



NORTHUMBERLAND & DURHAM FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY

NORTH TYNESIDE BRANCH NEWSLETTER

Editor – Susan Lynn – email: susandavid80@yahoo.co.uk

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Welcome to the July issue of our monthly newsletter and I hope you find something to interest you. Thank you for all the contributions so far, please keep them coming we'd love more of your stories and pictures. If you have anything for a future issue, an article, a query or maybe a nice photo you'd like to share please email me at the above address.

Susan

DENT'S HOLE



The village was sited between the mouth of the Ouseburn and St Anthony's in Walker, Newcastle. Whalers anchored at Dent's Hole because of the depth of the river at that spot. It was described as being one of the prettiest locations on Tyneside, but one which was often feuding with the neighbouring riverbank villages of St Peter's and St Anthony's. The 19th Century North East historian R.J. Charlton wrote about people's memories of Dent's Hole. "They will tell you how pleasant it was to walk among the green bushes on the banks, and see the houses below half-hidden by the trees and watch salmon fishers on the shore hauling in their nets, and the Greenland whalers come sailing up the river to anchor at Dent's Hole".

LENA ASHWELL (1872-1957)

Largely forgotten nowadays, Lena Ashwell was one of the leading Edwardian actress/producers, a suffragette, founder of the Women's Emergency Corps and a founder member of the United Suffragist group. Her determination to take entertainment to the troops in World War I earned her the OBE. She campaigned for a National Theatre and after the war set up her own theatre company, The Lena Ashwell Players, but she was also a Tynesider. Not born on the banks of the Tyne but on the Tyne itself on board the ship her father commanded.



She was born Lena Margaret Pocock on the 28th September 1872 on board the Wellesley, the Training Ship of Wellesley Nautical School, while it was anchored off shore between North and South Shields at "Peggy's Hole". The Wellesley was a home for boys "unconvicted of crime' but under suspicion". Her father, Royal Navy Commander Charles Ashwell Boteler Pocock moved his family to Canada to become a



clergyman, when Lena was eight. Lena, the second youngest of seven children, went on to study music in Lucerne, Switzerland and then the Royal Academy of Music, London. It was here Ellen Terry heard her sing, liked her voice and persuaded her to become an actress. She worked alongside Ellen Terry and Henry Irving and made her name in 1900 in the play Mrs Dane's Defence going on to become one of the most famous actresses of her time. Bernard Shaw described her as the '...divinely-gifted Lena Ashwell'.

By 1906 as a well-established actress, she became actor/manager of the Savoy theatre, the following year she opened the Kingsway Theatre Company. She visited Newcastle a number of times and her Kingsway Company brought two plays to the Tyne Theatre in September 1908. "Irene Wycherley" by Anthony P. Wharton will be staged on Friday evening, and in this Miss Ashwell has a part which, it is said, gives her even greater scope than other roles which she has sustained with success "Diana of Dobson's" which will be played during the remainder of the week and on Saturday afternoon is a bright little comedy which has attracted all London. (Newcastle Daily Chronicle; 5.9.1908) The same year she divorced her first husband on grounds of violence and cruelty and married her second, the royal obstetrician and gynaecologist, Sir Henry Simson (1872-1932).

At the beginning of the war Ashwell, with Decima Moore and Evelina Haverfield formed the Women's Emergency Corps which encouraged women to take up traditionally male jobs to help the war effort. But perhaps her greatest achievement was the setting up of the YMCA

Lena Ashwell Concert Party. She was a great believer that the arts were a means not only to entertain but also to bring relief and help protect soldiers from the brutalising effects of war. The War Office initially turned down her request to take music and theatre to the front line. However, through Princess Helen Victoria, chair of the Women's Auxiliary Committee of the YMCA, she won their support and in Feb 1915 the first Lena Ashwell YMCA Concert Party embarked for France. In her book *Modern Troubadours*, she remembers the first concert in a YMCA Hut, Harfleur Valley.. *"The wooden hut was packed to suffocation... the men had been waiting for hours and smoking incessantly, and the fog of smoke and the heat within the hut was a tremendous contrast to the cold, rain and mud... Ivor Novello, who was one of the party, had just written 'Keep the Home Fires Burning', and when he sang it, the men seemed to drink it in at once and instantly sang the chorus, and as we drove away at the end of the concert, from all parts of the camp one could hear the refrain of the chorus"*.



The series of entertainments given by Miss Lena Ashwell's concert party has afforded the greatest pleasure to thousands of soldiers behind the firing lines and in the hospitals of France. The picture shows a performance in progress. An officer has rigged up a canopy to protect the pianist as the weather was very unsettled.

Money was needed and Lena held fundraising events all over the country. By the time her event was hosted at Newcastle Theatre Royal on the afternoon of 6th April 1916, the YMCA Lena Ashwell Concert Parties had given nearly 600 entertainments to soldiers in France at the cost of £2.2s per concert. The Lord Mayor (Counsellor George Lunn) presided over this event and as well as herself, the speakers were Major-General Montgomery, Sir Thomas Oliver FRSE, and the Rev A. S. Wardroper (vicar at Walker). In the evening the Company performed *Irene Intervenes* with Lena Ashwell in the lead. By 1918, more than 600 leading actors, singers and entertainers had travelled to France, Malta and Egypt to perform for tens of thousands of troops. They played in venues at the front which included hospitals, base

camps, transit stations and ships in France, Malta, Egypt and Palestine and at military camps and hospitals in England. After the war Ashwell formed the Once-a-week Players, later known as Lena Ashwell Players Ltd of which Laurence Olivier was a member – until fired for leaving the stage during a performance of Julius Caesar, although in his memoirs he claimed he was sacked for giggling. Lena Ashwell was the author of four books, including her autobiography *Myself a Player* published in 1936. She died in London on the 13th of March, 1957.

References:

Lena Ashwell (1922) *Modern Troubadours*, Gyldendal
Lena Ashwell (1936) *Myself a Player*, Gyldendal
Newcastle Daily Chronicle - Saturday 08 April 1916
Newcastle Journal - Thursday 06 April 1916
University of Birmingham Special Collection – YMCA archives
Photo of painting *The Wellesly Training Hulk in North Shields Harbour The Fire Of The Wellesly* by J D Liddell (1859–1942) this maybe copywritten www.stagebeauty.net

Ruth Gilchrist

Ruth is a Newcastle City Guide and this article, re-printed with Ruth's permission, was first published in the Newcastle City Guides magazine 'Guidelines' in April 2021



MANGLES

Shields Daily Gazette 9 December 1859

A MANGLE FOR SALE in good working order. Will be sold reasonable.

Apply Mr. Arkley's Grocer, Dotwick Street, North Shields

A MANGLE FOR SALE, in good working order,
Will be Sold reasonable. Apply at Mr ARKLEY'S
Grocer, Dotwick Street, North Shields.

Washing clothes used to be such hard work, water to be heated in a boiler then put in the poss tub with soap, the clothes agitated with a wooden dolly to clean them, then put through a mangle before drying on a line or in front of the fire. When I was a child I was lucky enough to live next door to my grandmother and in her out house stood the poss tub and dolly and a large old fashioned mangle with wooden rollers and big handle, which when I tried to turn it I found very difficult. They weren't used in my day, grandma had moved on to a modern washer with electric wringer, but it seems these old mangles were still used well into the 20th century.



After the 1931 census a determined effort was made to improve housing conditions in Tynemouth Borough. A large slum clearance programme was arranged and houses were built on the Ridges Estate. The first slum clearance tenant was re-housed there on 13 November 1933. A rather curious difficulty arose from the fact that nearly all the tenants in the slum clearance areas owned large old-fashioned mangles which were too big to take into the new flats. So, the Corporation bought several hundred small wringers and they were sold on an instalment plan at 3d. per week.

SHIP BISCUITS

Hardtack is a simple type of biscuit made from flour, water and salt, cheap and long-lasting it was an important part of the sailor's sea diet before the introduction of canned foods. Long journeys at sea meant food needed to be long lasting and along with salt meat the biscuit or 'hardtack' was vital.

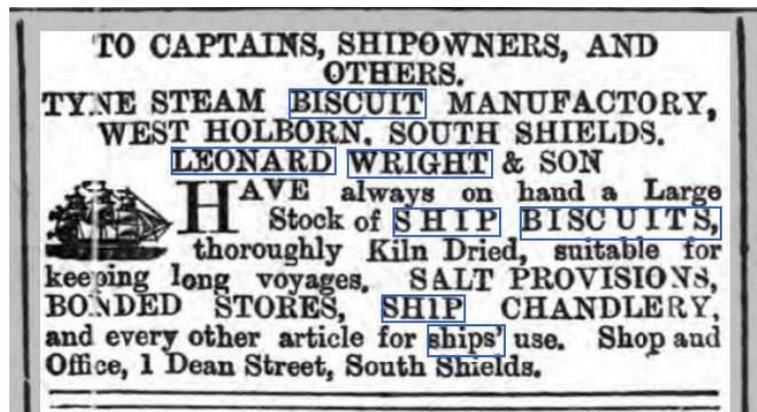
There are references to Richard I (the Lionheart) setting out from England in 1190 with his ships suitably stored with 'biskit. Unfortunately, it wasn't uncommon for flour to be adulterated with powdered bone, or a pea flour which became incredibly hard and could not be bitten through. Sometimes the only way to eat a hard biscuit was to leave it until it got stale and soft, by which point they tasted musty and often contained weevils and maggots.

Locally quayside bakers made 'hard tack' and an advert in 1825 for bakery premises 'to be let' states that the property includes: bakehouse, furnace ovens, flour lofts and ship biscuit drying lofts.

LONGEVITY

On the 20th ult. William Gall of Willington Quay in the parish of Wallsend completed his 100th year on which occasion a few of his respectable neighbours gave entertainment. This venerable old man on whose forehead time has not yet indented a furrow can read the smallest print without glasses. His teeth are so good that he prefers the hardest ship biscuits to the softest bread. He walks without a stick as erect as man of 25.

Newcastle Courant 1 March 1800



TO CAPTAINS, SHIPOWNERS, AND OTHERS.
TYNE STEAM BISCUIT MANUFACTORY,
WEST HOLBORN, SOUTH SHIELDS.
LEONARD WRIGHT & SON
HAVE always on hand a Large Stock of **SHIP BISCUITS,** thoroughly Kilm Dried, suitable for keeping long voyages, **SALT PROVISIONS, BONDED STORES, SHIP CHANDLERY,** and every other article for **ships' use.** Shop and Office, 1 Dean Street, South Shields.

Shields Daily Gazette 12 November 1867

WRIGHT'S BISCUITS



I'm sure many will still remember Wright's Biscuits with their distinctive 'Mabel Lucy Atwell' tins. This company according most records was founded by Leonard Wright of South Shields in 1790 to produce ship biscuits. However, as Leonard was born in 1801 the son of master mariner and shipowner William Wright (1772-1857) this clearly isn't correct. I did wonder if maybe an uncle or grandfather had set up the business but I cannot find any evidence to support that theory. Leonard married Jane Waller at St. Hilda's Church, South Shields on 9 September 1827. Jane was the daughter of George Waller (1767-1847), baker and flour dealer who had been born in Haltwhistle and married Esther Rea in that place in 1794. He was in South Shields by 1798 when his son George was baptised at the New Presbyterian Church, living and working as a baker first at East Pans in 1799 and then Dean Street before 1827.

By the 1841 census Geo Waller, retired, is living in Westoe while Leonard Wright, wife Jane and their young family are living at Dean Street where Leonard is a baker and flour dealer having taken over his father in law's business. In 1861 by now living at 20 Winchester Street, Westoe he is described as a steam biscuit manufacturer and bonded store merchant. He died on 18 August 1864 described as a provision merchant and shipowner leaving £4000.00



early picture of the Dean Street factory

The firm went from strength to strength but as the number of sailing ships in the river declined in favour of steamships, coupled with better preservation methods and the introduction of canned foods, the demand for ship biscuits fell so Wright's turned instead to fancy biscuits and cakes. Following a disastrous fire at the factory in 1898, substantial new premises were built at Tyne Dock. In the 1930s they implemented intensive factory methods for production and became a national supplier of biscuits, cakes and groceries becoming a leading employer in the district and a public company in 1936.



Children's illustrator Mabel Lucie Attwell created the Wright's logo, a curly-haired boy called Mischief and a Mischief Club was created for children with members getting a collectable badge. The Second World War saw day and night production for the Army with around 300 employees, mostly women, working shifts around the clock.

In 1962 Wrights sold their cake sales division to J. Lyons and in the same year Wright's bought Kemp Biscuits from Scribbans, but by 1966, the losses of the Kemps division seriously affected Wright's business. In 1972, United Biscuits took over Wright's Biscuits, Kemp Biscuits Ltd and Carr's of Carlisle making it part of the giant Cavenham Foods group. In October 1972 the company was put into administration and the factory finally closed in 1973.

The factory was reopened in 1975 under the name of Lowe's for the production of dog biscuits. This ran until 1983 at which time the factory and the chimney (a landmark for the Tyne and Wear Dock area) were demolished thus bringing to an end a business that started with 'hard tack' in the far- off days of sail.

Susan Lynn

Resources:

Newcastle Courant
Ancestry.co.uk

Shields Daily Gazette
FindMyPast.co.uk

South Tyneside Libraries
Royal Museum, Greenwich

LOST BUILDINGS No. 3 - BEACH BUNGALOWS

I don't know about you, but I would dearly love to have a beach hut on the Longsands at Tynemouth. Many other seaside resorts around the country have them and like many others I have hired a hut for a week in the summer at other resorts, all great fun. They even have them at Blyth and Amble yet we have none locally.

However, this wasn't always the case. The coming of the railways made travel easier even for those of modest means and by 1860 there were already some wooden huts on the Tynemouth beach catering to the needs of a growing tourist industry, a couple of huts offering lodgings, some refreshments rooms and a beer house which later became a temperance café. This row was cleared with the building of the Plaza. Fleets of bathing machines also began to appear and were very popular through the 1880's and 90's there was even a lady with mangle to wring out your heavy wet bathing costume.



Bungalows began to appear on the Longsands beach at Tynemouth at the turn of the 20th century. Tynemouth Corporation laid out the plot size and the owners built their own bungalows, but as early as the 1920's there were concerns about lack of maintenance and the ramshackle appearance of some of the huts and towards the

second half of the 1930's the Council planned to demolish the old bungalows and lay out a new lower promenade with custom built chalets. The date is significant because the start of WWII brought the plan to an end and in summer 1940 the army took over the beach and the huts were demolished never to re-appear

At Whitley Bay in June 1936, 25 wooden chalets were erected and let out by the council at a rent of £15.00 per year. They were built on circular concrete bases which enabled them to be manually rotated to catch the maximum amount of sunshine. With the onset of World War II, access to the beach was restricted, and in 1940 the military authorities requisitioned all the chalets and paid the council £1,520.00 compensation.



In succeeding years, a number of proposals were brought forward to replace the chalets, which were rebuilt in 1959 with a further 25 added in 1960. They were removed in 1990 due to increasing vandalism.

Ref:

Tynemouth in Old Picture postcards by E.J.Hollerton;Whitley Bay Remembered by Charlie Steel;Baxter family of Blaydon

Mr. NELLIS and THE LADY PARACHUTIST



One of the touring entertainment acts that took the country by storm in the 1880's and 90's was an American, Alma Beaumont the 'Lady Parachutist' and in 1889 she came to North Shields. Everyone in Shields was thrilled with this performance, all except one that is – Henry Nellis who farmed at Spital Dene, Tynemouth. The farm house building is still in use by Tynemouth Golf Course.

Documents show there was a lease on the farm in 1784 rented to Ralph Codling at £132.00 per annum. The Nellis family ran the farm for many years and by 1881 the farmer was Henry Nellis, recorded as farming 68 acres and employing 2 clowns and a boy ! Now apparently the word 'clown' is Old English for peasant – not much better – but as the two clowns were his brothers, Willam Nellis age 27 & Matthew Nellis age 25, maybe it was a bit of a joke. Henry it seems was an irascible character and in 1905 he was fined for taking a horse whip to some boys for stealing turnips.

It was in late August 1889 that Alma Beaumont ascended 5000 feet into the air in a balloon and descended by parachute. She was described as the daughter of a showman, young and pretty, barely five feet tall. She landed in a field but after she had detached herself from the parachute it collapsed onto Mr. Nellis' wheat field and he reluctantly agreed to allow people to go into the field to recover it as long as any damage to the wheat was made good. The search had resulted in a regular track being made through the field of standing wheat. Then two days later a second performance resulted in Miss Beaumont landing on the chimney of the waterworks beside Mr. Nellis' Hawkey's Hall Farm, North Shields – this was such a spectacle that a crowd of people estimated at 400/500 stampeded across the fields making a track over his corn field 300 yards long and 7 yards wide and in another field 150 yards by 10 also doing damage to turnip and other crops and hedges. Henry Nellis was furious, he complained his farm was trampled in a most disgraceful manner and he demanded compensation from the North Shields Cycling Ground who had invited her in the first place. So, he took them to court and was eventually awarded £9.00 compensation for the damage. He died in 1913 leaving £2700.00 and four properties divided between his surviving son & daughter with instructions that his son John was to employ the widow Hannah (Henry's wife and John's mother) at £1.00 per week. He left nothing to his daughter-in-law, the widow of his other son (George).

Alma continued to tour for many years, enthralling hundreds more, once going up in the air from Jarrow and landing in the river at Howdon where she was quickly rescued.

Shields Daily News
The Era

Shields Daily Gazette
Ancestry.co.uk



ALMA BEAUMONT.

Letters to the Editor

Shields Daily News 21 April 1925



Sir,

What is the position of the Borough of Tynemouth regarding excess passengers? On most nights between 5.30 and 7 o'clock the omnibuses coming from Percy Main and Balkwell are packed to suffocation. It is terrible to contemplate what would be the result of a serious collision involving some of the omnibuses which have only one exit at the front and which only allows one person to get out and this is sometimes a task. The passengers generally complain about the crowding, but these protests are unheeded.

Yours etc.,

'STRAPHANGER'

Shields Daily News 22 April 1925

Sir,

In answer to "straphanger's" letter regarding the excess of passengers on the Balkwell, Percy Main and North Shields omnibuses, does the writer ever think how many times in a day they run up and down with one or two penny fares? It is only between 5.30 and 8.30 that they make anything at all. If 'straphanger' had the petrol bills to pay, he would want his omnibuses packed every time. All omnibuses on the Percy Main run have an exit door at the back which passengers can open.

Yours etc.,

'GREY BUS'

Shields Daily News 23 April 1925

Sir,

The number of times an omnibus is empty in its journeys to and from Percy Main is of no concern in a question of public safety. Neither am I anxious to be the kind philanthropist 'Grey Bus' would like me to be. If he is in any way connected with the services I would politely ask him to re-examine all the omnibuses and repeat his assertion seriously that "all the omnibuses on the Percy Main run have an exit at the back which any passenger can open."

Yours etc.,

'STRAPHANGER'

PS: I tried to find a local bus picture, you'd be amazed at how many heritage bus sites there are – this is a Daimler of the type used by Tynemouth & District Transport between 1921-1928. This bus advertises Snowball's shop in Gateshead, sorry, I couldn't find a Tynemouth picture.



