

Dene Park — The "Jewel" Of Dawdon



A view of the bridge in Dawdon Dene Park, which was opened in 1935.

BUT THE LIFE BLOOD OF THE PARISH IS COAL

DAWDON, as an ecclesiastical parish, was formed by Order in Council on April 2, 1912, from the parish of Seaham Harbour.

The Church of St Hild and St Helen was erected in the same year at a cost of £6,500, Lady Londonderry, following the beneficent traditions of this family, presented the organ and also the rose window in memory of her husband, the 6th Marquess, who died in 1915. The low oak chancel screen was erected in 1921 and upon it were inscribed the names of those belonging to the parish who fell in the 1914-18 war. The church accommodates approximately 650, and its registers date from 1912. The Rev. H. T. Rushford is the present vicar. Until 1937 Seaham U.D.C. was still known as Dawdon parish, at least for rating purposes; but in April of that

year the parishes of Dawdon and Seaham were united in the civil sense, with the result that the term Dawdon parish and Seaham Harbour parish were

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omitted from the official description of Seaham.

The names still obtain among the schools where we find Dawdon County Juniors and Infants Schools etc.

Tiny Township

It is hard to realize as we walk round this populous area with its great colliery and its long history of the bottleworks, blast furnaces, and so much besides of importance to the story and development of Seaham as a whole that in 1821

the area contained little apart from an inn and three farm-houses existing as a tiny township of Dalton-le-Dale. Its history as we saw in an earlier article can be retraced to 700 A.D. and from the earliest times it belonged to the parish of Dalton-le-Dale.

In the years following the Norman Conquest, Dalden Tower of which the ruins may still be seen, became the seat of the lords of Dalden, where, in 1325, Sir Jordan de Dalden founded a chantry or oratory. In 1155, the boundaries between the holdings of Dalton Church and those belonging to the lords of Dalden and Seaham were fixed by a solemn compact already referred to.

Bowes Family

For centuries Dalden Tower was, it is said, a favourite abode of the Bowes family; they were followed by the families of Collingwood, Millbanke, and Londonderry. Dalden or Dawdon Hall close by, was erected by the Collingwoods in Jacobean days, and part is still in fair preservation.

Dalden, in spite of all these changes in ownership, continued in close affinity with Dalton-le-Dale and in the parish church there we may see the effigy of Sir William Bowes which we had incorrectly described as that of Fitz-Marnwade in Easington Church.

Indeed, though Dalden was separated from Dalton-le-Dale in 1744, by the appointment of a "constable," it remained a civil though not an ecclesiastical township of Dalton-le-Dale well into the 19th Century. Then it became a separate chapelry under the title of Seaham Harbour in 1843; for it was here that Seaham Harbour as such first began in 1828 as a port for the shipment of coals from the Londonderry collieries in the Rainton area.

Dawdon possesses the usual

amenities in the form of churches, schools, halls, clubs, etc.; swimming facilities of world-wide reputation, and a splendid Dene Park opened in 1935 which, including the recreation grounds, etc., covers some 31 acres.

Mainspring

As the official guide books records: "Visitors to the town are impressed by the beauty of its setting by its trees and flowering shrubs, and by its formal rose gardens."

True though this admirable description is, one must visit the Dene in order to enjoy the full beauty of the lay-out, the peace of dells and slopes overshadowed by luxuriant trees, as well as the joy of trim paths

and borders and all the changing patterns of colour, charm, and fragrance to be found in this exquisite arboreal paradise where all seems so far away from the din and dust of industrial progress.

All the same, coal is the mainspring and lifeblood of the whole Seaham area. Dawdon pit is the largest of the three Seaham collieries and in 1962 it produced over a million tons of coal.

After the sinking operations were well under way, quicksands were encountered beneath the magnesium limestone which covers this area, accompanied by the flood waters which have presented such formidable problems in the North-East coalfield.

Two Shafts

Because pumping operations had little effect on the torrents of water which measured seven thousand gallons a minute, it was decided to adopt the freezing process and this proved successful.

Coal was first drawn on October 5, 1907. As usual two

shafts were sunk—the Castle-reagh shaft of 1,669 feet in depth and the Theresa, 1,745 feet deep. The seams now being worked are Main Maudlin, Low Main, and Five Quarter.

Three types of coal are produced: gas coal, household, and steam coal, for domestic and industrial consumption both locally in Scotland and abroad.

I am told the record output for one week was 28,656 tons in July, 1962, but this figure may have been exceeded since that date. The most up-to-date machinery is in use and reconstruction continues; the coal being brought to bank via the upcast shaft. A modern washery is operating and considerable surface building has been maintained.

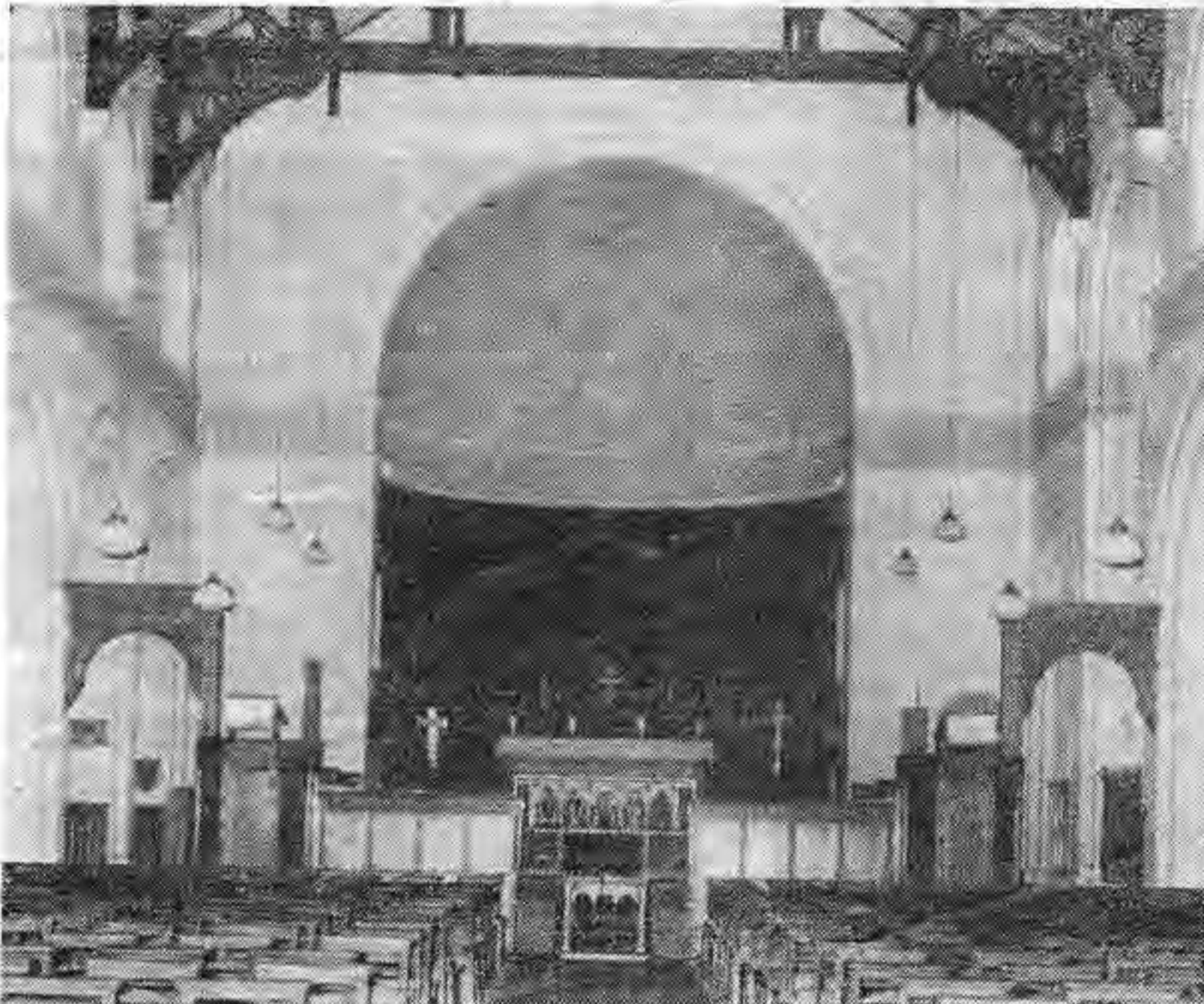
Below ground the locomotive roads and trains speed the output, as in the case at the newer Vane Tempest Colliery. Mr H. Irwin is agent-manager of Dawdon Colliery.

Considerable improvements in regard to crossings, highways, etc., are expected as we shall learn later.

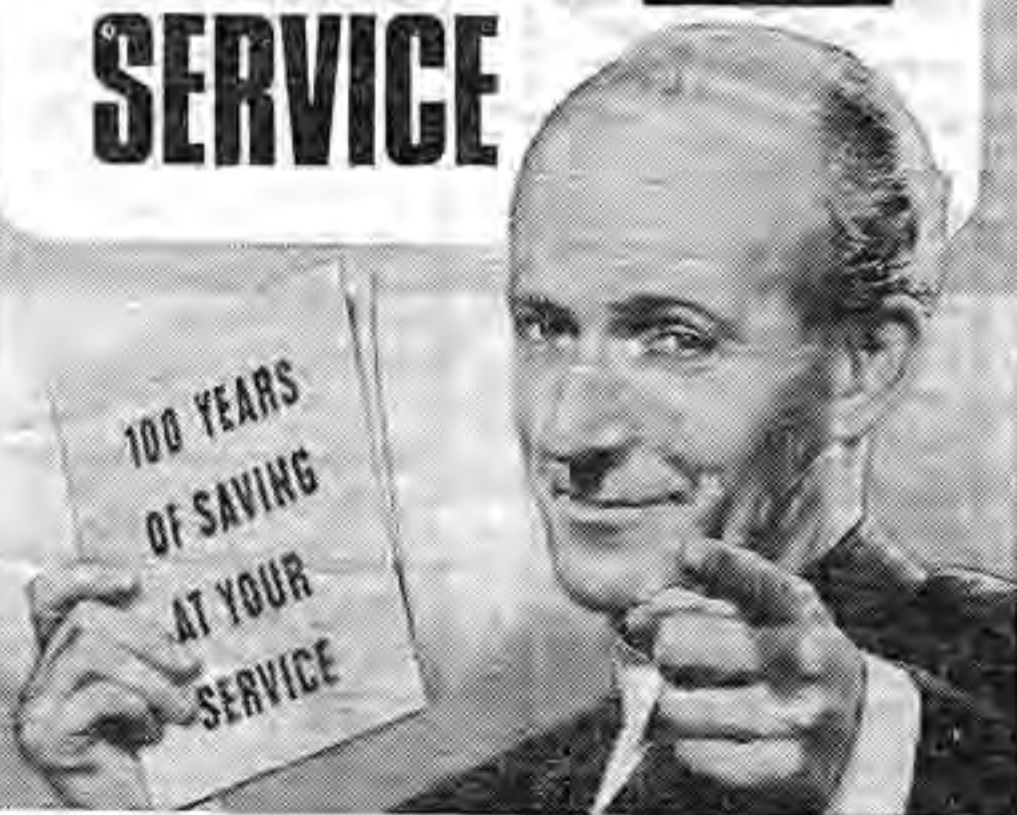
(To be continued).



Dawdon parish church of St Hild and St Helen's was built in 1912 at a cost of £6,500. Lady Londonderry presented the organ and also the rose window in memory of her husband, the sixth Marquess of Londonderry, who died in 1915. Below: An interior view. Its low, oak chancel screen was installed in 1921 as a memorial to those who were killed in the 1914-18 war.



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Part of Dawdon Hall, which was erected by the Collingwoods in Jacobean days. Below: A view of Dawdon Colliery, the largest of the three Seaham pits.



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