



DURHAM
In Time

Wingate - The New Century

by Marilyn Brown

In 1906, on October 14th, the village was thrown into anguish and sorrow, which was shared with the whole country, when the mine suffered an explosion. Twenty-six men died due to this tragedy. The cause of the explosion was the subject of much investigation and discussion and a Home Office report was presented to Parliament in 1907. The conclusion reached by H.M. Inspector of Mines was that "It cannot be treated as a reproach against either officials or men that they did not more effectively guard against a danger of which they were in ignorance." No prosecutions recommended. On December 21st, 1907, the monument opposite the church was unveiled as commemoration to the tragedy.

The Great War of 1914-1918 brought its toll on Wingate as it did to the whole of Britain. Men went to war and did not return. The village suffered, food and clothing were scarce, but as with other hard times they tightened their belts and survived, helping each other along the way. The memorial of the War Dead of World War I is a stained glass window and tablet in the church.

After the war Labour came in to power and attention was given to housing conditions. This saw, for the first time, council houses being built – the end of the old era. What was ahead for Wingate? Great turbulence and change was to come for the next generation in the mining industry and the communities built up around them.

The twenties saw conditions at the collieries throughout Britain as bad as ever. An appeal for decent wages was put before the employers and turned down. Rejection of the plan by the coal owners led to strike in 1921. This strike had the same outcome, as the previous ones as





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the miners were forced to return to work on the owner's terms, only this time there was no eviction or shortage of food.

The labour party was defeated in the 1922 elections but social improvements were secure. In 1926 the coal owners, due to the loss of markets and increasing overheads, asked the workers to take a reduction in wages. This led to strike, as wages were already low. There was trouble in the village during this time and riot squads were brought in at times to stop the violence and protect blacklegs (strike breakers). Some prosecutions were made. The outcome of the strike was that the miners went back on the owner's terms – for less pay and longer hours.

The 1930's saw the opening of A.J. Dawson Grammar School by Peter Lee. This was an important event for the whole area. A.J. Dawson was a Director of Education and was well known in Wingate as he had often visited the schools. Around this time the Co-op Dairy was built in Wellfield Road. Here we have two buildings, in different ways of importance not only to Wingate but the surrounding area as well.

The Second World War brought change to the village in lots of ways. The colliery worked to full capacity and Bevin Boys came in from other parts to help work the pit. Women of the village went to work in the munitions factories at Aycliffe, some went to work in factories and some joined the forces. Many families lost loved ones and the memorial to them is the illuminated clock on the church.

After the war housing took priority and Wingate saw houses added to Market Crescent, Kings Row and Newholme. Vicarage Estate was built on a twenty-two acre site.

On 20th October 1962, Wingate Grange Colliery closed after 123 years, becoming the first colliery to close in the area. Looking at the landscape now the black coal mountain has gone,





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replaced by green grass. Small business units are trading on the site and a visitor would never know there had been a colliery.

Digitised by George Muncaster

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