

## CHILDHOOD MEMORIES OF VALLEY TERRACE

Joyce Charlton (née Corner)

Valley Terrace was a very close-knit community where neighbours and caring for one another reigned supreme. However, it was often not included in the activities of Howden-le-Wear as a whole: it was almost as if it was shunned. When asked if this was by accident or design, one elderly resident replied, "Probably a bit of both." One explanation is based on the fact that, after the war, the Carnival procession used to begin at Hook's field at the far end of Valley terrace. However, for practical reasons, the starting point of the Carnival procession was changed, and it then began near the park. It was suggested that some residents of Valley Terrace took umbrage at this, as the procession now completely missed Valley Terrace, and so decided to hold their own activities independent of the rest of the village. Yet residents of Valley Terrace still played their part in chapel and church activities, and the names of a number of young men from the street figure on the War Memorial.

Valley Terrace also used to be known locally as Shiney Row, possibly as a result of the late afternoon and evening sunlight reflecting off the windows in this long street.

My memories, dating from the late 1930's and 1940's, are almost without exception happy ones.

Mrs Hanson collected children, rather like the Pied Piper, and took her own children and a troop of other children, together with our jam sandwiches, bottles of water and towels, to a stream that ran onto Blackie Beck. Needless to say, there was no sun cream in those days. At Blackie Beck we spent hours paddling in the stream with our skirts tucked up into our pants to prevent them from getting wet. We built dams, collected minnows, played ball games and skipped, having great fun as children do.

Mrs Walton at No. 2 Valley Terrace sold sweets and chocolate from her front room. After she gave up, Mrs Birtles at No. 16 sold much sought-after confectionery from her front room.

Miss Nicholson, who became Mrs Water Hook, had a thriving business as a herbalist in the top house on the street.

An elderly gentleman called Bill Lard had what nowadays might be called obsessive compulsive disorder, although it was absolutely harmless. At the front of each house was a very small garden with a gate. As Bill Lard walked along the terrace, if anyone's garden gate should be open, he would close it.

After peace was declared in 1945, a very large bonfire was built on the seggar, or spoil, heaps at the end of Valley Terrace. When this was lit, the fire was encouraged to burn more fiercely by a barrel of tar which had been 'borrowed' from the colliery for the purpose. As a result of this 'borrowing' the residents of Valley Terrace were fined for stealing the tar. As no one accepted responsibility for the theft, it was decided that a street collection would take place to pay the fine. Of course, the total of the money collected was far in excess of the amount of the fine, leaving quite a substantial surplus. As a result of this unexpected windfall, lots of activities were arranged over the years for the benefit of anyone who wished to take part in them.

I recall Mr Natrass (Emmie) collecting money from each house in Valley Terrace every Friday. I seem to remember that it was 6d, which enhanced the fund.

We had fancy dress parades and carnivals. Christmas parties were held in the W.I. hall. Sports days were held in either the park or Hook's field which included running, jumping, egg-and-spoon races, three-legged races and various other competitive activities. There were also competitions for the best decorated Easter egg. We also had occasional coach trips.



There must have been some committee to arrange all these events, but I remember that John Corner was the driving force behind some of them. His hobby was breeding budgerigars, and he had some of the most colourful birds imaginable.

As children, we spent hours in the sand quarry or seggar heaps, sliding down the slopes on metal trays or pieces of cardboard.

There is one thing I can't remember: did it ever rain? It must have done, because most of the residents of Valley Terrace grew their own vegetables in the gardens at the back of the terrace.

What a lot of fun we had playing all day long at very little cost! These are wonderful memories of happy, sunny days.