



DURHAM  
*In Time*

## Arrival of the London Lead Company in Teesdale

by Anne E. Metcalfe

Around Middleton-in-Teesdale, Newbiggin, Forest and Frith and Eggleston were many lead mines belonging to local gentry and Lord Barnard.

In 1753 the London Lead Company took on the first lease in Teesdale at Newbiggin and eighteen years later mines and smelting mill at Eggleston. Once established other mines were opened up – about nineteen in all.

The majority of workers were local but in 1758 thirteen Derbyshire miners and their families moved to Teesdale to work in the Langdon Beck mine. However, poor results led to some miners returning to Derbyshire though the names of those remaining are still common in the dale i.e. Barker, Redfern, Smedley and Staley.

Although the company (of Quaker origins) was admired and praised for its public works the Teesdale miners lived in abject poverty. The working conditions were appalling; men died at an early age and their children who were poorly housed and fed often died from ordinary childhood illnesses.

Local workers felt that the company was growing too quickly. Too many outsiders were coming in and the work was spread too thinly. The miners felt strongly that more money should be given to their wages that put to use in public works.

The London Lead Company established its Northern Headquarters at Middleton-in-Teesdale in 1815. An impressive residence, Middleton House, was built alongside stores and a central workshop at the top of Hude. The house was the home of the





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superintendent as well as the company's main office. The workshop was a repair centre for mine machinery, which had to be quickly repaired or replaced.

The village had become a company town; the population grew and the housing situation was desperate. In 1824 the company began to provide new housing for the workers. One such development was New Town. The houses were built to suit the status of the employees.

Ten Row (now River Terrace) was built to accommodate lowly miners in 'one up and one down' cottages. Each had a long narrow garden and a pig sty out back. New Town Terrace was in a similar style.

At convenient points piped water was made available. The tap housing may be seen to this day.

Masterman place had an assortment of housing to suit all layers of employees. A row of small cottages; four more larger cottages for skilled workers and a grand block of superior dwellings for the under managers, the surveyors and the doctor. A one-storey house was built to be a workers library.

The houses all had roofs with distinctive nipped gable ends. Tenants chosen to live in New Town had to be of good character, hard working and of a sober disposition. The children were obliged to attend Sunday school. New Town was entered through an ornamental arch; its gates were locked at night, thus encouraging the tenants to lead wholesome lives. The men worked hard in their gardens to provide fresh food for their families and some raised chickens and a pig. The company encouraged education for the whole family.





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For the children aged 6 years to 12 (14 for girls) a new school was built in 1861 along the Alston Road. Cost per a child – 1d per week.

The men were encouraged to use the reading room in the Baptist chapel (1829) at Hude and the purpose built library at Masterman Place. At a later date a more substantial reading room was built with company support in Market Place (later Mechanics Institute). Here lectures were given on gardening and smallholding. Good quality seeds were sold at reasonable prices. The company encouraged garden produce shows for which they provided cash prizes.

Brass bands were supported by the company also. This kept the men busy and out of the public houses. Regular band concerts were given.

The company bought in large quantities of wheat, rye, oatmeal and other basics, which were sold in the ready money shops. No debt was allowed even so a group of miners got together in 1841 and with the help of the London Lead Company formed a cooperative cash association. The building was sited near the Hudeshope Beck. Grain was milled here and helped stabilise the price of bread.

In 1873, the cooperative purchased premises in Horse Market to provide a full grocery service, drapery, shoes and seeds etc. Then a blacksmith shop, butchery and a coal depot. Villages all around the area were served by the coop.

Life in Middleton-in-Teesdale and the local environs was very comfortable. A rich social life evolved – libraries, brass band concerts, lectures, cricket clubs, garden shows and allotments. A company doctor provided care for the sick and the men





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funded this by joining the Lead Company's social fund into which regular payments were made. Men made friends and supported each other at work and at home.

Sadly, in the 1890's the richer vein of ore had been worked out and it was uneconomical to mine the smaller veins as competition from Spain grew and other materials, zinc and iron, were substituted.

The company had to survive by investing elsewhere. With the withdrawal of the company, the lead mining tradition diminished. Some families moved away, others returned to farming and quarrying. A few private mines remained.

The London Lead Company ceased operations in Teesdale in 1905.

Coop info "The People's Store" by Lamb and Warren.

*Digitised by Valerie Walton*

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