good condition and safe custody of the same.
<u>The Gardener</u>	shall have charge of all garden tools, attend to all garden work, carriage roads, playgrounds, lawns, grass slopes, trees, shrubs, and all other work not being Farm work, and shall also act as an indoor or outdoor assistant when required.
<u>The Engineer</u>	shall have sole charge of the Steam Boilers, Calorifiers, Gas, Water, Steam and other pipes, and do ordinary repairs in connection with same, and shall also act as an indoor or outdoor assistant when required.
<u>The Cook</u>	shall be responsible for the food of officers boys, and for the cleanliness of the Kitchen, Scullery, Cooking and Dining room utensils.
<u>The Laundress</u>	shall wash, starch and iron for the offices and boys, and for the cleanliness of the Laundry, Sewing Room etc.
<u>The Housemaid</u>	shall clean the bedrooms, dormitories etc., in the forenoon, and shall act as Seamstress during the afternoon.
Officers may not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> [a] Strike a boy on any consideration [b] Place a boy in a cell, unless for an act of direct insubordination, and then only in the absence of the Superintendent. [c] Smoke whilst on duty or in any part of the building, except in the Reading Room. [d] Be absent from the School without leave, nor come late to duty, or from temporary leave of absence.

Regulations for Boys

Each boy on admission shall have his hair cut close, his clothes shall be taken from him and fumigated, and he shall be placed in a warm bath and well washed.

The Superintendent shall examine each boy on admission, and he shall be placed in the Standard for which he is qualified.

No boy shall be absent from school or from his appointed Industrial occupation without an order from the Superintendent.

Promotions shall not be made until after the annual visit of H.M. Inspectors.

No boy shall be presented for examination until he has been six months in the School.

Every boy may write home at intervals of three months after his admission. The date of each letter sent or received with the address of his parent, shall be entered in a book kept for that purpose.

When a boy commits a serious offence, a report in writing shall be sent to the Superintendent who will hear the cases and, if necessary, award punishment at 8.45 the following morning.

The Whole School shall have one afternoon in each week devoted to drill, bath, hair cutting and clothes' mending, and one afternoon, at least once a month, to a walk or excursion beyond the precincts of the School.

Mark System

1. The boys shall be classed in three divisions.
2. Every boy will be placed in the third division at the end of six months after admission, and twelve months' good conduct will entitle him to advancement to the Second division.
3. Twelve months' good conduct in the Second Division will entitle a boy to advancement to the First Division.
4. Boys who have been in the First Division six months without forfeiture of marks will be placed in the Merit Class and receive 24 additional marks payment.
5. Six marks will be awarded to each boy for every day, subject however to deduction for forfeitures, as provided by the rules.

6. The value of every twelve marks shall be:

- the First Division - one penny
- the Second Division - one halfpenny
- the Third Division - one farthing

Punishment System

<u>OFFENCES</u>	<u>FIRST OFFENCE</u>	<u>SECOND OFFENCE</u>	<u>THIRD OFFENCE</u>
Dishonesty Indecency	18 marks forfeited and not exceeding 6 stripes with cane	36 marks forfeited and not exceeding 4 strokes with birch	144 marks forfeited and not exceeding 8 strokes with birch
Disobedience Falsehood Impertinence Carelessness	18 marks forfeited and not exceeding 4 stripes with cane		
Insolence Neglect of Duty	18 marks forfeited	36 marks forfeited	108 marks forfeited and not exceeding 4 stripes with cane
Untidiness Absconding	36 marks forfeited	72 marks forfeited and not exceeding 8 strokes with birch	All marks forfeited and not exceeding 12 strokes with birch

The boys' diet was plain and wholesome, but rather monotonous, from our viewpoint. It was very like a workhouse diet.

Boys' Menu

<u>DAY</u>	<u>BREAKFAST</u>		<u>DINNER</u>		<u>TEA</u>	
Sunday	Cocoa	1 pt.	Beef or Mutton	4 oz.	Cocoa	1 pt.
	Bread	6 oz.	Bread	4 oz.	Bread	6 oz.
	Dripping	½ oz.	Potatoes	8 oz.	Butter	½ oz.
			Cabbage	4 oz.		
Monday	Porridge	1 pt.	Soup	1 pt.	Cocoa	1 pt.
	Bread	6 oz.	Bread	6 oz.	Bread	6 oz.
	Dripping	½ oz.				

DAY	BREAKFAST		DINNER		TEA	
Tuesday	Porridge	1 pt.	Stew	1 pt.	Cocoa	1pt
	Bread	6 oz.	Bread	6 oz.	Bread	6oz
	Milk	½ pt.			Dripping	½oz
Wednesday	Porridge	1 pt.	Pudding	12 oz	Cocoa	1 pt
	Bread	6 oz	Bread	3 oz	Bread	6 oz
	Milk	½ pt	Sugar or jam	1 oz		
Thursday	Porridge	1 pt	Meat	4 oz	Cocoa	1 pt
	Bread	6 oz	Bread	4 oz	Bread	6oz
	Milk	½ pt	Potatoes	8 oz		
			Cabbage	4 oz		
Friday	Porridge	1 pt	Soup	1 pt	Cocoa	1 pt
	Bread	6 oz	Bread	6 oz	Bread	6oz
	Dripping	½ oz				
Saturday	Porridge	1 pt	Stew	1 pt	Cocoa	1 pt
	Bread	6 oz	Bread	6 oz	Bread	6oz
	Milk	½ pt			Dripping	½oz

Boys over 12 to have 2 oz. of Bread at each meal in addition to above.

Ingredients of Diet for boys

1 Pint of Porridge to contain 2½ oz. oatmeal and ½ oz of sugar.

1 Pint of Soup to contain 4oz Shin of Beef, 2oz Split Peas, 6oz Potatoes and Mixed Vegetables.

1 Pint of Stew to contain 4oz compressed Beef, 8oz potatoes and Mixed Veg.

12oz Suet Pudding to contain 7oz Flour and 1½oz Suet

1 Pint Cocoa to contain ¼oz Flake Cocoa, ½oz Sugar, ¼ pt Milk

The Officers were given an allowance of food, which would be cooked and served for them if they lived in at the School.

Officers Allowance

Bread	1½ lbs per day
Bacon	6 oz “
Butcher's Meat	¾ lb “
Milk	1 pt “
Butter	½ lb per week
Cheese	½ lb “
Coffee	¼ lb “
Moist Sugar	½ lb. per week
Lump Sugar	1 lb “
Tea	¼ lb “

The Assistant Schoolmaster complained of the similarity of the food served to the officials at the school, and asked for a more varied diet. So it was decided they be allowed a fish dinner once a week.

In 1901 the following additions were made to the boys' bill of fare.

January 1st & Easter Sunday: Currant loaves at Tea instead of the usual White or Brown bread.
Annual Trip : 2 stone extra meat in lieu of vegetables and currant loaves for Tea instead of usual White or Brown bread.
Christmas Day : 2 stone extra meat, and currant loaves for tea instead of usual White or Brown.
Also : 2 stones of extra potatoes on Sundays and Thursdays when there are no Cabbages to be had.

The Officers were allowed 2 pts., milk daily for puddings, and 10lbs Teacakes every Wednesday and Saturday.

Supplies were bought wholesale, some from local suppliers, of which one that supplied Groceries and Housekeeping items is still trading in Durham City. Stores were bought for the Tailors', Shoemakers', Farm and clothing needs from various places, some more specialised items coming from as far away as London. All bread to be bought while the oven was being repaired. This was not possible in 1901, so a new range was bought for £10 4s 0d.

The Farm

The farm was run by a Farm Bailiff, and in 1900 when a new one was required, there were 83 applicants for the post. The successful candidate received £65 p.a. with house, coals, milk, potatoes, 1lb butter per week, and medical attention, and it was understood that his wife would attend to the Dairy and Poultry. A variety of stock was kept; cows, sheep, pigs, hens, horses for ploughing etc., and various crops were grown; wheat, barley, potatoes, cabbages, turnips, and carrots etc.

In 1895 a long list of requirements was put to the committee:

2 tons Cotton Cake

2 tons Bran

15 cwts. Bean Meal	5 tons Turnips
2 Dandy Brushes	1 pair Plough Cords
1 Slasher	2 Gripes
1 Bill knife	1 pr. Hedging mittens,
150 Nails	100 Posts
3 Plough Shares & 6 Points	

Dairy equipment needed was:

1 Churn, 1 Butter Worker, 1 pr. Scotch Hands, Butter Sealer, 2 Milk Pans, 1 Pint and 1 Gallon Measure.

Blinds are also required for the Dairy.

The boys were hired out to other farms for haymaking and harvest for 10d or 1/- a day, or in one case, labour was exchanged for the use of a Reaping Machine. In 1904 requests were made to use the farm for Educational and Experimental work, so more land was purchased to make this a viable proposition.

Medical Care

The boys were given a medical examination on arrival at the school, and were reasonably healthy, apart from the usual ailments, but there was a mysterious epidemic of what seemed to be typhoid fever in November 1895. Five boys were suffering with so-called typhoid, and another six had all the symptoms of influenza. The County Medical Officers and the County Surveyors checked all the drainage arrangements for the school, but they were "satisfied of their completeness and sufficiency". The medical Officer at the school suspected the milk from a certain cow which had a sore udder, and subsequently, tests revealed no typhoid bacilli, but micrococci which caused a form of blood poisoning, which resembled the symptoms of influenza, or if severe, typhoid, so the milk was boiled until the cow recovered, and all was well.

A Durham dentist was appointed to treat the boys and his scale of charges was:

Extracting	[ordinary]	1/-
Extracting	[with local anaesthetic]	2/6
Extracting	[under Gas]	5/-
Stopping	[with Cement]	3/6

Stopping	[with Metal]	5/-
Artificial teeth	[Vulcanite Plate]	5/-

He also examined all the boys and there were only 23 out of 133 with sound teeth. He advised brushing the teeth, and presented the school with one gross of toothbrushes and a supply of tooth powder, so the school ordered some tooth mugs to encourage the habit.

Boys who needed spectacles were taken to Newcastle “for spectacles to be properly sighted and fitted at 5/- per pair”.

Staff

The Superintendent of the school was a Mr. Goodenough, and his wife acted as Matron, and was responsible for engaging and overseeing the female servants. The Farm Bailiff was in sole charge of the farm, and reported to the Management Committee. In 1895, the schoolmaster was paid £55 p.a. This included board, lodging, washing etc. if he was single, but if married, he was allowed 15/- per week in lieu and allowed to live away from the school. The assistant schoolmaster received £40 and board and lodgings. The blacksmith earned £44 4s 0d. The gardener’s salary wasn’t stated, but he was not given a rise. The assistant gardener had 10/- per week with board and lodgings, and washing and a suit of uniform each year. The joiner had 15/- per week and similar emoluments. The shoemaker’s wages are not mentioned, but he received 12/- in lieu of board and lodgings. The drill officer taught physical training. The bandmaster was engaged when the band was formed. He was granted 5/- for each engagement away from the school, as they usually occurred on his half-holiday. The laundress earned £24 p.a. The cook is not mentioned nor the housemaid as presumably the matron dealt them with. The tailor also is not mentioned, but there were ‘perks’ for the gardener, tailor and cook, of ½ load of manure for their gardens. There were staff problems in those days, and one blacksmith was often late through being drunk the night before, so was eventually dismissed. Also in January 1902, the Superintendent reported that the assistant schoolmaster and the laundress were found in the laundry with the door locked. On the 4th inst. she absented herself without leave. She had confessed that she was with child to the assistant schoolmaster and that he [the Superintendent] had discharged her. The assistant schoolmaster also received a month’s notice.

Instruction

Apart from farming, boys were taught tailoring and shoemaking, and kept the school clothed and shod. The Superintendent visited several other Industrial Schools to see their tailoring and shoemaking provision. In one school the shoemakers' shop had machinery for everything except soling, so could earn quite a lot supplying other schools and the trade. He found the other schools very similar to Earl's House, but they used more machines, so he requested an extra sewing and buttoning machine for the tailors' shop, and a sewing machine for the shoemakers' to enable them to do the work quicker and give time for technical instruction.

The joiners' apprentices took examinations, and this is the Drawing Inspector's report:

"Drawing	Freehand	Good
Drawing	Ruler work	Excellent
Drawing	Scale	Good

Manual Instruction: Drawing Good, Bench work Good.

Remarks: More knowledge of the growth and seasoning of Timber required".

The band was also treated as an Industrial Occupation, and a new brick and tile building was erected for band practice at the cost of £246 15s 0d. The band played at many local events, and charged at least 5/- per performance. They also played for the Sunday Church Service at Witton Gilbert Parish Church on occasion, and gave concerts for the village. In September 1902, the Bandmaster of the 1st Royal Irish Fusiliers requested that four boys be allowed to leave the school and enlist in the Regiment. All four boys expressed a desire to join up, so were sent off the Dublin.

The boys had an annual day trip to the seaside. Tynemouth was one place visited, and the party started and finished the day with the band playing. The whole school also had an occasional two weeks' holiday away; one place mentioned was Seaton Carew. I have seen two summer camps reported in the minutes for 1896 and 1904, but more may have taken place later.

Local people contributed to the school's entertainment at Christmas and New Year. The Reverend Arthur Watts wrote in the 1903 Church Magazine, "For some years it has now been the custom for members of our family to give an entertainment at Christmas time to the boys of the

County Industrial School, and to the officers and their friends. I announced the items of the programme. The entertainers were; Mrs. Watts, Rev. H. Greenwood [curate], Mr. A.F. Watts, Miss Gladys Watts, Miss Mary Holmes, Miss D. Holmes, Mr. Alfred Heart and Mrs. R. Bainbridge. Three of the pieces were given in costume and were well received, as indeed all were”.

An invitation from the Durham and Floral and Industrial Society Annual Exhibition was extended to the school, but whether as visitors or exhibitors is not clear.

For the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902, a sum not exceeding £5 was granted to provide sports and other entertainments for the boys during the Coronation Festivities, and extra food for the occasion. A hundred and fifty King’s Cups were sent to the school by Mr. H.L. Doulton of the Lambeth Pottery, and he asked that receipt of them be acknowledged direct to Sir Francis Knollys at Buckingham Palace, which was duly done.

Although boys were normally kept at the school until they were sixteen years old, some parents applied for their sons to go out on licence. The police visited these homes, and reported on the parents and the state of the houses. Depending on their reports, the boy was sent home or remained in the school. The reports would observe that parents were drunkards, the house filthy, or that parents were in lodgings and in these cases the boys would not be allowed out. Or, they would remark that the father was respectable and had a comfortable home. In a case like that, the boy would go out. The boys were still under supervision and visited at home by the Superintendent and the police at regular intervals, and in 1900, the Superintendent applied to the Home Office for leave to discharge boys who had been out on licence for over three years and were not likely to return to the school.

Even when discharged they were not quite free of the school. Here is a report of visits to discharged boys:

In work and doing well	98
Out of work otherwise doing well	9
In the workhouse	1
Failed to answer letters	6
Unknown	8
Of doubtful character	<u>6</u>
	<u>128</u>

It is interesting to read that, "Permission was given to the Superintendent to purchase a complete photographic outfit for taking photographs of the boys when they enter and leave school.

Cost £5 10s 0d.

Fire drill was instituted in June 1904, and the boys given a set of rules.

Engine Squad	Four squads were formed for fire fighting. 2 officers and 48 boys. To bring the engine from the shed. Work it 24 at a time and change round about every 5 minutes.
Hose Squad	1 officer and 6 boys. To bring the reel and place ready for coupling.
Coupling Squad	1 officer and 6 boys. To fix stand pipe and turnkey, to couple hose and nozzles, and turn on water when required.
Ladder Squad	2 officers and 12 boys. To bring ladders to fire, fix them and be ready with hatchets to make a way for the water. Boys not in squads to proceed to allotted fire station.

This needed a lot of equipment, which was provided as follows;

1 Merryweather Improved Public Schools' pattern manual	
Fire Engine.	£96 0s 0d
8 50ft. lengths of very best quality pressure canvas hose.	£26 0s 0d
3 Firemen's Axes	19s 6d
1 Gunmetal divided breeching	£2 10s 0d
Engine to be written, "DURHAM INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS", and delivered and tested free at Durham including giving boys preliminary drill	<u>£5 10s 0d</u>
	<u>£130 19s 6d</u>

Fire pumps, fire buckets and brackets to hang them on inside the school were also bought, and fire exits checked. In November 1904, the insurance of school buildings was increased for £6,000 to £9,000.

The boys were a familiar sight in Witton Gilbert, helping on various farms, and attending church regularly. A ninety year old native of the village remembers them marching to church each Sunday afternoon, wearing a grey uniform with a forage cap and grey and red scarf. Later they were allowed to walk to the village in groups instead of marching, and the uniform was changed to navy blue with Eton collars.

Earl's House remained an Industrial School until the 1920s, when it became a Sanatorium with seventy-eight beds for tubercular children. In 1953, with the advent of antibiotics and the subsequent decline of T.B., the building was used as a hospital for a hundred and twenty mentally handicapped children, and enlarged in 1967 to care for three hundred and seventy children and adults. Constant enlargement and modernisation have ensured the survival of a thriving community on the foundations of the old one.

FARMING

Witton Gilbert had been primarily an agricultural community until the middle of the nineteenth century, when the sinking on new pits close by in Langley Park, Kimblesworth, Sacriston and Bearpark, provided the men with more lucrative and less seasonal occupations. The old farms still flourished, with perhaps fewer men and more machinery. In 1900 the farms were these:

Hartside Farm	Mr. Jackson
Fulforth Farm	Mr. J.P. Bell
Sniperley Farm	Mrs. Harper
Witton Hall Farm	Mr. T.R. Holmes
White House Farm	Mr. Lawson
Sleights House Farm	Mrs. Peacock
New Close Farm	Mr. S. Holmes
Witton Farm	Mr. M. Ellison
Colliery Farm	Mr. W. Tindale
Kaysburn Farm	Mr. J. Wallace
Lodge Farm	Mr. Peacock [see map]

It has proved very difficult to find any records for Witton farms at this date. Most of them were rented from big landlords like the Earl of Durham, the Dean and Chapter of Durham and the various collieries, and the families of the tenant farmers have moved away from the area, taking their papers with them. Fortunately, an account book for Witton Hall Farm beginning in 1920 has survived, and our thanks are due to the present owner for making it available for study. Although the First War had an effect on prices and wages, methods of farming would not have greatly changed since 1900. Horses were the chief source of power, and the raising of stock, the chief source of income.

In 1921, Witton Hall Farm was managed as follows:

The farm stock included; 31 bullocks, 6 heifers, 2 cows, 1 calf and a Frankland Bull. There were 3 horses called Duke, Soldier and Cappy, 1 mare called Blossom, a filly and 2 colts. There were 49 ewes and lambs, 1 tup and 1 black-faced ewe.

The farm gear included; 2 wagons, 3 long carts, 2 hay bogies, 2 binders, 3 grass cutters, a hay rake, a corn drill, a paddie, a sweep, a manure drill, a turnip drill, a roller, a chain harrow, 2 harrows, 3 scufflers, a double plough, 2 ploughs, a potato lifter and 2 turnip slicers.

During the year, the farmer bought other essential equipment: a weighing machine, a hay lifter, pig troughs, wooden and earthenware mealtubs, 3 hen houses, a dog kennel, a new ladder, sheep troughs and a wood shed. He bought hurdles, oak posts, nails, barbed wire and wire netting for repairs to fences. Extra tools and equipment were bought, like a cross-cut saw and 2 ordinary saws, an axe, three stack knives, a hay spade, 2 galvanised scoops, wire rope and blocks, 4 sets of swingle trees, 3 sets of cart gears, a plough and traces, a sack barrow, a wheel barrow, and assorted cartshafts and spokes. He needed 4 new stack covers, a hay net, and stack pins.

He settled accounts for repairs and equipment from the Blacksmith, the Ironmonger, the Saddler and the Veterinary, and he purchased cattle cake and linseed from the Corn and Seed Merchant.

He had seven regular farm workers paid an average of £2 14s per week, and five casual workers paid by the hour. Their wages represented just under a quarter of his annual expenditure.

During the year, he had electric light installed in one of his outbuildings. He paid extra for the opening out of drains in the Garth and the Pinfold and for special work on hedging and fencing. He paid 22s 6d per acre to have 37 acres of fallow ploughed, and 5s an acre to have manure mixed and spread on 102 acres. He bought in lime, basic slag, phosphates and nitro-lime as fertilizers, seed corn to supplement his own, clover seed and seed potatoes.

About two thirds of his income in 1921 came from selling stock; bullocks, heifers, ewes and lambs, hogs and the occasional horse. The beasts were sold at Lanchester market, Chester le Street market and Gateshead market. Butchers, R. Lawson of Witton, and R.&T. Swainston, bought directly from the farm, and other buyers were Durham Co-op, and Brandon and Byshottles Co-op. A large proportion of the remaining third of his income, came from selling grain and hay, and a smaller amount from selling potatoes. He sold oats to Consett Iron Company and Mr. C. Green of Witton, wheat to T. Marton & Son and the Swainston brothers. Hay was sold to Bearpark Colliery for the horses, and to Annfield Plain Co-op. R. Swainston bought 40 sacks of potatoes, and the Co-op Wholesale Department bought 20 tons. Farm workers bought their own supplies by the sack. A much smaller amount was brought in by the sale of eggs, butter and milk.

The account book contains a cropping scheme for 1922 also showing the fertilizer used. Other land usage is listed, and the total farm acreage is given as 282 acres.

Allotment Field	18 acres	Turnips	Steamed bone
Severalls	8 acres	Turnips	flour, 3 cwt per acre
Severalls	4 acres	Potatoes	Potash salts 3 cwts
Ewe Hills	9 acres	Potatoes	per acre
West Church Haugh	1 acre	Potatoes	
Low Church Hill	20 acres	Wheat	Potash 2½ cwts
West Church Haugh	6 acres	Wheat	per acre
Parlour Field	1½ acres	Wheat	
Surage Land	9 acres	Barley	
Allotment Field	8 acres	Oats	Steamed bone flour
Severalls	8 acres	Oats	3 cwts per acre
East Church Haugh	10 acres	Oats	
Black Cragg	10 acres	Oats	
Black Cragg	4 acres	Meadow	Steamed bone flour
West Field	12 acres	seed	3 cwts per acre
Wall Field	21 acres	& Clover	
Fair Field	14 acres	Seed pasture	
Hemmel Field	23 acres	over on grass ley	
Hemmel Field	10 acres	Clad land	damaged cattle cake
Severalls	20 acres	meadow	5 cwts per acre
Ewe Hills	12 acres	& temporary	
		ley meadow	
Boggs	28 acres	Wood, waste	
Sundry	25½ acres	and pasture	

Newspapers for 1900 provide useful information about local markets and prices for beasts. Shorthorn cattle were the most popular, and a good beast could bring £20-£25 at a sale. Store cattle were £17 10s for bullocks and £18 5s for heifers at Tow Law mart. At Lanchester mart, a bull calf made £3 7s 6d and a cow in calf made £25 15s 3d. Of the various breeds of sheep, Leicester Cheviot half-breeds were popular. At Hexham Mart 20 half-breed lambs were bought for £42 10s and 20 ewes cost £107 at Haswell. At Darlington Auction Mart, the farmer was paid on average 9d to 9½d per pound for mutton, and 2s 6d for a wool fleece.

Horses were an essential part of the farm, as they provided most of the motive power. A very important job for the working horse was threshing the corn in the Gin-Gan. This was a circular wheelhouse with a slated roof. The horse was harnessed to the wheel, and walked slowly round to produce power to drive the thresher, which would be situated in an adjoining barn. There was a Gin-Gan at Witton Farm, as can be seen from the village plan. In 1900, the mobile thresher was often being used in preference. The thresher would travel from farm to farm, pulled by, and operated by a steam traction engine. Horses still pulled ploughs, mowing machines, rakes and seed drills. They pulled carts too – no doubt the potatoes, hay and grain sold by Witton Hall Farm, would be transported to Witton Station by farm cart. Another vital job, which Mr. Hood remembers, doing, was taking the corn to Wallnook Mill to be ground. The outward journey from Witton was easy, but coming back was more difficult, as the gradient just after Kaysburn was much steeper then, so steep, that a second horse had to be harnessed to help the carts up the hill.

Farmers still used horses for riding from place to place, as cars were only in their infancy. A bay mare cost 36½ guineas in 1900, a strong cob 30 guineas, hacks 43 guineas, and a bay horse 36½ guineas. Most farms kept two breeding mares to produce two foals a year. The stud fee for a thoroughbred mare was 10 guineas, plus 5s for the groom's fee. A hand-sewn carthorse harness to buy complete was 5 guineas per set.

Pigs were kept on most farms as a handy source of meat and bacon. In 1923 Witton Hall Farm had 2 sows, 12 pigs and 4 porkers. In this area they would either be Middle-white, Yorkshire or Berkshire breeds. The pigs were fed prime to 30 or 40 stone weight, and then on the selected day, would be killed by a local person or butcher at the farm. A lot of preparation was needed in the house; chiefly lots of very hot water to scald the pig, and a hot oven to cook the black and white puddings. After

hanging overnight, the carcass was cut up and trimmed. The joints and hams were packed away in salt, with particular attention being given to the knuckle joints in the ham and shoulder. The veins at these points were removed, and salt-petre was packed into the recess. The intestines were scraped and washed, for they were to be used for the skins of the sausages made from the trimmings. Large amounts of lard from rendered down scraps, were stored in pottery jars. There was such an abundance of homemade specialities, that it was customary to share them around with relatives, friends and neighbours, who did the honours in return when they killed their pig.

Agricultural wages were not very high. In 1900, married men were paid an average of 20s per week. They would live in a farm cottage, and have 7½ cwts. of potatoes and other small allowances. Overtime was paid at the rate of 4d per hour, or £3 to £4 per year. Unmarried men who lived in at the farm were paid £30 to £36 per year. Women workers were paid at the casual rate of 1s 3d per day, and would be mainly employed in picking potatoes or making hay. Wages rose considerably after the First War, as men were in short supply. Average rates for the summer months of 1920 were 43s per week.

For workers who lived in, the food had improved over the years, to include eggs and bacon for breakfast instead of oatmeal porridge, bread and coffee with skimmed milk. For dinner, meat and vegetables replaced dumplings.

Work on the farm began at 7 a.m. by which time all the horses would have been fed. However, on threshing days, everyone began at 6 a.m. Two men, who had brought the mobile thresher the previous night, would have slept at the farm. They, and about ten other local helpers were to be provided with dinner, and probably tea. Plentiful supplies of drink were essential. The jobs were apportioned thus; two men to fork from the stack, one to pass on, one Band cutter, one to feed the corn to the thresher, two to carry the corn, two to carry the straw and one to fire the engine and fill up the water in the boiler. Harvest of course was one of the busiest times of the year. Fields which were too steep to cut with a horse drawn reaper, had to be cut by hand using a long handled scythe, a difficult skill, which had to be learned at an early age.

The farmer's wife has always been a hard worker, and her life then would be even busier than it is now. As well as cooking and cleaning for her family, she usually fed the hens and pigs, made cheese and butter, fed any casual labourers, and had to help with milking and the cleaning of the

cow byres. The dairy would be her responsibility, and she would sell milk to customers who came with a can or a jug to be filled. There would be large milk churns to be filled for the milk cart, which would drive round the village selling milk at about 4d per quart.

Cheese making was a time consuming business. The morning's milk would be added to the previous evening's cream, and then put into a clean tub, to which some boiling water was added, to avoid over richness. When it was lukewarm, rennet was added. After curdling, the mixture was broken up and mashed, the whey strained off, and the solid curds pressed down into a cheese vat. After solidifying a little, the curd was put into a cheesecloth and pressed in a cheese press to extract more of the liquid. The cloth was changed, and the cheese re-pressed four or five times more, and then it was left for twenty-four hours. The next day, the cheese was laid in the salting tub, rubbed with salt, and left for another night. Next morning it was rubbed again, and turned out into the brine, where it stayed for two to three days according to size. Then the cheese was laid on a clean, scrubbed table, and often turned until it was thoroughly dry, and fit to be stored in a cellar or other cool, dark place.

Butter making was a regular task. For home use, small quantities could be made in a large glass jar with wooden paddles attached to the lid [see photograph]. Two to three days' collection of cream, having been kept as cold as possible, could be made up in such a churn. After the butter formed, the water and buttermilk were drained away. The butter was washed with clean water, and salt solution added to give the familiar flavour and a longer life. It was then kneaded with a butter worker to remove all excess water and whey, and shaped into blocks or pats as required.

THE PARISH COUNCIL

In 1894, the old system of local government by Quarter Sessions in the County, and by Church Vestries in the Parish, was done away with, and an Act of Parliament substituted a system of County, District and Parish Councils instead.

The Church Vestry, or Council, was the only Local Authority, and it dealt with ecclesiastical and civil affairs. Its fairly wide powers had been eroded over the years, so that it was finally left in charge of local roads and paths, in charge of any Parish Church property like Almshouses, and in charge of assessing and levying the rates by which the poor were supported. We see the Vestry at work in Witton in reports in the Church Magazine. In 1889, four Overseers were appointed, with responsibility for the Rate and the Poor; Mr. Sam Holmes, Mr. Christopher Peacock, Mr. George Lumsden and Mr. James Stevenson. The Waywarden, with responsibility for roads, was Mr. P. Bell. The Churchwardens were always members of the Vestry, and in 1890 they were Mr. Peter Pearson and Mr. James Wilson. The Vestry decided to put up the rent of the Parish Almshouses to 6d per week, and take steps to evict those tenants who would not pay. They also discussed raising a "voluntary rate" in the village to pay for the repair of the Churchyard wall. After the Act of 1894, some of these powers were transferred to the new Parish Council, and the Vestry in its new form of Parochial Church Council, confined its activities to Church matters.

Witton and Sacriston were paired to make a new Civil Parish and the new system was at first welcomed, but later, Witton began to feel that it was unfairly represented on the Council as it only had four members, whereas members from Sacriston numbered eleven. The Rector wrote that on November 29th 1894, "the last Vestry was held under our old parochial system, when Mr. Graham was re-appointed Waywarden, and a Vestry of the whole parish carried its last vote of thanks to its official chairman. Henceforth the Vestry will be confined to Church people and their business to Church affairs, a distinct advantage. A limited elective body at a Parish Meeting through their representative body, the Parish Council, or the wider District and County Councils, will deal with purely Parish affairs. This new scheme will be much more expensive; it should therefore be much more efficient. This, time will prove. An effort was made on December 1st to avoid an election, but was unfortunately ineffectual. This election will cost the parish much money, which might have been better spent. Under the new Act, the first Parish Meeting was held by consent of the Trustees in Witton Gilbert National School on

December 4th, and was largely attended. Mr. Blackett was elected chairman, and there were twenty-nine candidates for the fifteen places. The decision by show of hands was rejected and a poll demanded. This was taken on December 17th when Messrs. Brass, Noble, C. Green, T. Green, Robson, Robinson, Embleton, Turner, Gillow, Mole, Nicholson, Stevenson, Goodwin, Peacock and T.R. Holmes were elected on the Parish Council, and Messrs. Blackett, Garson, and Swainson on the District Council. The parent village is here fairly represented by its four candidates Messrs. Green, Turner, Mole and Holmes, as it is also on the District Council by Mr. Blackett, so that evidently a sense of justice rules the minds of the majority of this double parish, as I hope it always will”.

As early as next June, there was a move afoot to separate Witton and Sacriston “for civil purposes----believing it will be for the good of each community”. The Rector said, “I heartily desire it, and hope it may be effected to the relief of existing strain and discontent”. But on July 24th the Clerk of the County Council told the Rector that no case had been made out for separation, so the double Council rubbed along somewhat uneasily.

In March 1901, the Rector wrote, “I suppose I must notice the election of a Parish Council, if only to rejoice that henceforth, it will not be an annual affair. That of March 4th at Witton was little more than a farce. Circumstances are dead against us, and as I see no way of remedy since a separate existence is denied us, I have felt compelled to decline nomination again. To labour in vain is folly. Whenever the possibility of remedying matters arises, I shall be ready to answer the call of duty, as I am sure you all will. The footpaths through our village are crying out pretty loudly just at present; I wonder if anybody will hear and heed the cry. The poor little ones who tumble down on them will do plenty of crying, and their parents will be pretty near crying over their shoebills. As I write, the “Parish Meeting” is being held at Sacriston, and perhaps “there’s a good time coming”, but as I am not there to see, I can only say – perhaps!”

We can see the Council in action in reports of its meetings, in the Durham Advertiser. On September 13th 1899, the Lighting and Footpath Committee of the Council, met at Fell House to view a footpath running through Laverick Hall, West Hall, and Broom House, terminating at Nursing Field. Lord Durham’s agent had closed it. Several of the oldest inhabitants were interviewed, and said that the path had been used to their knowledge for the last sixty years. The Clerk was asked to write to

the District Council requesting action on this footpath, and another, which led from Bleach Green to West Hall. The Housing Committee discussed the scarcity of houses, which was causing serious overcrowding in Sacriston, Kimblesworth and Edmondsley. The Clerk was to pass on a request to the District Council to take action. The Council paid £5 to the Rate Collector for drawing up and collecting a special Sanitary rate for the half year.

There was further discussion of footpaths on February 2nd 1900, when the following members were present; the Chairman, Councillor T.F. Brass, Rev. A. Watts, Councillors Gair, Moralee, Lumsden, Nicholson, and the Clerk, George Southern. They decided to repair the footpath down the Gap from Plawsworth Road to Mr. Lumsden's shop, and the Clerk was asked to write to Lanchester Council asking them to co-operate with them in trying to get the previously mentioned footpaths closed by Lord Durham, opened again. The Clerk was ordered to pay £72 3s 9d ground rent for electric poles and for lighting for the winter quarter.

Electric street lighting had been installed in Witton village in 1896. The Rev. Watts wrote in the Church magazine for February, of "the luxury this winter of going home not in darkness but mildly flooded in electric light. For Witton is pioneer in applying the electric light to a country village. There was a preliminary trial on Christmas Eve, but it was not formally installed till Mr. Brass, Chairman of the Parish Council switched it on on Saturday January 4th. The generosity and good feeling of the owners of the Charlaw, Sacriston and Kimblesworth Collieries have made this possible. The work is that of the Corbett Electrical Engineering Co. of Newcastle. Power is supplied at Charlaw and Kimblesworth Collieries. At the former, a coupled high-speed vertical engine drives a Crompton 250 volt dynamo, which supplies currents to about 180 sixteen-candle power lamps, distributed over about ten miles of wire. The remotest light, though about two miles off, was quite bright. The one road not yet lighted is that to the Parish Church, which is somewhat unfortunate.

Electrical matters were on the agenda of the meeting held on March 30th 1900. Mr. Jopling complained about the position of the lamp at Bottlers' Yard. Mr. Embleton proposed that the meeting sanction a lighting rate of 4½d in the pound on houses and Collieries, and 1½d in the pound on land, for the year ending March 1901. This was carried.

Mr. James Wilson took up the cudgels about the Council's neglect in repairing footpaths and stiles. He complained that he had brought a resolution to the same effect the previous year, only to be told that the parish Council would attend to them. All that had been done was a little

repairing of a footpath belonging to Lord Durham, and another through Charlaw Wood. There was a footpath to Bearpark, which was in a very dangerous condition, and there ought to be a handrail put up to prevent people falling into the Browney. Another footpath to the west of the old Gatehouse was full of holes. Mr. Jopling agreed with these remarks, and spoke about the bad condition of the paths on the main road from Witton to Sacriston. The Chairman said that he was sure the Council was doing its best, but Mr. Wilson's resolution was carried.

The Overseers still seem to have been responsible for assessing the rates, and trouble blew up over this at the same meeting. Mr. W. Jopling had already written to the Press complaining that the valuation was unfair, that it had been done twenty-six years before and many anomalies had since arisen, which he felt the four Overseers were not capable of dealing with, and suggesting that a professional surveyor should be employed instead. He now formally proposed at the meeting that a professional surveyor be employed. He said that the new valuation done by the Overseers was a sham. "Talk about making a parson swear", he said, "it's enough to make fifty parsons swear". Although some new property had now been rated, some had still been left off the list. There were discrepancies in the rating of Colliery houses and Beer houses. The monetary burdens of the parish should be borne equally according to the property a person had, and it was not fair that one person should be charged nearly double another's charge for the same class of property. One landlord receiving £18 rent, was rated at £7 10s, whilst another receiving £13 rent, was rated at £11 10s. Mr. Holmes said that the Overseers had worked hard for nearly a year on the new valuation, and he was sorry they were getting no credit for it. There would always be inequalities in the rating system, and rent could not always be taken as a guide. Mr. Embleton, one of the Overseers, said that there were fewer inequalities than there had been, and that if people were dissatisfied they should appeal to have their valuation reduced. There was a certain amount of support for the new valuation. The chairman asserted that rents would go up if the rates went up, and that that would be the result of employing a professional surveyor, who would probably charge five per cent for his work. Mr. Jobling's motion was then put to the vote, and defeated.

At the Council Meeting on April 27th 1900, we see a sub-committee being formed to gather information and consider ways of improving the health of the township. We also see that the council acquired grazing land, which it let out as allotments. At the meeting on June 22nd 1900, Mr. Wallace of Kaysburn Farm wrote to ask the council not to take any more land from

him, and Mr. Strong said that at the next meeting he would propose that the council take more grazing land for allotments, as there were two or three people requiring them. At the meeting on August 17th 1900, the matter of re-erection of the bridge across the Browney, washed away in the spring floods, was brought up again. They had been asked by Bearpark Council to repair it, and had already tried to get the Bearpark Coal and Coke Co. to assist. They now agreed to let the matter lie!

We see too, that the council had taken over the Church Poor Houses, as at the same meeting they held a ballot for the tenancy of one of them. There were five applicants. The Rector remarked in the magazine that he hoped the new District Councillors would remember that it was their duty now to care for the Poor.

BIRTH, MARRIAGE AND DEATH

Times have indeed changed, and it must be that they have changed for the better. Nevertheless, it can sometimes seem that the Welfare State is a remote and bureaucratic substitute for the self-help, the friendliness, the neighbourly concern, that were shown in close knit societies like Witton Gilbert at the turn of the century, when it came to the all important matters of birth, marriage and death.

When a woman discovered that she was pregnant, she could only depend on advice from her mother or her friends. There were no maternity clinics, no maternity grants and no qualified midwives. There were no special maternity clothes either. Fortunately, ordinary clothes were fairly voluminous, and crossover pinafores, which were adjustable, were quite concealing and comfortable. All women wore laced corsets, which could be let out as pregnancy advanced.

There were certain women in the village who were very good amateur nurses and midwives. These women would attend to injured pitmen, sit up with the sick, lay out the dead, or assist at births. Mrs. Greenwell of Park View officiated at one end of the village, and Mrs. Young of Dene Terrace, at the other. This was a most convenient arrangement if help had to be fetched in a hurry.

Unless it was a very difficult birth, when the Doctor would have to come from Sacriston or Langley Park, the women managed themselves. There were no pain killing drugs; a sheet was tied to the top of the bed and knotted and the woman in labour would pull on it to ease her contractions. The new mother had to stay in bed for ten days after the birth, and the "midwife" would visit every day. Young girls who had left school and had difficulty in finding work, for with poor transport, and few shops, there was only "helping at home" or domestic service for them, were glad to have ten days' employment at these times. They would help to look after the mother and baby, and wash, clean and cook for the household.

As soon as the mother was fit, she must go to church and be "Churched". This was a ceremony to cleanse the woman from any impurity incurred by giving birth, and to thank God for a safe delivery. It was indeed a matter to thank Him for, for there were still far too many deaths from puerperal fever and other hazards of child bearing. In 1908, there is a record in the Church Magazine that Jane Ann Black of Witton Cottage died in July, aged 34 years. "She was carried away in the prime of life at childbirth, the child also dying". So many of the infant deaths recorded in the

Church magazine are those of babies a few days or weeks old. They were so vulnerable to cold and dirt, and if the mother was not able to feed her baby herself, there were only the poor substitutes of gruel, or bread soaked in tinned milk and water. In the magazine for January 1903 there are seven deaths recorded; one was an old man of 84, another a man of 49, another of 54, and the rest were infants – there were twins who died aged 1 and 2 days, a baby girl of 7 days, and a boy of 4 months.

If the child survived so long, it would be baptized at about three weeks old. It would be dressed in a long christening robe, usually made by hand, with elaborate frills, pin-tucks and lace, and it would wear a veil. The first person to be met by the christening party, provided he or she were of the opposite sex to that of the baby, would be given a piece of “Baby-cake” and a piece of silver to bring good luck.

Babies wore elaborate clothing, which must have been a nightmare to wash and dry. They wore a “binder”, a firm double layer of cotton cloth about four inches wide, round their tummies to hold a penny in place over the navel, to ensure that everything healed up. Then they wore a long crossover garment called a “Barracoat”, and a long gown of cotton or winceyette, according to the season. They were always wrapped in a shawl or a piece of blanket, as there were no matinee coats or cardigans. Mothers appreciated the time when Baby was “shortened”, or put into short clothes. Boys continued to wear dresses until they were about 3 years old.

After the baby was baptized, and only then, could it be taken into anyone’s house as it was most unlucky to take it anywhere before the ceremony. The household could not allow the baby to leave without first giving it its “Three Things”; salt, representing the salt of the earth, a candle or box of matches to represent the light of the world, and food so that it should never lack. Sometimes a sixpence or threepenny bit would be included, so that the child would always have money.

Marriages at Witton seemed to take place in Church at the rate of one or two per month. There were exceptional months like April 1902, when the Rector recorded in the Church Magazine, “Last Sunday established a record in the Parish Church, for five Banns of Marriage were called. May it prove a good omen for each couple”. Not many weddings are described in the Magazine, but the Rector devoted a whole page to the wedding of his daughter, Miss Mary Watts to the Rev. H. Greenwood, the Curate of Witton Gilbert. He even listed all the wedding presents and who gave them [see “Rector’s Letter, 17th September 1901”]. He describes

another wedding on April 2nd 1902. "The Wedding bells were heard twice this Easter, and on the second occasion, the Church was tastefully, if somewhat sparsely decorated [flowers are scarce yet], as Miss Annie Holmes, our Churchwarden's eldest daughter was the happy bride. Her friends, and those of the bridegroom, [Mr. Alfred Swainston of Consett] would have filled the Church twice over. The day was fine, and everything was very nice, including the playing of our voluntary organist, Mr. Robert Bainbridge".

Only the "well to do" brides wore long dresses. Normally a bride would wear a smart but serviceable dress that could be worn afterwards. All the guests would have to walk to Church unless they possessed a horse and trap. The bride and groom would continue to travel by horse and trap. After the ceremony, the bridegroom would throw out a handful of coppers for the waiting children to scramble for. Rice was used to throw over the bridal pair. The reception was always held at the home of the bride, and her mother would have to do all the baking and boiling of ham for the "Great Day".

An important village wedding on August 2nd 1904 was reported in the Consett Chronicle of August 5th. "On Tuesday, flying flags in the neighbourhood of the old village Church, and groups of people here and there, suggested that something out of the ordinary was going to take place. A visit to the picturesque little Church of Witton Gilbert, which looked charming in its decorations, revealed the fact that a popular wedding was about to be solemnized. It was the marriage of the Rev. H.B. Watts B.A., second son of the Rector, to Miss Mary Holmes, second daughter of Mr. J.R. Holmes of Witton Hall. The bridegroom's father, the Rev. A. Watts, assisted by the Rev. J.W. Hudson Barker, Vicar of Consett, performed the interesting ceremony with whom the bridegroom is working as Curate, and the Rev. J. Wallis, Vicar of Castleside, and old friend. It was a pretty wedding, and the villagers turned out in large numbers to witness it. The bride had four bridesmaids: her two sisters, Miss Frances and Miss Isabella Holmes, and the two sisters of the bridegroom, Miss Lizzie and Miss Gladys Watts. They carried charming baskets of flowers, and were dressed in cream voile with large lace collars and yokes, and white picture hats. The bride was attired in cr me mousseline de soie, with a coronet of orange blossoms, and carried a large shower bouquet of orchids. Dr. William Bratton of Consett was best man, and Mr. Morland of Langley Park kindly officiated at the organ, in the absence of Mr. Bainbridge, who was also getting married. The happy couple soon after left for Bridgwater, where the honeymoon will be spent.

The presents were numerous, useful and beautiful, and included four cheques. They carried many good wishes away with them”.

Witton Gilbert was always thought of as a healthy place to live, and it probably was healthier than an overcrowded town like Durham. Even so, it had its share of epidemics, and the weather could have a marked effect on the death rate. The Rector reported in the Church Magazine in February 1907, that there had been a lot of frosty weather before Christmas, and a lot of snow, which was still on the ground. He said it was not good for the old people, although the young ones enjoyed skating and sledging. “There is an exceptional amount of sickness amongst us, and yet ours is a very healthy village”. In March he wrote that not only had they had continuous snow but it had been very windy, and there had been thunderstorms and hail. “With the severe weather, the death list has grown, and the sick list is swollen beyond knowledge”. Obviously, the wintertime was a danger time for the old and the very young. In the Spring of 1903, the Rector wrote, “It is quite phenomenal that for three months our death record is only two; one on January 31st, and a second on February 28th, whilst this month there has been no death. This has certainly been so far a windy year, but equally certainly, a healthy one. Our normal death rate is over three per month. With a return of frost and snow near the end of April, there has been simultaneously an increase in deaths”.

Sanitary arrangements were fairly primitive; ash-pits emptied weekly by a man with a horse and cart, represented the toilet facilities. A reservoir had been built at Sacriston by the Weardale and Shildon District Waterworks shortly after 1878, and pipes ran through Witton Gilbert to Langley Park [see map]. Some houses would have piped water, but very few, and wells and pumps were still in use and always suspect when epidemics of fever broke out. Mr. Bailey remembers seeing a drainage system installed when he was a small boy in the Nineties. He remembers Front Street being dug up along its length, and recalls thinking how deep the trench was. There were several manhole covers which were constantly inspected. In 1898, the Rector reported in the magazine that “Modern costly drainage schemes don’t seem to be doing much for us. The very first time our own special drainage scheme is put to the test, it breaks down. Fever has come among us several times in the past ten years, only to die out on arriving. Not so now. This year alas, about a dozen patients have had to be removed to the Fever Hospital”.

Hot weather favoured the spread of disease. Most people kept a pig in their back yards and hens too, and flies would help spread germs and

infection. Horse manure left lying on the streets would be an additional health hazard. In 1898, the Rector reported that “the holiday weather continues----but during the excessive heat, mortality has been very high indeed with us, especially among the children. In less than a month from September 14th to October 9th we have had ten funerals, of which seven have been infants, and only three adults”. Epidemics of measles and influenza could close the school, and help fill the graveyard. In 1900, the Curate, Rev. H. Greenwood, had influenza in spring, scarlet fever in summer, and a breakdown in health following that. He was granted six months’ leave by the Bishop, and by the end of the year after several operations, was beginning to “pick up”. He was lucky – with no antibiotics, you had to just recover, or die.

As many of the men of Witton worked down the pits, there are several fatal accidents reported in the magazines. In 1908, Henry Roberts was killed at the age of twenty-five. He had come home “unscathed” from the Boer War, and was put on the Reserve, “alas, for so short a time. By a heavy fall of roof, he passed from full and vigorous life to sudden and almost painless death. Clearly the dangers our coal miners run exceed those of the soldier, if not even those of the sailor. The pitman should deliberately put his life in God’s hands every time he goes down the pit. If sympathy comforts, his bereaved widow and children are comforted, for never has such a procession passed through the Lychgate at Witton Gilbert, as that led by draped banner and band, which filled the entire length of Church Lane on February 7th, or so large a congregation gathered on a funeral Sunday, as that of the 16th. May God have mercy on him and all of us”.

Funerals were a much more ceremonial and public business than they are now. When a death occurred, the death bell would always be rung, signifying the death and sex of the dead. All the blinds in the house where the dead lay would be pulled down, and they were only drawn half way up on the day after the funeral. Men of the village called “Bidders”, wearing dark suits and white gloves, would knock on all the doors, inviting people to the funeral. This invitation was usually accepted, even though everyone had to walk to church. The family mourners could hire “mourning coaches” or brakes to travel in, and would all wear black. There was no cremation then, and so everyone was buried. Many people had a service outside the house before processing to church. It would consist of a simple hymn and prayer, whilst the coffin rested on two chairs. The coffin was always carried by friends of the deceased. If a pitman was being buried, the Colliery Band headed the procession, or the Salvation Army Band turned out on other occasions. The funeral

processions were long and slow, and at every house on the route, the blinds would be drawn down, and left down until the mourners had returned from the Churchyard. Everyone would go to the house for a meal prepared by friends and relatives. The family would wear black for about a year after the funeral, and only slowly get back into quiet colours. Flowers and wreaths were elaborate and profuse. When Mrs. Watts, the Rector's wife was buried in 1908, there were twenty-two wreaths, twelve crosses, one anchor, and one harp, besides several groups of flowers, in all about forty floral tributes. Her husband received two hundred letters or telegrams of sympathy from private persons, and five from "corporate bodies". More permanent floral tributes were "Globes" left on the grave by the family. There used to be many of these in the Churchyard at Witton. They consisted of an arrangement of china flowers and foliage, protected from the elements by a dome of glass. The last surviving globe was rescued from the churchyard five years ago, and placed in the Church porch for safety.

The Rev. Watts wrote eloquently in the magazine after his wife's death, "comfortable words" which will serve both her and all the people of Witton who lie in the old churchyard. "We pray that all thus left sorrowing have learned not to sorrow as without hope. They are all safe in Jesus, and we who are left to labour on yet, and hope for a while, can in Him alone find true solace".

THE BOER WAR AND MILITARY MATTERS

From 1899 to 1903, war, and matters military and patriotic, occupied the attention of the people of Witton Gilbert.

There was a detachment of Volunteers, the Fourth Volunteer Battalion of the Durham Light Infantry, based at Sacriston. Young men could join and learn the skills needed for soldiering, in their spare time. The Volunteers had a Drill Hall in Sacriston, opposite the Parish Church. They used to camp every year at Humberhill, where campaign conditions would be as realistic as possible. Captain Blackett, the Company Engineer at the Sacriston Pit, was the Commanding Officer. He lived at Blackett's Farm, Acorn Close. There was a shooting range on the north side of the farm, with butts dug into the hillside. There was a concrete cabin near the top of Nor Lane, where a watchman sat when the Volunteers were practising with their rifles. He would telephone down to the shooting range to warn them whenever there was traffic on the road; a red flag flew when the shooting range was in use.

One of these Sacriston Volunteers went to the Boer War. He was Jack Morrow of Kimblesworth. Reverend Watts wished him "God speed" on February 10th 1900, writing of him and two other local men, "They are all good men and true, and I pray that I may grip their hands once more, and in a time of peace". He did indeed, when they were both present in Durham Cathedral in 1901, when the Sacriston Volunteers joined other men back safely from the war, in a service of Thanksgiving. Jack Beattie, a member of the Church Choir at Witton, volunteered to go to South Africa, and had two spells there. The first was from March 1900 to June 1901, when for a time he was a prisoner of the Boers, but in April 1902, he went out again, and after the war ended his wife joined him, and they settled at Malmesbury, Cape Colony. William Sones of the Third Battalion King's Royal Rifles went out in September 1899. He was slightly wounded, but fought so bravely that he was mentioned in dispatches. John Turnbull of the First Battalion Durham Light Infantry followed a month later. He too was slightly wounded, and had an attack of fever. The two men were the first to return to Witton in September 1902. Other "Witton Lads" to serve in South Africa were; Robert Hardiman, who had fever and a bullet wound in his arm, Harry Roberts, who was shot through the helmet, Taylor Laidler, Thomas Robson Suddes, who had fever, and Joseph Gott, who went on to serve in India in 1903.

Reverend Watts, who thirty years before had been an officer in the Durham Rifles, kept his parishioners abreast of all the news from the Front in his writings in the Church magazine. He led them in constant prayer for those away at the war, and used a special Litany at Evensong every other week. He stirred their patriotism, and assisted in the collection of money to help the troops and their families. He led their rejoicing over the British victories, and he helped to organize the presentation of silver watches to the soldiers who came safely home. Some of the men from Witton wrote to him from South Africa giving details of campaigns, and he printed extracts in the Church magazines for all to read.

On 20th November 1899 he wrote; “Like everyone else, the one topic with all of us this month is the invasion of our colonies by the Boers, and the one thought is – what can we do to lessen the sufferings and hardships of war? Not only are there the sick and wounded to be cared for, but also there are the wives and children [alas, many are now widows and orphans] left behind by our soldiers and sailors to be watched over and supported. Our American brethren have generously helped us to care for the former, and it is our special duty to attend to the latter. The Lord Mayor of London’s Fund led the way, and now all over the country there are workers ready and eager to help. Every county has its fund or funds. The marchioness of Londonderry has a well-organized and comprehensive scheme at work here, and now the Lord Lieutenant of the County, the Earl [and this year, Mayor] of Durham has joined in the merciful work. We at Witton Gilbert took our part in this work early, beginning on November 5th with a Morning Offertory at the Parish Church of 10s 9d, and following it yesterday by two others of 25s, while Kimblesworth Mission Church took it up on the 12th with two Offertories of 22s, so that from our parish has gone already £2 17s 9d”.

It soon became evident that the wished for speedy end to the war was not to be. The Boers were putting up a more determined resistance than anyone had expected. Reverend Watts wrote on 16th December 1899; “The war is ever more in our minds this month than last, and we fear a speedy termination is now improbable. The invaders of our colonies are more numerous and better supplied with great guns and stores of ammunition than we anticipated. They have been secretly preparing for years, and the projected attempt to expel English rule from South Africa was evidently in their minds long before the negotiations began which ended in their declaration of war, or even before the Jameson Raid. We shall have to send more men and very many more horses and artillery, for

we must win, or the result to us will be a fatal loss of prestige, and eventually loss of Empire”.

On December 12th, Captain Blackett gave a concert in the Co-op Hall at Sacriston, under the auspices of the officers and men of the Fourth Volunteer Battalion Durham Light Infantry, “as an acknowledgement of the kindness of the Charlaw, Sacriston and Kimblesworth workmen in subscribing [men 2d, boys 1d, per fortnight] to the Durham County Soldiers’ and Sailors’ Fund”. The Parish Council voted to have a house collection in support of the workmen’s effort. The Rector, who was on the Council at the time, and six other councillors had collected by April 1900, £25 11s 7d by this means. The Wesleyan Chapel contributed some of the money, as did Mr. McNabb’s Smoking Concerts. In March 1900, the Chairman of the Parish Council moved in the meeting, to enter the names of local volunteers at the Front in the Parish Book, together with the Council’s appreciation of their bravery. The new headmaster of the National School, Mr. Brewis, organized a concert just before Christmas in aid of the Lord Mayor of London’s Fund, which took in “all sufferers from the war – refugees, invaded colonists, soldiers’ and sailors’ families, besides sick and wounded of all kinds”. The schoolchildren performed very well, and Mr. Bell of Waterhouses gave “a magnificent Lantern Entertainment---His views were all South African, and some were quite up to date, for they represented incidents and scenes of the present war. Applause was hearty and frequent”. As the Rector said, “Much charitable feeling, and much patriotic spirit has resulted from the present war, and so helps to show us that all the results of war are not necessarily evil. In our parish, generosity to those suffering in various ways from this lamentable war has been nobly shown”.

A lot of war news was coming from South Africa in March 1900, which was duly reported to the parishioners. “Death has been busy amongst friends and foes in South Africa, and though we rejoice at the relief of our beleaguered brave countrymen at Kimberley by French, and at Ladysmith by Buller, and of the victories by General Roberts at Paardeberg and elsewhere, culminating in the capture of Bloemfontein, the capital of the Free State, we do so especially because we see the beginning of the end. We will pray earnestly for a speedy and enduring peace.

We rejoiced much more for the relief of Ladysmith than we did for the surrender of Cronje and his army, because we want right for our friends more than harm for our foes. The ‘Te Deum’ we sang in our Church on the first Sunday in March, none of us will soon forget, and hope soon to repeat for Mafeking and its intrepid defender, Baden-Powell. I was in

London when the good news came, and was delighted at the generous, kindly and unselfish nature of the joy of London's gigantic crowds, and at the absence of excessive personal indulgence there. Would that it has been thus everywhere”.

Perhaps when the news broke, Witton people celebrated the relief of Mafeking a little too unrestrainedly for his liking! Their celebrations were reported in the local press; “This ancient village went wild with delight over the relief of ‘that other little place’. No sooner were the Church bells heard ringing [the first intimation], than a stentorian voice in the street shouted, ‘Hip, hip, hooray! Mafeking has been relieved’. The effect was almost instantaneous. Flags flew in all directions, singly and in groups, and in lines festooned across the streets. The populace poured out of doors, and all day on Saturday, companies and groups of villagers, adult and juvenile, paraded the thoroughfare and by-streets bearing banners and mottoes, cheering, and singing patriotic songs. Effigies of Paul Kruger and his consort quickly made their appearance and were borne hither and thither, amid laughter and derisive cheers. Children dressed up, and the Industrial School Band led the parade around the streets, and ended at the Rectory grounds. Photos were taken, and the Rector made a speech and called three cheers for the bravest man in the greatest army in the world, Colonel Baden-Powell. These were given with fervour. The Band and bandmaster were awarded a hearty vote of thanks for their services, and the groups departed to resume their parading. The day ended with songs and fireworks”.

May 1900 was a very busy month for rejoicing over victories. “First, we had on May 10th Captain Lambton's Day, when Durham justified its title ‘Ancient and Loyal City’, for it fairly went mad with excitement on welcoming the Saver of Ladysmith back to the city which has this year his brother, the Earl of Durham for its May. Next, on the 17th we had the relief of Mafeking---It was effected at 9 a.m. and at 10 p.m. on the same day, our Witton Church bells rang out the wildest and best peal they could”. The news must have come by telegraph to Sacriston, and been sent down to the Rector by special messenger, for the express purpose of having the bells rung to inform the people. “Then on the 12th we had ‘Queens Day’, when the rejoicings for Mafeking came to a fitting climax, and lastly on June 5th we had ‘Pretoria Day’, when Lord Roberts planted the English flag in the enemy's capital, and joy-bells and shouts rang once more round the world, and rockets made stars wherever English hearts beat. The youngest will remember the month of May 1900 as long as they live. Here, a small but energetic committee organized a tea for all the children and the old folks of the village, sports, fireworks etc., and a

band to head the procession on horse and bicycle from our daughter parish Sacriston to complete the prolonged rejoicings”.

The Witton men at the Front wrote to Reverend Watts about their experiences “Corporal Sones, Private Turnbull, and Volunteer Morrow have alike written cheerily and are happily in good health and spirits. The first two have passed through the entire campaign unhurt, and this though both have been in seven battles [including Spion Kop, Kranz Kop, and Monte Christo], to say nothing of minor engagements”. Corporal Sones added, “We [The King’s Royal Rifles] are fighting side by side by my county regiment, ‘The Faithful Durhams’. They have done some splendid work here [Elands Laagte], taking positions, and helping to hold others; they are a credit to our army”.

Everyone hoped that the war would be over by the end of the summer. Witton Harvest Festival passed without victory being announced. Professor Lenton, who was a professional entertainer, doing a ‘memory act’ as well as giving lantern shows, gave a topical show in October. “Professor Lenton’s bioscope gave us most realistic views of several incidents in the Transvaal War. They were startling and almost painful in their reality and lifelike features, especially the incident of the ‘Dispatch Bearer’. The whole entertainment was a great treat and the room crowded”.

In December the Rector wrote, “Would that the desolating war in South Africa were ended ere the New Century begins. It is hardly possible now, although the criminal character of its prolongation is beginning to dawn on the minds of those responsible, and we therefore hope early in the New Year to welcome back those who went from our midst at the call of duty and honour”.

The Sacriston Volunteers returned home in July 1901. After joining in a service of Thanksgiving in the Cathedral, they had “an amusing parade” in Sacriston, followed by a concert in the Drill Hall. “A presentation was made to each member by Mr. Blackett on behalf of the Reception Committee”.

Not however until June 1902 was the Rector able to write, “Happily the stress and strain of the Boer War is now over, and how great that was, is fairly indicated by the universality and heartiness of the rejoicing, when on Sunday evening June 1st, the good news reached us. [I, preaching at Bishop Auckland, heard the news soon after

8 p.m.] Monday saw rejoicings everywhere. Here, the children receiving a holiday, first gave God thanks, next rang the Church bells under my guidance, and lastly formed an impromptu procession which kept the village astir till night set in. On the following Sunday in both Parish Church and Mission Church, we held special Thanksgiving Services simultaneously with our King and Queen and national representatives at St. Paul's London, our army at Pretoria, and our colonists the wide world over. Never before in the history of Man was there such a Thanksgiving at the close of a great war, for never before was such a simultaneous act possible". It was made possible by the modern wonder of the telegraph!

The next excitement for Witton was the return of the war heroes. Sergeant Sones was the first of the regular soldiers to return on September 8th. Once more the children had a procession and "sundry forms of rejoicing". Private Turnbull arrived without warning a week later. Mr. Bailey remembers seeing them both in their khaki uniforms. It caused a great stir, because it was only during the Boer War that the British Army gave up red uniform for its soldiers, in favour of a colour, which blended into the background. The Boer sharp shooters could pick off too many "Red-coats". Private Turnbull, who lived in "Bug Row", returned to find his brother lamed in a pit accident, "while he was facing other perils in the Transvaal and Natal". The Rector wrote, "We never forgot these and their comrades, from the beginning to the end of the war, but prayed every Sunday for their safety, at our Parish Church, and never were heartier thanks given, than when the bronzed faces of Sergeant Sones and Private Turnbull formed a part of the congregation".

When Private Hardiman came back in October, the village held a Reception in the National School, when the Rector "had the pleasure of saying a few words". He proposed that when all the men had returned, they should be given a Reception, together with "some little memorial of our appreciation". The Rector suggested holding a concert to provide money for the purpose, but was forestalled, when a private meeting set up a committee of 21 to organize it. Reverend Watts insisted that the committee be widened to represent all the villagers. With his permission the concert was held in the National School in November. During the interval, the audience voted to enlarge the committee by 14 members, and decided to treat all the soldiers exactly alike. Unfortunately, the private committee acted without consulting the publicly appointed committee; they did not treat all the men alike, they did not publish a balance sheet for the concert, and they held a presentation of silver watches to the soldiers in the Wesleyan Schoolroom without the enlarged committee being made aware of it. Much controversy arose as a result,

some of it reported in the Press. The Rector was indignant that no watch had been provided for Jack Beattie, presumably because he had returned to South Africa. At a public meeting held in the National School, it was decided to buy a silver watch and guard exactly like the others, and send it out to him in Capetown. It was to be engraved "Presented to Trooper John Andrew Beattie by the inhabitants of Witton Gilbert in appreciation of his VOLUNTARY services in South Africa". £12 14s was raised at the meeting, to pay for it.

The watch was sent off in June 1903 and Jack Beattie wrote the following letter when he received it.

"Malmesbury,
Cape Colony.
28.9.03

Reverend and Dear Sir and Subscribers,

I want to thank you very much for the very handsome and useful present, which you have sent me, but I hardly know how to begin. Tell my friends the subscribers, that I individually thank them very sincerely for their splendid token of esteem, and that as long as it is a watch, [which is likely to be longer than I am a man], I shall never forget their kindness, and on seeing it, shall always have pleasant remembrances of the dear Homeland by the Browney. I am very pleased with the inscription, so nicely engraved within the case, and indeed feel quite proud when I show it to my friends and acquaintances here. I hope you will forgive me for being so very long in acknowledging your kindness, but I was away from Capetown when it arrived, and it had to wait till I could get down country. When I remember how little Witton Gilbert has seen of me in the last six years, your remembrance of me is an agreeable surprise. Tell my friends that out here, one may get the idea that they are finally settled, and everything may be going all right, but there are times when the call of home is almost irresistible, and one feels that just one week in the woods and green fields of old England would counter balance all the advantages of a prosperous exile".

LEISURE ACTIVITIES

Like the people in many small villages, Witton Gilbert villagers were no exception when it came to providing their own amusements for their spare time. The range of leisure activities appears to have been very varied, being on the one hand educational, and on the other hand recreational. Witton Gilbert village was very fortunate in having a Rector who was obviously very community minded. This shows in the work and enthusiasm of himself and his family in organizing sing songs, lantern lectures, concerts, dances and money raising events. In fact at this time the church seems to have organised a great deal of the amusements for the villagers. Much of the material for this chapter is taken from the Rector's accounts in the Church magazine.

Witton Gilbert had six public houses, a large number for such a small village. They each provided some different type of amusement or recreation apart from the obvious one of drinking. Mr. McNab ran the Three Horse Shoes. This was known as the "quiet pub" even though smoking concerts were held there during the time of the Boer War to raise money for various Comforts' Funds. The landlord's son sang in the church choir. Mr. Bates ran the Black Lion. Rabbit coursing was organized at this pub. This was similar to today's greyhound racing. A rabbit was set free and then the dogs chased it, and bets were laid on the outcome. Mr. Jackson ran the Travellers' Rest. The Gardening Club met here and the Flower Show was held annually in the carpenter's shop, Mr. Jackson being both a joiner and publican. The purpose of the Gardening Club was "To deepen interest in cottage gardening and in the cultivation of window plants". "To provide encouragement, the Rector and Mr. Graham have offered each a prize of 10/- to the committee of our Flower Show on condition that this body will add a second prize to their first". The Oddfellows' Society met there too. Mr. Hunter ran the Three Tuns. The hounds met at this pub. Mr. Bailey, one of Witton Gilbert's oldest inhabitants remembers seeing the Huntsmen drinking the stirrup cup, and he remembers their "lovely red coats". Mr. Renwick ran the Glendenning Arms.

A favourite Sunday evening walk was from the Gatehouse to Kaysburn. This was known as the "Monkey Walk", and a great deal of courting appears to have taken place there. Another "promenade" was from Witton to Sacriston; Sunday evenings were particularly busy! If you walked to Sacriston on Saturdays, you could go to the Theatre and see

Music Hall turns. Quoits and Handball were two other forms of amusement for the menfolk. All you needed for handball was a good wall.

Even in those days people seemed to like going away for the day on trips. These in the main were organized by the church. The Rector says in the Church magazine for 1908, "On the 19th September which was happily a fine day, Witton Parish Church Choir mustered at the Witton Gilbert Railway Station to catch the first train to Newcastle on their way to Whitley Bay, which they reached soon after 9 o'clock, and left in time to catch the last train from Durham. Bathing, donkey rides and amusements infinitely varied, filled every moment of the happy day except the mealtimes. A capital tea was ready at 4 o'clock, in that quaint and picturesque ship house now well known as Panama House, [Mr. Fry's novel restaurant made of disused ships' cabins]. Some walked along the charming sands in the afternoon to St. Mary's lighthouse, where a descendant of the celebrated Grace Darling does duty, and in the walk found several beautiful specimens of ice marked limestone boulders, revealed by the exceptionally late high tides, which washed away the Helter Skelter so well known to the youngsters. All reached home safely and delighted with their day's outing".

The previous year the choir members went to Tynemouth and South Shields where they saw "the giant ship Mauretania, the pride of the Tyne, as she re-entered the river from her trial trip...The harbour was crossed by ferry-boat just as the Mauretania crossed the bar". In 1906, the Church Men's Society went from Witton "by brakes and wagonettes to South Shields". There they visited the beach and the parks, some went to the Roman camp, some crossed the Tyne by ferry and all reassembled after tea and viewed St. Hilda's Church. The return journey "was not accomplished without adventure, though happily without mishap. One vehicle went astray and one horse threw a shoe, of course far from any blacksmith, but before midnight all were safely back home".

In 1902, Witton Gilbert Choir went to Keswick for their summer outing. Even in those days the weather was a problem; "The day did not promise well at first but eventually proved delightful". They climbed Castle Hill, getting a glorious view over Derwentwater and "descending to the water's edge at Lakeside, some took boats and rowed round the chief islet, whilst others enjoyed the clever antics of a water acrobat". They arrived back at Witton by midnight "with the memory of a visit to the prettiest spot in England to be treasured as long as life lasts".

Children in those days played similar game to children at the present time, for example Skipping, Whips and tops, Bowlers [Hoops] and Marbles. The river Browney was a great attraction for the boys to have adventures in, sometimes ending tragically. In 1908, James Dixon "in the dawn of life, died by misadventure, having fallen whilst playing with other young children into the Browney when in flood".

Records show that children even played in the churchyard. In 1911, some children playing there broke the head off a cross put up by a poor widow. Their parents were willing to help pay for its repair, and the Rector appealed for others to help, as they were poor. He goes on to say, "This turning of our churchyard into a play place should be instantly stopped, and we call upon all parents to impress on their children the wrongfulness of playing over the graves of loved ones".

There were vandals even in those days! The Rector reported another kind of vandalism; "Four out of five rooks' nests in the Dene were cruelly robbed, so that before May Day our little colony of friendly birds was reduced to one".

There were events organized for the children. At Easter time in Witton "the children gathered in the Rectory garth to roll their eggs and themselves on Easter Monday". Tea and sports were held afterwards. In autumn every year the Rector gave away apples, if they had not been stolen, to the school children and the children at Earl's House. In 1900 he says, "I had the pleasure of sharing my crop of apples with the children of the village and of the Industrial School and that in spite of the thievish visits to my garden referred to last month". 1907 must have been a particularly cold and bad winter because winter sports were held; "The young people have had a good time with sledges and skates".

The children performed in concerts, one such being "Sleeping Beauty". "There was a good audience. It was a seasonable evening and the little performers did splendidly. Little Sleeping Beauty will not soon be forgotten nor yet her dainty, graceful dancing". The children repeated this performance for the 150 boys and staff at the County Industrial School. The Rector's wife, son and daughter "gave songs, and the Princess again danced as charmingly as ever. The room was very prettily decorated and the stage lent itself well for the performances. Mr. And Mrs. Goodenough, [the Head of the school and his wife], entertained the performers afterwards with a capital supper, to their great surprise and delight".

For the older children [teenagers], a Fancy Dress Ball was organized in 1907 by the Watts' and Holmes' families in the schoolroom. "The Mayor

of Durham generously lent decorations, and the scene was quite fairylike when the floor was covered by the gaily dressed dancers”.

Special occasions were celebrated in style, and played a large part in village life. These could vary from Harvest suppers to Royal occasions. One such occasion was a Harvest supper held in 1893. This was called a “Mell”, and was held in Witton Hall Farm. “At Mr. Holmes’ request, the Rector after tea held a short service before the evening festivities began in the large barn, which was transformed into a very pretty ballroom”.

Another especially memorable occasion was Queen Victoria’s Jubilee in 1897, when a daylong programme of festivities was planned. In the joint Parish of Witton and Kimblesworth, 150 aged poor were supplied with a substantial meal at lunchtime and 1,000 children enjoyed a good tea. Witton Schoolroom was decked with banners, Chinese lanterns, drapery and pot plants. A programme of the day’s events in Witton is as follows:

10.30 a.m.	Thanksgiving Service at the Parish Church
11.15 a.m.	Royal Salute fired
1.15 p.m.	Dinner to over 70 aged poor in the National Schoolroom
1.45 p.m.	Short address and toast “The Queen, God Bless Her”, by the Rector and Mr. Graham
2.00 p.m.	Procession of children and villagers
2.15 p.m.	Distribution of Jubilee medals by Mr. and Mrs. Graham
2.30 p.m.	Congratulatory address to Her Majesty by village children. Procession through the village to a field, singing with band accompaniment at various points “God Save the Queen”, and “O King of Kings”, [the Jubilee Hymn], “Children send a song of Praise”, and “Happy Children we have been”.
4.00 p.m.	Tea, then presentation of “Life of the Queen to every child by Mrs. Graham. An orange given by the Committee
5.00 p.m.	Sports for prizes
8.30 p.m.	Distribution of prizes by Rector and Rev. G.F. Smythe
9.00-9.45 p.m.	Fire balloons and fireworks
11.00 p.m.	Coloured lights in the Dene
“Brilliant weather made this a memorable day”.	

In 1911, Witton Gilbert prepared to celebrate the Coronation. There were 12 hours of celebration commencing at 10.30 a.m. with a service in church, through dinner in the Schoolroom for old people and the poor, to a procession with a band to the sportsfield. Every child between 3 years and 14 years was presented with a Coronation mug. Everyone was provided with tea and bags of sweet cakes. Sports were held, followed by dancing in the evening on the grass and fireworks in the Dene at 10.30 p.m. The weather was beautiful, and children and parents spent an enjoyable day.

In 1912, George V visited the area. Mr. Bailey can remember this occasion very well. It was a shooting trip to Kaysburn woods hosted by Lord Lambton. Lunch was held at Bleach Green, in a large cottage there, lived in by Lord Lambton's gamekeeper, Mr. Foster. Furniture, china, cutlery, and food were all sent by wagon from Lambton Castle. The shooting party ate indoors whilst the beaters had a sandwich lunch on the grass. Proud villagers still show a chair or two, which have been handed down; large Victorian dining chairs upholstered in red plush. A procession of cars drove to West Hall. The King was in the second car and all the villagers turned out to watch. The King planted a fir tree to mark the occasion. Queen Mary opened some bungalows at Ushaw Moor on the same day; women didn't go shooting! Mr. Bailey watched the King's arrival at West Hall and then he walked to Ushaw just in time to see the Queen, an unforgettable day for him.

The villagers of Witton Gilbert obviously liked some of their recreational pastimes to be educational. This shows in the fact that Technical Classes were held. These classes must have had some mishaps as the Rector writes, "The Technical classes at Witton have been particularly unfortunate as regards mishaps, but I trust these latter have come to an end, and that the cookery, dressmaking, and ironing lessons will be so effective that sweet scents and pleasing sights will abound this Christmas at Witton as they never have before". A Miss Dunn gave a series of Health Lectures. The lectures on Nursing were especially appreciated. The Rector writes, "The lectures could have been better attended rather than the street corners. Don't you think our "Corner men" are rather too numerous and too regular in attendance? Why don't they get an allotment and dig?"

The Young Men's Friendly Society was founded in 1890. This seems to have been connected with the Working Men's Club Movement, then much more educational. The aims were, "To promote purity, temperance, morality and thrift: to provide healthy literature and amusements, and to

befriend young men leaving home or moving from one place to another". They had lectures on Astronomy in the schoolroom and several visits to Durham Observatory. A course of Geology was held and one evening "Mr. Frank Watts gave a fine series of Edison records on Mr. Holmes' phonograph". Other technical subjects were taught, like shorthand, and they had examinations in geometrical drawing, freehand drawing, theoretical and practical chemistry. These were called "Continuation Classes", and were in fact the beginnings of Nightschool. Admission was free if 40 or more attended. A library was opened in the Old Schoolhouse to cater for these classes.

Magic lantern lectures were another form of educational recreation, one such being in "Church History". This was well attended, "and the silent attention has been the best possible tribute. Almost the only break to the silence has been a half suppressed 'Oh', as some very beautiful illustration shone out from the sheet".

Raising money was obviously a problem in those days. As today, events were organized to raise money, on one occasion to provide new matting for the Church, and Bearpark Amateur Coloured Minstrels gave an excellent performance on another occasion, the proceeds of which were for the Reading Room. Benefit concerts were often held for pitmen who were injured or sick, to supplement what Poor Relief there was.

As with many villages at this time, Witton had a Temperance Society. This was formed in 1896, and members fell into two groups: "First those who feel that the only true safety lies in complete abstention from all intoxicating drinks, and second, those who feel that real temperance is use without abuse". They had lectures and trips and even a Temperance Gala held in the field behind the Travellers' Rest. There were prizes for sports, bicycle races, garden produce and window plant displays, and exhibitions of "industrial work". There were horses and ponies on show, and a "washing competition". A band was in attendance. There was also a Band of Hope, which was the Junior Branch of the Temperance Society. They had lectures and lantern slides and examinations in what they had learnt. Doubtless these societies did good in an age of cheap drink but much of the children's learning was by rote as their examination answers show.

The Mothers' Union was started in 1903. They had sewing meetings, and ran a "Clothing Club". They also had lectures and annual trips. In 1904, they went by brake to Newcastle and "thence by electric tram to pretty Jesmond Dene". Rev. Watts took the Mothers round old Newcastle and

the Hancock Museum. They had fortnightly teas for good causes; "The teas will be plain teas and the charge will be 6d". In April 1907, Mrs. Moule, the Bishop's wife lectured the Mothers' Union, urging "the great need or prayer and bible reading, of training children from early infancy to obedience, and of keeping our girls modest. She also strongly advised Fathers as well as Mothers to forbid their boys smoking, at least till manhood, and to guard against gambling".

The Browney Valley Naturalists' Field Club was started in 1907. In July they had a ramble when "the winding of the river and its deserted beds were followed through some four miles of its course from Wallnook Mill to Bearpark ruins, and bird and flowers got attention as well as the geological and geographical features which are here almost ideal". Not of course forgetting sport, the Church had a Tennis Club, which used the Rectory lawn every Saturday evening. There was a Cricket Club, which used two fields leased from Mr. Holmes. They played Chester Moor, Langley Park 2nd, Croxdale United and Sacriston, but the Rector felt that "the members want more practise and should endeavour to be on the field every night". Such was the recreational life in the early days of this century. People appeared to have enjoyed themselves fully without the aid of present day entertainments.

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