



Houghton Feast: The Dark & the Light

BY PAUL CANNAGAN



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ONCE UPON A TIME, in the historic county of Durham, there was a small village called Houghton in the Springe. It had a shining church surrounded by green fields where the people worked the land.

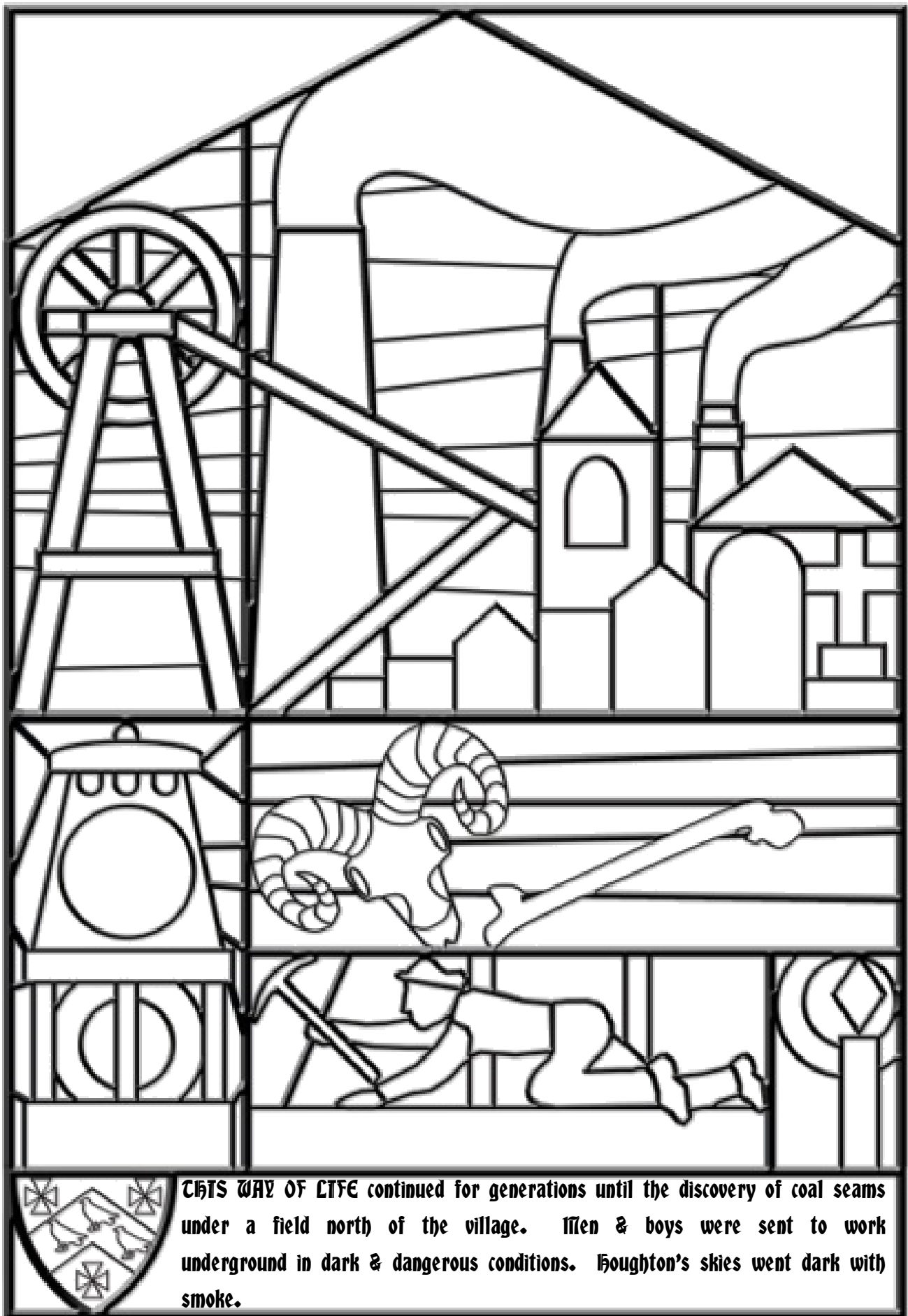


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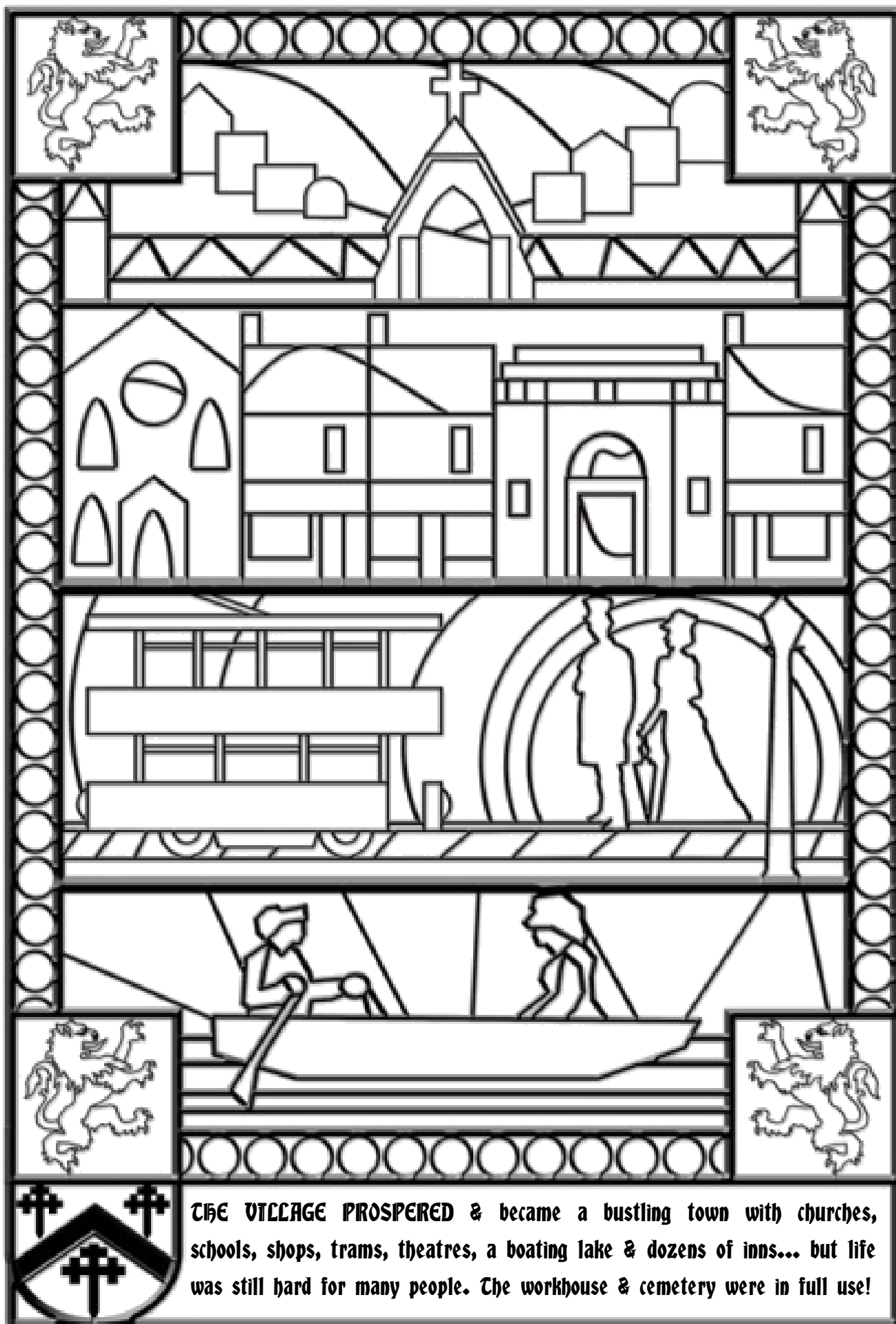


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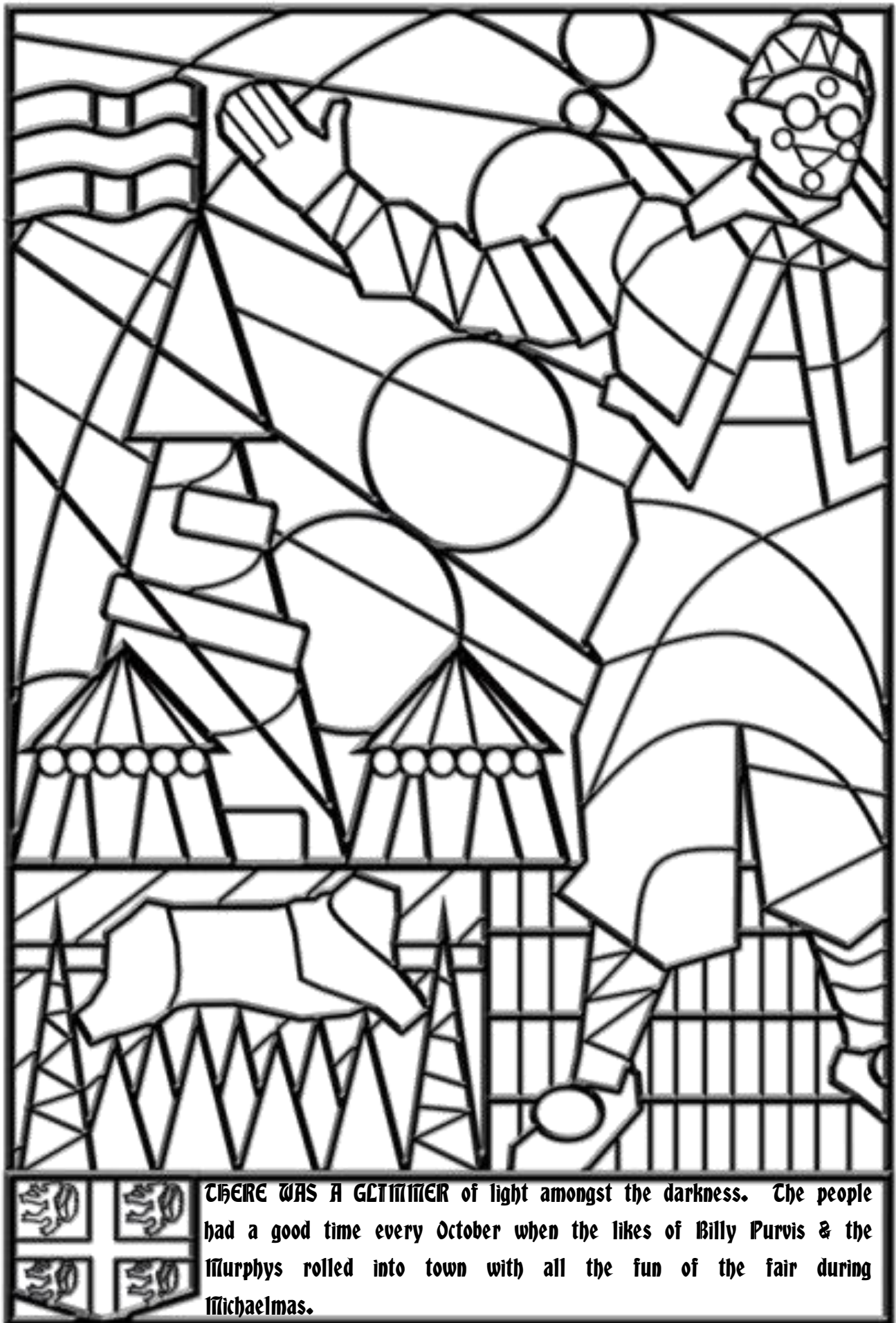


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THERE WAS A GLIMMER of light amongst the darkness. The people had a good time every October when the likes of Billy Purvis & the Murphys rolled into town with all the fun of the fair during Michaelmas.



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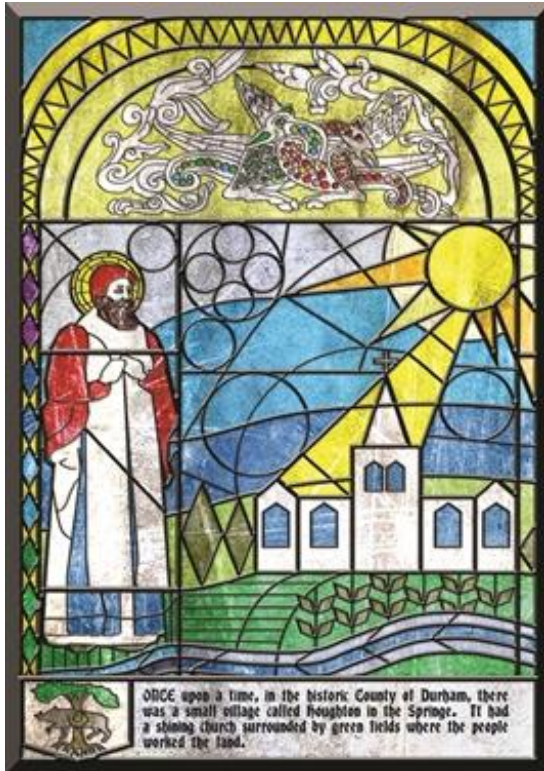
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Notes for Teachers



1 - Houghton Dragons

This stone carving is found inside the north transept of St Michael & All Angels Parish Church. It is known as a wyvern.

2 - Bernard Gilpin

Bernard Gilpin was called the Apostle of the North and Father of the Poor. He would often roast an ox to feed Houghton's poor during his time as Rector (1558 – 1583).

3 - Church Steeple

The wooden and lead steeple was removed from the Church in 1824 when the tower was heightened.

4 - The Spring/Burn

Houghton Burn still flows through the Market Place and would have been the water source for the original Saxon village. There are numerous springs in the hills of Houghton.

5 - Gilpin Crest

Featuring the Wild Boar from the Gilpin family crest, this version can be found on the archway which leads into the Parish churchyard in Houghton town centre.

6 - Houghton Colliery

Houghton Colliery was open between 1827 and 1981. Many miners were killed there and were buried in the Parish churchyard or Houghton Hillside Cemetery.

7 - Miners' Camp

Commemorative lamps from when Houghton Colliery closed in 1981 can be found in Houghton Methodist Church, Sunnyside Methodist Chapel and St Michael & All Angels Church.

8 - Ram Skull

The noble Lambton family owned collieries in the local area. The Lambton coat of arms features a ram's head.

9 - Crawling Miner & Candle

The crawling miner was inspired by an iconic Miners' Strike badge from 1984 and the candle represents the struggle of working in harsh conditions underground.

10 - Sancroft Crest

William Sancroft was Rector of Houghton between 1661 and 1663. He left Houghton to become Dean of St Paul's Cathedral, London, and became Archbishop of Canterbury in 1677. This crest can be found today on the archway which leads into the Parish churchyard in Houghton town centre.



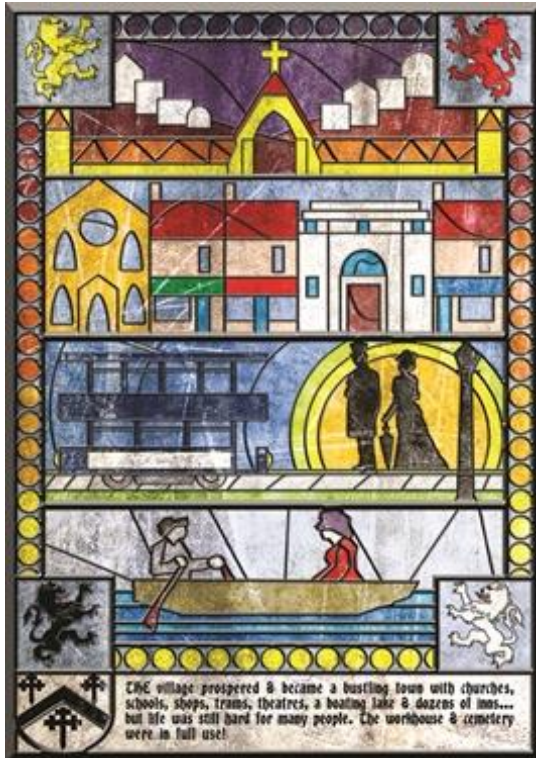
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Notes for Teachers (cont)



11 - Four Lions & Coins

The four lions are Golden, Red, Black and White and represent Houghton's four lion public houses. The coloured circles show the wealth generated in Houghton-le-Spring as the town prospered.

12 - Houghton Hillside Cemetery

The Hillside Cemetery was consecrated in 1854 on the site of a former quarry up next to Houghton Cut. Over 7,000 people were buried on the small site, many from the Workhouse.

13 - Buildings

Depicted are: Mautland Street Methodist Chapel, Newbottle Street shops and the Coliseum picture house (now Superdrug).

14 - Houghton Tramways

The Sunderland District Electric Tramways opened in 1905 and ran from Easington Lane to Grangetown via Houghton. Branch lines ran to Fencehouses Station and Penshaw. The network closed in 1925.

15 - The Lake

Local man Joseph Coulson created an artificial boating lake by blocking up Houghton burn in 1881. It was filled in and used as the Houghton Feast showground. The area is still known as Lake Road.

16 - Davenport Crest

George Davenport was Rector of Houghton 1664 until 1667. He rebuilt Houghton Rectory from the ground and founded the Almshouses behind the Parish Church.

17 - Murphys Fun Fair

The Murphy showfamily have been involved with Houghton Feast for over 100 years. They first came with steam powered galloping horses (carousel) but nowadays they bring the Waltzer, Dodgems and other rides.

18 - Billy Purvis the Clown

The well-known Victorian clown Billy Purvis visited Houghton Feast over thirty times between 1818 and 1848. His entertainment act took place in a booth and he charged for admission. Many of his customers had come to Houghton Feast to watch the horse racing.

19 - Ox Roasting

In 1967 the Rotary Club revived the ox roasting tradition in honour of Bernard Gilpin's kind acts.

20 - See of Durham Crest

Houghton-le-Spring was once part of County Durham before Tyne & Wear was formed in 1974. This crest can be found today on the archway which leads into the Parish churchyard in Houghton town centre.



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Notes for Teachers (cont)



21 - Houghton at War

Houghton got off lightly from the Germans' bombing campaign when compared to neighbouring Sunderland, however several bombs were abandoned over Houghton from aborted raids.

22 - Come Into the Fields

A well-known advertisement from during the Second World War, encouraging women to work as part of the War Effort.

23 - Poppies

Poppies are a symbol of remembrance. Every November, poppy wreaths are laid on Houghton's cenotaph in the Parish churchyard.

24 - Soldier

This member of the Army can be found on a 1944 War Savings plaque which was given to Houghton for recognition of successful achievement during 'Salute the Soldier Week'. The plaque is now on display in Houghton Library.

25 - Sailor

This member of the Navy can be found engraved on the cenotaph in the Parish churchyard. The war memorial was unveiled in 1925 to commemorate those killed during the Great War.

26 - English Crest

Not found on any particular building in Houghton, the English flag was included to continue the pattern of the previous crests from *well-known men > county > country*.

27 - Illuminations

Illuminations were introduced to Houghton Feast in 1947 and initially centred on the Parish church. Many of the early pieces were made by Billy Straughan of Houghton Urban District Council's engineering department.

28 - Peacock

The Peacock illumination was designed and constructed by Leslie Westmore and was inspired by a children's picture book owned by his niece Winnie Hunter.

29 - Witch

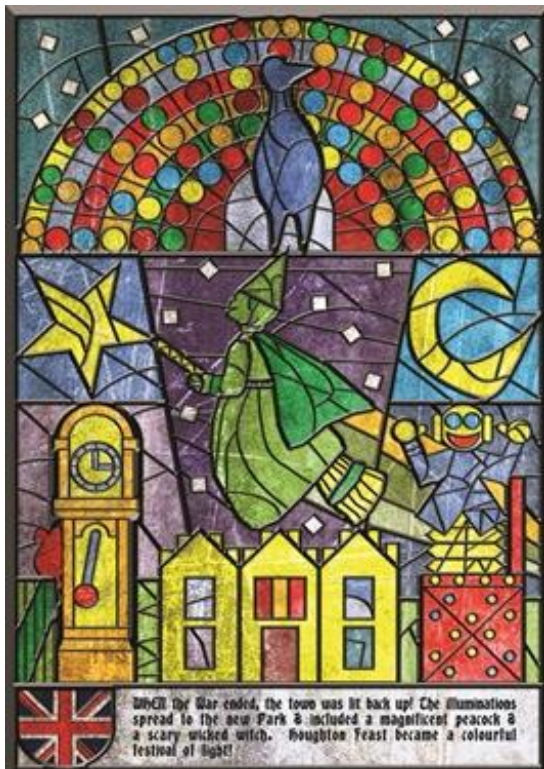
The witch illumination hung from the large conker tree in Rectory Park. Many remember seeing it during the 1980s.

30 - Rectory

The Rectory grounds became a public park in 1949 and later become the home of illumination pieces during Houghton Feast.

31 - British Crest

Not found on any particular building in Houghton, the British flag was included to continue the pattern of the previous crests from *well-known men > county > country > state*.



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