

MEMORIES OF HOWDEN

David Quinn October 2016

Watching TV's Who Wants to be a Millionaire, I was bemoaning the fact that a contestant didn't know that a cubit was a unit of length used in Biblical Times. Mary rebuked me with the usual 'She's not as old as you.' Well, I wasn't around when Noah built his ark but I imagine that, listening to my ramblings of days gone by, some folk will think that I have much in common with Methuselah.

I was born in 1947 in Railway Street which at the time seemed to be occupied by my and me, plus a bunch of geriatrics. In reality although there were some 'old' people, several were probably in their 30's, 40's or 50's. The street was like a large family, probably because people didn't move house much in those days. At No.1 lived Bibber Bailes and Lily. One of my earliest recollections is of Bibber free-wheeling down the street in his pit hoppers, helmet still on, face black and bait box over his shoulder, on his way home from the pit. Their daughter, Joan, was a school friend of my mothers and won a sports Victrix Ludorum at Wolsingham School, only to lose the medal in the park. Joan married a Welshman called Yslywn (Isluwin). He was a debonaire man rather in the mould of Clark Gable. Next door lived Joe Slee, his wife and daughter Margaret. Joe had severely deformed legs which precluded him from working and I think he augmented what would be a minimal income by playing the piano (you couldn't get £200 disability money for in-growing toenails or a bad hand at dominoes in those days). Next up, Kit Metcalfe, a tall, slim man with weather-beaten features and a bald head. As a little lad I spent quite some time with Kit as in his cove on the battery side he kept rabbits. He bred Chinchillas, Silver Grey and Silver Foxes to the highest of show standards. He was obviously well respected in the rabbit world for as well as an exhibitor he was a judge. I remember helping him to fill sacks of dandelions 'rabbit meat' and watching him groom the rabbits, blowing gently against their fur, I guess to see if the silver flecking was even. Kit was game for a laugh and I well remember half the street watch while his grandson Chris taught him to ride a bike when he must have been well into his 60's. Kit was of course the father of one of the best known and best loved characters of Howden, Freda. My mam and Freda were school friends. Mam often talked of Freda's exploits when they were terrorising kids in the class, 'Leave us the gowk off yer apple or I'll bray ya.'

Throwing ink wells and taking the cane off Polly Gardiner thro to teenage years climbing down the drain-pipe to go to the dance, which was fine 'till Kit put a barrel at the bottom. Also the regular occurrence of a case flying out of the front door followed by Freda shouting, 'The old buggars put us out again.' Freda worked in the munitions factory at Aycliffe (the Aycliffe Angels) during the war. She loved life, loved a drink, loved her fags and was loved by everyone. I can't remember her without a smile. She died much too young at 54. I was about 26 at the time and had never seen my mam and dad as upset as they were when they told me. At No.4 was little Meggie Pattison but I have little recollection of her. Next up John and Jane Bailes or to be exact, Uncle John and Aunt Ginny. Quite who's uncle and aunt they were, I never found out, but my grandparents called them UNCLE Jack and Aunt Ginny. Though I'm not too sure which pair were the elder. Jack and Ginny must have had a bob or two because Ginny had a fur coat and, in what must have been the pantry off the back kitchen, was what looked like to be a large draining board with a white enamel bath under it. Everyone else had a tin bath hanging on a hook in the yard. The fact that Jack and Ginny had a fixed bath seemed something of an anomaly as Jack was reputed to be a 'black-backed miner', not washing his back for fear of weakening it. At No.6 lived Ernie Dixon and his wife, followed by George and Mary Brown, both very nice couples but probably slight strangers in that they obviously had not lived there during WW1.

I think that these 6 houses were owner occupied but Nos 7 and 12 were rented with a shared yard and a line of coal houses and netties across the back. Mrs Foster lived in No7 with daughter Bessie and granddaughter Marjorie. Son Bobby lived at No10 with wife Ethel and daughters Janet and Valerie.

At No.8 the house I was born in lived Bob and Ada Davidson. Bob was variously called Robert, Robin and Blut, but his given name was David. I know! I'm his grand-son. For now I'll call him Bob so that I don't get confused. Bob and his sister Maggie, who lived in High Street, came to Howden from Aspatria in Cumberland when no more than children. Bob started work in Bitchburn Pipe-yard at the age of 12. He had no ankle in one foot so had a pronounced limp however, he worked at the pipe-yard for 52 years and I reckon at 64 he'd earned a rest. He died at the age of 74 when I was 14. Had he lived a few more years he and I would have had some good crack as from the age of 17 to 21 I spent some of my happiest working days of my life in my beloved pipe-yard at Fir Tree. Bob's other full-time job seemed to be church bell ringer. He

religiously (pardon the pun) attended church on a Sunday morning but back in the house after 11am he steadily limped around the kitchen, whistling, looking out of the window, puffing on a Capstan and occasionally glancing, first at the clock and then his watch the, around 5 to 12 he'd say, 'Well mother, I think I'll away and be off to The Australian,' to return a couple of hours later with a slightly more pronounced limp and the veins in his eyes a bit pinker. My grandmother who had a strong aversion to drink would admonish him but he would say, 'I've only had a couple mother.' The link between granda and grandson gets even stronger. My grandmother or Nana as I called her was a regular church-goer, stalwart of the W.I. and Mother's Union. She was church caretaker and also looked after the W.I. hall. As a child I helped her put out the hassocks and hymn books, carry coke for the church boiler and put away tables and chairs for the Wednesday Old Time Dance. (The W.I. doubled up as school dining hall, no-one would have the sense to do something like that these days). My Nana also seemed to be the village un-paid midwife and chief layer outer of the dead. For a little light relief she ventured to join Mrs Clayton's Ladies Club. These meetings were held in a side room at The Australian and I'm sure Nana would avert her gaze on passing the bar door as I'm sure she assumed that it was full of lecherous men who passed their spare time smuggling, sheep rustling and a little GBH on a Saturday night. She could not have been more wrong because I know from much personal experience that not another pub in the World contained more gentlemen per sq. ft. than The Australian.

From 1947 to 51 the other occupants of No.8 were Paddy and Florrie Quinn, Davidson that was, and their young son, me. Paddy had come over from Dublin towards the end of the War and was a guard at Harperley POW Camp. I still own a cigarette box in the form of a log cabin which he was given by a prisoner. It is unique and in my eyes priceless. Within hours of arriving at Harperley Paddy met a gentleman who invited him home for supper in Fir Tree. The gentleman had lost an arm in WW1 but still managed to work full time as a postman and was also Fir Tree scoutmaster. Many people will recognise George Vitty from this description. Over supper Mr Vitty (I never called him anything other) told Paddy about the local social scene which amounted to the Saturday night dance at Howden W.I. Paddy duly went along to the dance and met Florrie. Some time later when marriage was broached, the vicar Matthew Richardson, called on Bob and Ada to run the rule over Paddy who was, not only a Roman Catholic but an Irishman to boot. The vicar being an erudite man knew that Paddy would not be his real name and as the banns were due to be

read he enquired of old Bob what his real name was. Bob replied, 'Why it'll be Patrick likely.' Well, Paddy lived in Howden for almost 45 years and I like to think that he was a popular and well-known member of the community but I bet even now I could find some of his peers who don't know that he was in fact called Brendan. I hope my grandson, who will inherit the cigarette box, carries his name with pride.

At No.9 lived Benny Metcalfe. As a child I called him Uncle Benny Peg Leg, which is just about what his false leg was. It was basically a thickish stick with a rubber end and a hinged joint at knee height. I spent hours poking my fingers into the socket. Wee there were no tellies or mobile phones then. Benny emigrated to Canada at what was in those days a ripe old age of 65 to see his time out with his family.

Around the corner at No.10 lived Bobby Foster, son of No.7 and his aforementioned family. In Summer Bobby would pick tender dandelion leaves from the battery side on a Sunday morning to go in the vinegar salad. What Kit Metcalfe and his rabbits thought of this I dread to think. This is the second time I have mentioned the battery so for anyone who doesn't know, it was the strip of land forming a steep embankment down to the railway line. Filled in many years ago thanks to Dr. Beeching. The Fosters moved to Oxted in Oxfordshire when I was about 9. Next door lived Alf and Lily Carter. They seemed to be the oldest couple in the street. I can't remember Alf working, in fact he always seemed to be like a 'broken winded cuddy' (short of breath). He kept pigs in what later became the school field and the 'set pot' boiler in the corner of the yard was his. Maybe he boiled stuff for his pigs in it. Lily made lovely runny custard and being the baby of the back yard there was always some for me. Circa 1950 - 51 the Quinns moved out from No.8 to No.12. This seemed to be an interim home for young couples, probably because it had only one bedroom and maybe because of its close proximity to the midden. For these reasons in 1952 we moved into No.9. thus by the time I was 4 I had lived in 3 houses, didn't know what a furniture van was and my front door was now 2ft. from the door of the house I was born in. I reckon my parents would probably have moved all our furniture across the yard from No.12 to 9 in 2 or 3 hours. That's not to say we were poorer than our neighbours, that's just the way it was. My bedroom was furnished with a tall-boy for my clothes, a bed, a desk, an orange box my mother had wall-papered to make a book-case and a mat so you didn't freeze your feet on the oilcloth, Oh! and a chamber pot – it was a long way for a

four year old downstairs, thro' the back kitchen and across the yard on a dark night. Double the size of bed, add a wardrobe and a dressing table and that would take care of my parents' bedroom.

The bulk of the furniture went into what we called the kitchen. If this sounds odd to younger readers you see you didn't have lounges, reception rooms, dinettes, breakfast rooms or utility rooms in 1950's Railway Street. You had a kitchen and a back kitchen. The kitchen had a carpet (not fitted) on the oilcloth and there would be proddy or hooky mats here and there. There was a side board, a drop-leaf table, 4 chairs, a small two-seater settee and 2 easy chairs. That was about it to begin with but after a couple of weeks I looked out of the front window to see my dad coming over the bridge almost staggering under the weight of a huge cardboard box which contained a wireless. It was a brown Bakelite affair which crackled and whistled violently while father twiddled with knobs to get radio Luxembourg in order to hear the likes of Dickie Valentine, Anne Shelton, Frankie Vaughan and Alma Cogan. The other great use for our wireless was the boxing. Honestly, you've never known true excitement if you haven't listened to Eamonn Andrews hell for leather commentary of boxing that you could not see. That was the kitchen about complete apart from the odd crackitt but the triangular alcove to the right of the fireplace seemed to have a space waiting for something to fill. Furnishing the back kitchen was not a big job. Next to the back door was the fitted part, a huge Belfast sink or as we called it 'the slabstone' with a brass tap above. It stood on 2 brick pillars which formed your base unit. There was a floorboard shelf and to complete the cupboard, a piece of curtain on a wire. In here were kept the household detergents, a bottle of Domestos, some soapflakes and maybe some Jeyes Fluid. There was also a wooden scrubbing brush with proper bristles, not the kind a child could flatten and a cloth to wash the kitchen floor. The washer stood about 4 ft. from the sink and was a square tin tub on a 4 legged base. The agitator was an S shaped blade operated by pushing a handle back and forth in a sort of semi-circular movement. The mangle, which fitted in the top of the washer was 2 hard rubber rollers which turned when the handle on the side was twined. This pulled the washing over the back of the washer while squeezing the water out. I liked to twine the handle but a small child was probably only strong enough to pull small items thro. Washing day was always a Monday and was a day's hard graft. Remember, most men had 'proper jobs' in those days and came home dirty from working the land or in pits, brickyards etc.. There were no systems analysts, business consultants or CEO's all over the place then. Maybe it would

be a better world without so many now. At the end of washing day the water, which was let out through a tap at the bottom of the drum, resembled a thin tattie hash which was very short on corned beef. With this regular exercise plus the rest of the housework, like black leading the fireplace, scrubbing steps and beating mats I should think that many women had a right arm to rival Tessa Sanderson or Fatima Whitbread. The other piece of furniture in the back kitchen would be a small wooden table with 2 drawers, one for cutlery, scissors and the like, the other for tea towels and whatever was used for kitchen roll in those days. Wall units were not necessary as leading off from the back kitchen was a walk-in pantry where crockery, pots and pans and foodstuff was kept. There was a meat safe to keep blue bottles off – obviously no fridge. For some reason in my Nana's kitchen there was also a gas mask. Most folk still cooked on the black leaded range in the kitchen with its built-in boiler and oven. Electric kettles were quite a rarity and a toaster was about 18in. long with 3 spikes on the end, however, my mother being a modern young housewife, had a Baby Belling electric oven. It was about the size of a small microwave. I can only assume that to make Sunday dinner (I didn't know what lunch was) the Belling must have been used in tandem with the fireplace back in the larger kitchen which was dominated by the old black range with its huge grate, room at the back to throw a couple of buckets of coal to rake forward at night, the boiler, oven and all manner of openings and flues which had to be regularly cleaned of soot. The hearth had a brass fender round, a high mantle shelf with a tassled frill round it. The range was complete with a small decorative front to the grate, which for reasons beyond me was called a 'tidy betty'. Another term peculiar to the era and probably to the north-east was a 'brattish'. These small houses had no room for porches and no-one knew what a vestibule was hence you had a few floor boards running from floor to ceiling to keep the draught out ie. the brattish. It was at times so cold that a paraffin heater was essential. The sliding sash box windows didn't do a lot on the heating front but just to be on the safe side for hygiene the pantry window had open slats at the bottom. There were no fridges or freezers and cling film was light years away. Funnily enough salmonella and e-coli were unheard of. I firmly believe in the saying 'you've got to eat a peck of muck' or as my grandad would say while chewing on a rabbits' brains, 'Thicker the meat stronger the man.' Add to this the trips across the yard to the outside netties or coal houses and everyone had an abundant supply of what many folk are short of these days, fresh air.

Another good source of fresh air, and money for a young lad was putting the coals in. loads of coal were dropped in the back street next to the wooden hatches in the wall. They were about 3ft. high and alternated with the netty hatches which were at ground level, one shilling was the going rate for a load but this was a fair sum of money for a lad Of 9 or 10.

It may seem that the picture I paint has a gloomy rather Dickensian look to it, while I have to admit that people were considerably poorer in most ways and had to work much harder than today, this was not strictly the case. Young adults were optimistic after the war, their parents relieved and happy to have survived two World Wars, rationing was coming off and a sort of second industrial revolution was underway with new towns and estates going up. Some lighter manufacturing jobs were created however, the 'leisure industry' was still a long way off. Yes, people seemed quite happy with their lot and if anyone had known what was waiting for us in the wonderful 60's they'd have been ecstatic. If anyone can bring me evidence from the time of people saying, 'We must have a new ----' or 'I'll have to get away for a break I'm so stressed out 'or the classic kids 'I'm bored', I'd be glad to hear from them. Families seemed to stay together better in those days but, as this account has to be truthful I must admit that most housewives had no income of their own so, even if some marriages were not a bed of roses her other options were probably worse than staying at home. She and her partner (no that's the wrong word, only cowboys had partners in those days) were probably working too hard to fantasise about the bloke or lass a couple of streets away, while there was little chance of an illicit relationship at work as in those days men did men's work and women did women's work. Over the last few pages I have strayed away from Railway Street and its inhabitants to village life in general but back to other characters. At No.1 Church Street lived Emil Worthy and his wife Nancy. They must have been really well off as it was in their front room that what seemed like half the village watched the Coronation inn 1953 on their TV. I was a bit young to remember much about watching but I do remember a song about the Queen called 'In a Golden Coach'. Emil was a small ruddy faced man he was always clean so I assume he was a clerk or something like that. Nancy was the sister of Jack Bell the baker in Bridge Street, more about him later.

T No.10 Church Street lived the man who gave me my first haircut, Jimmy Jones, he kept a brindle greyhound which he raced under the name of Jungle Jim. By all accounts it did its owner proud at the tracks but I think Jimmy knew

exactly how to have it trying and how to pull it. Jimmy never seemed to sleep and he was such a good poacher that in later life he became a gamekeeper. At the other side of Church Street lived Billy Varty, a rather scary figure to youngsters with his dishevelled clothes, shuffling gait, trilby hat, hawk-like features and due to his severe deafness, a loud raucous voice. Mrs Walburn lived on the same side as Billy and her two daughters Edith and Vera moved all the way to the other side of the street when they married Jack Jackson and George Waites respectively. At the top of Church Street next door to The Australian, lived George and Madge Garget with their daughter Barbara. George, like most of his peers, was a pitman but as the pits closed George spent the latter part of his working life as the village road sweeper. He had a dry humour and would joke about how far he had to travel to work and how he managed to nip home for breakfast and the odd cuppa. In the late 60's with the demise of the railways, Howden Bridge was changed dramatically to the extent that there now is no bridge. Much of this work was done in Winter and made the children's walk to school quite dangerous so from about 8-40 to 9-00 am George simply parked his barrow and made sure that the kids got safely to school saying they (WVDC) can sack me if they want but I'm not letting little bairns get run over. Sacking would have been out of the question as George kept the village in pristine condition. Mind you he did have the right tools for the job, a wheel barrow, a broom and shovel. I wonder what he would have made of a black bin liner and a pair of outsize sugar tongs?

Now, imagine you are stranded somewhere between John O' Groats and Land End, desperate to get home and suffering slight amnesia, your best opening line on meeting someone would probably be, 'I live near Jacko.' He was, to say the least, quite well known. John George Jackson came to Howden at the end of the War from Wallsend where he had been a shipyard riveter. Having used pneumatic hammers myself I know that this was a real man's job and Jacko was a real man. Jacko married Edith Walburn, 'Wor Edie' as he called her. They had two sons, Derek who lives in Howden and Kevin just up the road in Crook. With respect to all the other men mentioned in this story it is my opinion that Jacko was THE character of this village. He never lost his Tyneside accent and had a wonderful turn of phrase giving people such colourful names as Moses McTavish, Greasy Waistcoat and to one of his closer friends (Roy Westell) Square Arse. To say that Jacko's language was colourful was a slight understatement but he was never vulgar or obscene. I'm sure he could have sworn before the Queen, the Pope and the Dalai Lama and got away with it.

Jacko would never have made a politician as he knew only one way to talk, straight. Many folk would call him a rough diamond, Vera Allan once told me that Jacko would ‘Sup beer thro’ a sweaty nappy’ or something like that. Jack was well read and had a wealth of knowledge. At first glance he wouldn’t strike you as a man with any interest in cuddly toys but my daughter Kathleen still has the Bugs Bunny he had made for her when she was born. Yes, he did have craggy features of a life lived to the full but he had the warmest smile, he smiled with his eyes as well as his mouth and his rendition of Louis Armstrong’s Wonderful World would bring a tear to any-one’s eye. Jacko and my Dad were good mates and in their latter years seemed to take turns ferrying each other to hospital. The morning Paddy died I went to tell Jacko who was obviously very ill himself. He gave me his condolences and then said in his matter of fact way, ‘Ahh thowt aa’d have gone afore him but a’ll not be lang.’ Three weeks later Jacko was dead. I know it’s a well-used phrase but I can assure you that those of us privileged to know him will never see his like again.

Round to School Street, I’ve only come a few yards but my memory of older inhabitants diminishes rapidly. Tommy and Eva Parkin, son Wilson lifelong friend of mine, still in Howden. More of Tommy later. Claude and Irene Johnson and their family. Claude had a dance band but the only recollection I have of him is of a very smart man with a green trilby hat. The Coates family also lived in School Street. Roy, being an excellent cricketer and Arnold, winning an FA Amateur Cup Winner’s medal with Crook Town. At the top of Hargill Bank lived the Dixon family the prominent one in my memory being Malcolm. I remember going for a walk down McNeil with my Dad and Malcolm. I was about 6 and was tired on the way back so Malcolm gave me a piggy-back home. I couldn’t understand how someone not much taller than me could be so strong. Malcolm was about 17 at the time and as many will recall, a dwarf. Malcolm made the most of things and had, indeed may still have a very successful career in show business.

Back down Hargill was The Vicarage. The first incumbent I remember was Matthew Richardson. It’s as well it was a large house as the vicar had 6 daughters and a son. In those days everyone knew the vicar and he just about knew everyone. On the farm across the road from the vicarage lived Ronnie Elliot and wife Emma who had worked ‘in service’ before meeting and marrying Ronnie. Ronnie delivered milk on a flat cart pulled by Bobby. Horses and carts while not commonplace when I was a kid, were not a rarity either. A

green-grocer's cart would come round and Docker Davison from Crook sold sticks from a cart. The one I recall most clearly was Quadrini's ice cream cart pulled by a beautiful chestnut pony which couldn't half gallop. I imagine that on a hot day he had to get around pretty quickly otherwise the ice cream, which was kept in two green cool boxes either side of the driver in his white coat, would melt. The coat was spotless and the cart gleamed but, you can be sure that if it came round today some clown of a bureaucrat would find that it didn't meet health and safety standards.

Anyway, I digress again so back to Ronnie and Emma. They seemed to me to be middle-aged when they should have been young. They were both musical and gave freely of their time to help our Youth Club put on a 'Black and White Minstrel Show'. This was 1962, Rock and Roll had a firm grip, Cliff and The Shadows were in and The Beatles were on the horizon. However, with Ronnie and Emma as musical directors, included songs like Caroliner Moon, Swanee, Dem Bones Dem Bones, and the unforgettable, I've Got Sixpence. Our venture into the hit parade was Suku Suku by Nina and Frederick. At rehearsals we often took the micky out of Ronnie and Emma but they were just too nice to notice. They must have done something right though as our one-off show ran for 3 performances by popular demand. My mate Brian Patton, three years our junior went to each performance and says his abiding memory is of a shy little teenager at the end. I wonder who he was? This sowed the seed for a pantomime and for that shy little teenager a twenty-five year Karaoke career. If you haven't worked out yet who he was I'm not telling you, but, I'm not best pleased.

Bobby Balmer, farmer, butcher 'Ahem' had the shop where Ian Chambers now trades. His farm-hands were Gordon Balfour and Ernie Pinkney. They also delivered milk, sometimes with the help of Gordon's wife Doris. Bobby Balmer was cracked up to be the richest man in Howden. At the bottom of Hargill Bank was the Manse, home of the Methodist Minister who ran the Youth Club. You didn't have to be a Methodist to go and no-one pestered you to go to church. I suppose I was an ethnic minority being christened in the R.C. Church and also half Irish. Anyway, I never got any racist or sectarian treatment. The Youth Club was a great success in many ways including organised bus loads to Newcastle City Hall where, for about 10/6d, we saw acts that would become world-wide legends, The Rolling Stones; Animals; Kinks; Roy Orbison and, of course, The Beatles. A Howden lad called Frank Batey

took some whisky and ended up on the stage with a brush in his hand next to John Lennon. To his eternal credit John applauded Frank all the way as he was escorted off the stage.

Time went by and in 1963 I started work in the laboratory at Pickford Holland. I don't know why because I was useless at Science. Actually, I do know why, because I was so desperate to get out of school. In February 1965 I left Pickfords to work at my 'beloved pipeyard' in Fir Tree. The first man to speak to me was Bob Clusky. His first words were, 'Are you Paddy's lad?' and, 'Where do you get your beer?' Well at the time I didn't get much beer as I was only 17 and probably looked 15. However, I was 18 in the July and soon Monday night Youth Club gave way to Monday night darts in The Green Tree.

This might be a good time to break off and start a slightly different story about Howden – The Pubs.

On the evening of July 5th. 1965, I paid my 3/- (15p) subs and became a member of Howden Workingmen's Club. Very daring as I wasn't actually 18 'til the next day. I was a man, well, sort of. At that time there were about 350 houses in Howden, as well as The Club, there were 4 thriving pubs, The Surtees (Mrs Tinkler's) The Plantation, The Green Tree and The Australian.

Emily Tinkler, known to all as Cilla, kept The Surtees and was, for many years, Cameron's longest serving landlady.



The pub had a small, cosy bar which was full with about 20 people in it. In the slightly larger back room was a piano played on a Saturday night by Cilla's lodger, Joey Raisbeck who originated from Witton Park. As was the case in many pubs then, customers would sing accompanied by the piano. Joey could also play pretty good 'Boogie-Woogie.' The clientele was mostly from Valley Terrace with a liberal sprinkling of Witton Parkers.



One evening just after Tom Jones had recorded 'The Green Green Grass of Home', Bessie Liddle said, 'I bet David Quinn knows that'. I didn't want to sing but the self-appointed concert chairman, Freddie Yorke, thrust the mike at me saying, 'Here lad, sing it.' I was petrified but had no choice but to have a go. Little did I know then I would still occasionally sing that song 50 years later.

In those days, people didn't just go to the pub to 'get hammered', they did things, dominoes, cards and shove ha'penny were played regularly but I suppose my own great passion, darts, was the most popular game. The Surtees had a team in the Crook Monday Night League and also the Bishop Auckland Friday Night League, star players being John Skinner, Ronnie Howe, Ray Davies and Tommy Tazey. Tommy was also a good singer and general all-round pub man. He was for a time, Chairman of The Crook Dart League. Quite a prestigious position when the league could boast in excess of 600 registered players. To say that Tommy liked a pint was something of an understatement. I never saw him full. Other Surtees regulars were Fred and Mary Carrick, Trevor Allan, who was born there, chief domino card seller and as prodigious an eater

as Tommy was a drinker, old Geordie Woodward, a certain Dr. Hardy often took his refreshment there having his own Soda Syphon to temper his whisky at the end of the bar. Not many people will know that Dr. Hardy was a dab hand at darts. I was in early one evening when he picked an old set of darts up and, without even taking his hat off, proceeded to hit almost everything he aimed at. I didn't use the Surtees much but I have to say that when I did go in Mrs Tinkler always enquired about my family and how we were. In fact if I had more than a couple of pints there would more often than not be a one 'on the house'.

The Surtees was also a boarding house for Police Dog Handlers and the like training at Harperley Hall. In 2005 Gavin and Patricia Joplin made The Surtees a private residence.

It's always been the case in Howden that some people only used one or maybe two pubs. The other pub that in those days I didn't use much, again not for bad reasons, was The Plantation.



In my eyes when Lionel Walton had The 'Plant' it was full of 'old men'. Some of them must have been 50 or even 60. Years later, when Harold and Paula Hodgson had the pub, there was quite a young clientele. Although Harold was a good player, the 'Plant' never really cracked it on the darts scene. Maybe that's why I didn't go in much. In the mid 1990's Bill and Beryl Bradley bought The Plantation, re-naming it The Garden House. I was talked into running a Quiz there on a Thursday evening. I say I was talked into, it is a bit odd as I ran the Quiz for 17 years. Bill and Beryl, while nice enough people were not really pub type people and although the Quiz went 'OK'ish, the pub was generally pretty quiet, then in July 2002, Michael and Gwen Parker bought the pub, closed it for a month, re-named it The Plantation and proceeded to lift it as I've never seen a

pub lifted before. Michael was an astute business man, very capable chef and thoroughly nice bloke. Gwen was always smart, out-going and had that happy bar-maid's knack of giving innuendo to everything she said. If a man says he doesn't like that sort of thing he should keep, out of pubs. Anyway, quiz nights became much more fun for me. Michael and Gwen, much to the disappointment of their customers, sold up in April 2006. Garry Gibson, then Chairman of Hartlepool Unt. F.C., bought the pub for his son, Andrew, who was a nice enough young man but could not handle the vodka. Believe me having a drink problem and running a pub cannot be good for your pocket or your health. In 2011 Fred Wilson bought the 'Plant' and is currently building 4 houses on the site.



Two pubs down!

In the 1960's The Club, The Aussie and The Green Tree were all thriving however, for my friends and I the Green Tree was the 'in' place.



For one thing, it had a juke box, 3d. per record 3 for 6d. Also, it was eminently suitable for mixed company. The Club still didn't allow women in the bar and The Aussie, much as I grew to love the place, was hardly suitable for taking a young lady of the 60's on your first date. So the Tree it was. Hilda and Ted Dinsley, like many landlords in those days, Ted had a job so it was Hilda who was 'front of house'. In other words, she did most of the work. She was a real grafter but behind the bar she was always immaculate, never a hair out of place. Ted too was very smart. You didn't see landlords and landladies looking scruffy as is the norm these days. At first we called Hilda Mrs Dinsley but she made us stop as it made her feel old, well, she was 43. We also drank 'pint dashes', an inch or so of lemonade in. As much as I've loved the stuff for 50 years, I still say that beer is an acquired taste. I firmly believe that if young people nowadays would acquire that taste instead of drinking vodka based pop, alcohol would not have such disastrous consequences.

I'm digressing to my soapbox so back to the pub. Sunday dinner times in The Tree were a bit special as Hilda put a spread on which would probably cost £100 now. Yorkshire Puddings, sage & onion stuffing, pickles, sandwiches and her legendary Yorkshire Pudding Pie full of whatever she was having later for dinner. Sunday afternoon, like Saturday for that matter, the dart board would be in full swing. You could put your name down to chalk the board then go away for half an hour for a game of crash. Sometimes there were so many that we would play 'Loopy' 6d each, last one standing takes the pot. I almost said last

man standing but that was not always the case as both Hilda and daughter Margaret threw an excellent dart.

Pubs in those days seemed to be full every evening, there were no tellies in pubs, no gimmicks, all they did was open the door, keep the beer right and be nice to people. Monday night was my favourite as it was 'Darts Night'. I'd be there practising dead on 6-00pm. The games started at 8-30pm. I could throw really good darts in an empty bar but never had the 'big match' temperament until I was in my 50's. By then my eyes weren't so good and I think my co-ordination was going a bit. I well remember a game of Loopy after the league game against The Earl Derby, after about 20 starters, 3 were left, Fred Irvine, me and the legend that is Doug McCarthy. I hung on in for ages, all the pub including other Derby lads were rooting for me. Almost inevitably Dougie came out on top but then, he did go on to be County Champion twice, partner John Lowe to win the Guinness Gold Cup and play 19 times for England.

Pubs rarely had paid entertainment in those days but as the evening wore on Hilda would often treat us to a song. Sometimes this would be after closing time. One evening I was leaving the pub with John Stoker, across the street I saw the figure of Sergeant Elliot, 'the Fat Sergeant'. Quite a number, including my mam and dad were still drinking so I said in a loud voice, 'I've left my keys john.' I dashed back in to warn them but when I got back to the front door I was confronted by Sergeant Elliot who gently ushered me back to the bar. He took off his helmet, Hilda said with glass in hand, 'Pint George?' He said, 'Yes, and fill this young lad one.' That was a proper policeman.'

Hilda and Ted ran The Green Tree from 1963 till the mid 1980's. In the ensuing years it changed hands many times but no-one could make a go of it. I reckon it's because they didn't work as hard as Hilda.

After several attempts, some by people who had no idea how to run a pub, the Green Tree closed in 2011. Fred Wilson (Who else?) bought the building and although obviously in poor repair it stands there now, begging for someone to take it on and make a success that it has the potential for. Sadly this is never going to happen.

When I joined Howden Workingmen's Club in 1965 I just assumed that it would last forever.



This was not to be as in 1983 owing partly to changes in people's lifestyle and the mistake of building a larger concert hall, the Club became un-viable. It was no good blaming the committee as we all had our say in the matter.

Entertainment had been provided 2 or 3 nights a week in the old concert hall, which, on reflection was just the right size. Bob Sowerby from Witton-le-Wear started a country music night on Thursdays. This was a great success and Bob seemed to draw the best acts for miles around, Cliff Ledger's band, Ken and Billie Ford, Ken Andrews from Hamsterley and from Guisborough Paul Wheeler. A couple of years ago Paul hired The London Palladium to perform, so he must have been pretty good. Single artists, duos and small bands appeared on weekends, but often the 'Go as You Please' was just as good a night. Accompanied on piano by club chairman Harry mangles or George Wailes (Fishy George), regulars would sing, paid in pint cheques if lucky. Most had only a couple of favourite songs and most committee men had a song. Geordie Raine – 'Give Me The moonlight', he didn't kick his legs as high as Frankie Vaughan; Kenny Hawley – 'A Boy named Sue'; Secretary, Stan Laybourne – 'Mule Train' complete with toy whip and sometimes a bit of tray bashing; Roy Westell (square arse as Jacko called him) – 'Chattanooga Shoe Shine Boy', and of course the concert chairman 'Jacko' himself – 'Wonderful World and 'I Believe', other singers were Clive Orriss – 'Remember Your Mine; rose McCutcheon – 'Second Hand Rose'; Kath Peyrefitte – 'Wheel of Fortune'; Alice Chatterton – 'There goes my Heart' and Ronnie Willey who could have swept the board on Britain's Got Talent with a song called as far as I could make out, 'I be a bugger, a bugger I be Sir'.

One Saturday night, Mel Clarke who worked on the pipe machine with me at Fir Tree, leaned over to Harry Mangles whispering and smiling at me. Next thing I'm on the stage. I sang Clive's 'Remember Your Mine' but was so nervous that most of the audience joined in to help me out.

Singing in the bar a capella as they say, was usually reserved for bank Holiday afternoons, the stars being Jackie Stoker and Tony Johnson. Both sang regularly in concert parties. There was quite a bit of rivalry, but knowing and liking both men it certainly isn't for me to judge who was best. Jackie was best known for his Jolson medleys, while Tony, who had actually won the radio show 'Carroll Levis Discoveries' was more for Joseph Locke type of stuff. Both were a little prima donna ish. Jackie would as he said, 'Brek down' halfway thro' a song while Tony would protest that he was 'Past it'. Two pints later, far from 'past it' Tony would be up on his feet singing 'King of the Road am I'. Tony had a large repertoire so no-one really knew when he would sit down.

The club closed in 1983. It was privately bought and in 1984 became Bogarts Night Club. This did not last long, nor did another couple of half-hearted attempts to run, then in 1986, Ian and Helen Ashton took the place on naming it Sunnydene Lodge.



They were a good team but to hear them arguing you would never know. Helen had at one time been an air hostess, Ian, 'Asho' an excellent chef who had worked 'Maxims' in Paris and also been catering manager at Fulham FC. They were hard workers and Asho really wanted to make the place a high class eating establishment. He was well capable of providing the fare but Howden just wasn't quite the right place. He quickly earned a good reputation for his food but soon found that he had to cater for the more basic needs of the villagers ie. beer. We soon formed a darts team and joined the league where we held our own pretty well. Nothing like darts night for selling lots of beer. One night in late July 1993 Asho came in from the kitchen and said, 'I think we'll have a Leek Show, Quinny you know how to run them, don't you?' Yes, but who will enter, we have no club, no members and no money and the show can't be later than the beginning of October. Ash said, 'I'll put £100 for the winning leeks, you sort the rest out and we'll raise the rest of the prize money.'

I intend to go into a little more depth about Leek Shows later so I'll just say that I was pleasantly surprised at the outcome.

Asho and Helen ran the Lodge for about 10 years making some good friends in the village. Ian, like many in his profession, was fond of a drink, or rather too fond of a drink, he was a bit keen on the top shelf. By Christmas 1992 he was really ill with cirrhosis of the liver. Although he tried to work through, Helen had to cancel the Christmas dinners as he was too ill to carry on, He died much too young at 47. Typically of his style his coffin had number plates front and back with 'ASHO' on. Although he had not lived in the village many years, Howden Church was packed. Two notable attendees were Les Strong, former Fulham Captain and 60's star Dave Berry, (he of the Crying Game). Dave had put a show on for Ian only a few months previously. I haven't met many 60's stars but Dave was a modest, charming man, an absolute gentleman.

Helen typically of her carried on manfully running the Lodge but without Asho and his cooking skills it was always going to be an uphill task and in 1996 she sold up. Frank and Anne Spoor ran the place with reasonable success but the housing boom was coming and in 2000 they sold the land to a builder, hence the 7 houses now on the plot, some still empty.



If you were asked to describe a ‘man’s pub’ The Australian would fit the bill.

Named such because in 1867 William Walton bought the place with money he had made from opal and gold mining in Australia.

His nephew Marshall Walton was a well- known character in Howden. He looked after the sewerage beds. Presently I can probably claim to have used the ‘Aussie’ over a longer period of time than anyone, as in the 1950’s my Nana used to take me up to watch Andy Pandy on what would be one of the few TV’s in Howden at the time. Landlord at the time was Frank Clayton but only being about five at the time my only recollection is that he was bald and red-faced, (whisky induced).



Benny Batey took over from Frank, he and his wife Alison had a large family, 13 I think, of whom 11 were girls, most of whom went into the nursing profession. My first drink in the Aussie was on New Year’s Day 1965. I was

passing the pub when George Longstaff dashed out and practically dragged me in. Well, I wasn't 18 until July and I knew that Dick and Ena Hewitson knew my parents. I was welcomed but thought I'd best just have a half; two, as far as I remember, unique occurrences, one me being dragged into a pub and two, having a half. In 1967 the Allen family moved from The Brown Horse Inn at High Stoop, Tow Law down to The Australian. Vera looked after the pub, Walter, who worked in the Fire Service popped into the bar occasionally, usually when he fancied a game of solo whist. Norma was working in a bank and Judith at the time was just a girl of about 11 years. Judith now lives in North Yorkshire but still keeps in touch via Facebook. The best dart players of the village seemed to converge on The Aussie and as I was still naïve enough to harbour dreams of one day being News of The World Champion, I signed on in 1968. I was hooked. When going out, which was almost every night, I rarely said to my mother, 'I'm going to the Aussie,' just, 'I'm going to Vera's.' £1 for every time my mother said, 'You may as well take your bed there,' and I have been quite a wealthy man although I'd have probably spent it on beer.

Vera was not exactly your average landlady being to us young lads something of a mother/auntie figure, and to the older clientele of which 90% were men a friend/sister. She rarely drank and when putting a new barrel on would draw a drop off, when she thought it looked right would give a couple of us a taste to make sure, she was always right. Vera almost appeared to run The Aussie as a hobby rather than a business. This was reflected in the atmosphere. You could just about say who would be in at any given time thro' the week. Vera had Thursday night off. She actually spent those nights at Tow Law running an old people's club. Former Brown Horse customer, Ernie Amos looked after the pub that night. Ernie became one of my best friends and when Vera retired he and his wife Anne ran The Aussie for 7 years. Early during her tenure Vera started an Easter Egg Show. This consisted of a competition for dyed eggs, novelty eggs, children's section and hand-painted eggs. A raffle was run over the weekend and the eggs were auctioned on the Sunday Evening. The first auctioneer was Billy Ferris, I would take over some years later. The raffle and auction takings were donated to the 'Old Peoples Treat' tea in the W.I. Hall. The donations from The Aussie soon became the mainstay of the event and no wonder, some painted eggs were what I can only describe as true works of art. Fox hunting scenes, flowers, views of Durham Cathedral, biblical scenes. Funny how a few pints can make you feel rich. My friend Tommy Wright paid £17 in auction for a Crown of Thorns egg. In 1981 I bought a goose egg with violet,

jonquil and sweet pea painted by Terry Richardson, probably the best artist in Howden. Terry was so meticulous that he blew the egg and filled it with polystyrene to preserve it. I paid £11 at the time and now 35 years later it still has pride of place in our china cabinet. Easter weekend in the Aussie needed one thing to cap it off and so the Easter Monday Egg Jarping Contest was born. To put a pub egg jarping contest in a nutshell, it is a group of grown men and women getting extremely drunk while playing conkers with hard-boiled eggs. Strict rules were adhered to. You had to go point to point then, blunt to blunt, no lacquer and strictly no peahen eggs. The KO competition could last a couple of hours, whoever had one solid end left won the contest and the prize money. I ran the jarping for over 25 years and typically never got anywhere near the prize money didn't matter. Several of us were not just customers but part-time mentors and bar staff. If Vera had an idea for a change of any kind she would invariably say, 'What do you think Ernie or Alec or Jeff or Dave?' Any one of about 6 of us would pop behind the bar to serve at any time, but if you wanted a pint and Wimbledon was on the TV you had no option, Vera was glued to the telly.

Vera ran The Australian until 1980. She had a successful Dart Club and Leek Club, indeed she had a very successful pub. Old and young mixed well to the point that the Touring Club (I don't know how it got that name as we only went to Blackpool) was usually about 8 of my Dad's generation, 40 – 50's and 8 of us in our 20's The Touring Club probably belongs to another story.

On leaving the pub Vera spent her long and well deserved retirement in Howden, ending her days in Plantation View at the age of 90. I can picture her behind the Aussie bar as clearly now as ever.

Not much changed when Ernie and Ann Amos took over from Vera. Ernie was just about part of the fixtures and fittings.

Over the past few years some Leek Club stalwarts had passed on but suddenly a new generation of us had become gardeners. We kick-started the Leek Club and set a limit of 27 members as they filled the meeting room to capacity. Ann became secretary, I was chairman and Alan Lee treasurer (Alan could do creative accountancy). We had a good blend of members and the club went well.

Ernie was also keen to develop the potential of what was already a good darts club. We had always had a decent team but in the early/mid 80's it became the

best pub team in the area. One of the best things about that team was that there were no imports, all were regular customers. Star players were, county regular and winner of many tournaments, Maurice Quarmby, John Burdess, Ray Davies, Steven Orriss, (the most underrated player I knew) and in my opinion the most naturally gifted man ever to pick up a set of darts, John Ellis Harrison 'Jackie'. I came in about 9th or 10th in the pecking order so I did get the occasional game. One job I would never lose would be chalker. You'd be surprised how involved that makes you feel. Anyway, we had a team in the Friday Night League so all of us in the club got a game at least once a week. The Monday Night Team won the League, breaking the stranglehold that the redoubtable Kings Head Team under the captaincy of 'Bonner' Thompson had had for many years. Steven Orriss won the league singles beating Doug McCarthy in a tremendous final that I had the pleasure of calling. It would be over 20 years before Maurice Quarmby finally got his hands on the league pairs trophy, oddly enough, partnered by Doug. Great days, but now many Leek Clubs are defunct and the Crook Dart League is in such decline that I could probably get a place on most teams even now. Nobody seems to want to belong to anything now. Anyway, back to The Aussie, Ernie and Ann spent 7 years there. The only real change was that more women frequented the place. Nothing wrong with that, otherwise nothing much changed from Vera's time. It was still the best Bank Holiday Pub in the area. You could still tell who would be in on any given night.

When Ernie and Ann moved out it was still almost like family taking over as my mate Jeff Wright and his wife Christine took over. I was with Jeff some years earlier on then he and Christine met. If Christine had a fault it was she was too quiet, however, when she took over as landlady, she set to with a will and she and Jeff kept up the good work without really changing much. If it's not broken, don't mend it!

When Jeff and Christine came out various strangers took over for a few years. It didn't work.

Mick Jardine and Christine Morson took over, probably just in time and literally rescued the place. It was back to being The Aussie again. Mick and Christine left The Aussie to manage a club in Peckham (yes, Del Boy's Peckham), what they made of those two down there I dread to think. They have retired to live locally and it's always good to see them occasionally.

Just a few weeks ago Ronnie and Val Flounders celebrated 20 years in The Aussie. It's still the same other than it isn't open weekday afternoons.

About 40 years ago someone, and I can't remember who, told me that when there was only one pub left in Howden, it would be The Australian.

Who would have believed it?