

## AM I STILL AN "INCOMER?"

### A personal view of the changes to Howden-le-Wear

I came here in 1963 to a quiet village on the crossroads to Witton-le-Wear, Crook and Bishop Auckland and westwards to Weardale. All the houses were stone-built, but already Hargill had a new council estate of houses built of brick. Denebridge would soon follow.

Howden was divided by the deep cut that carried the railway line to Crook and Bishop Auckland. The line was crossed by a bridge, and even today, that section of road from the top of Railway Street and the mini roundabout, is still referred to as, "the bridge." . ‘

When the railway closed, that "deep cut" was slowly filled in with 'spoil' from the tip near Willington. Now there are green fields, where once the line carried trucks and carriages. The railway sidings, the platforms, the waiting rooms and the Station house, would soon disappear.

More new houses were to follow and each decade saw the building of "Fir Tree Drive" (Fishers), Parkside, Plantation View, Deneside, Bridgefield Court, Vicarage Close, Plantation Terrace, Milburn Way, Sunnydene, Village Gate, and Howden Green....

But, with this ever expanding village, came the demise of our shops. Who remembers, "Mary Jane", where you could buy almost anything and she knew where everything was? This shop became "Atkinson's", the paper shop, before it closed. "Florrie's" became "Bertha's" before it closed. "Bell's Bakery", "George Wales" fish shop (now standing empty....waiting!) Bertie Dunn, at the bottom of Hargill, where we called for our sweets. The Post Office, where I worked for a while for Mr. and Mrs. Watson and then Mr. and Mrs. Hutchinson, soon to close and merge with the Spar. Before "Spar" we had Harry and Peggy Waggott, Peggy's was a big miss for the ladies! Part of the house where I live was once a hairdressers and before that, a cobblers shop.

The Allotments, which had occupied the “store field” since the War years had to fight for survival. Eventually, they moved further along and are still very popular and well used.

A new school was built to accommodate the rising number of children. The old building was used as a Community Centre until it became obvious that vast amounts of money would have to be spent to bring it up to date.

Hargill Haven had a much younger building, so after long negotiations, the “Haven” became the new Village Hall. We secured a thirty year lease on this building and now it thrives as a centre for the village.

The old building is still empty.

A new petrol station and garage was built at the edge of the Park. A short row of houses called “Stable Row” stood on this site. The old petrol pumps were at the top of Bridge Street and the garages were behind. There is a garden there now.

As well as the closure of the shops, the pubs met the same fate. The Surtees, The Club (Sunnydene Lodge), the Plantation and The Green Tree, followed, one by one. In the sixties, Craig Hall used to be known as “The Blue Lagoon”. It was taken over by the Scouts and then sold as a house.

Although people from many parts of the country have made their homes here, there is still a “core” of families who have lived here for three, four and sometimes five generations.

After fifty-four years I think I can be called a “resident” and not an “incomer” now. In which case, I will be happy to stay here and be a “Howden-ite”

June Wright.