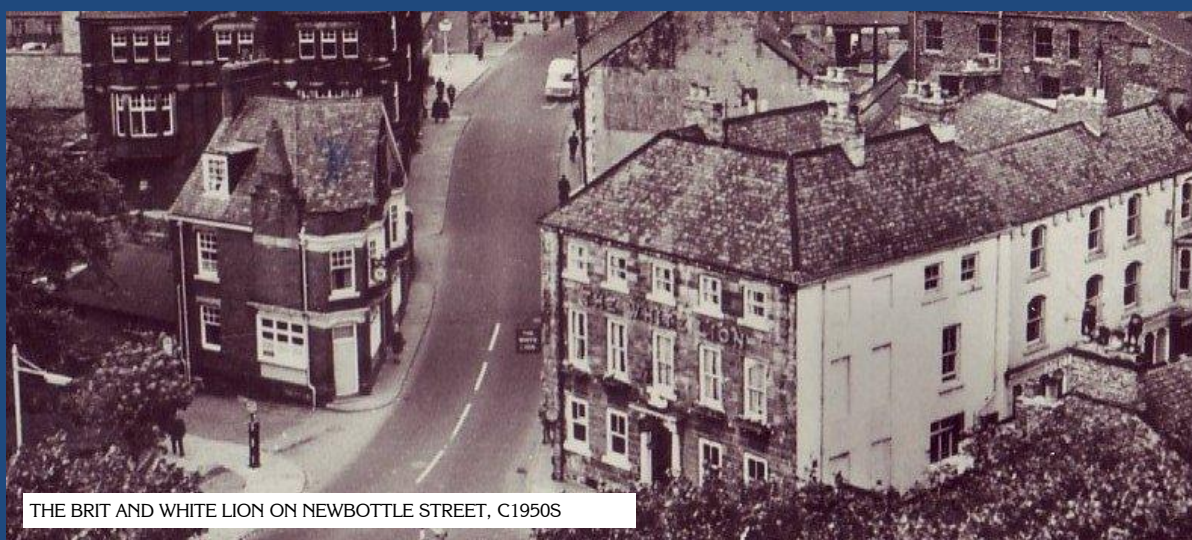




# PUBLIC HOUSES

## HOUGHTON'S FIFTY PUBS & CLUBS

DURING THE HOUGHTON Feast 2002 celebrations, I visited the Golden Lion public house for the first time. I was pleasantly surprised when I stepped through the door as I was greeted with an old style public house with a bar and snug! The walls were adorned with quaint old photographs of the area and the staff were extremely helpful and polite. My meal was also delicious and reasonably priced. On the Feast Friday evening, Houghton was alive with an atmosphere that I had never experienced in the Broadway before - a show organ played all night, the pubs were full with locals, visitors, showmen and pipers, celebrating the launch of the Feast. The pub was jumping and everybody was in good spirits! I am now a regular and my favourite room is the aptly named snug.



THE BRIT AND WHITE LION ON NEWBOTTLE STREET, C1950S

Amazingly, between the early 1800s and late 1950s, Houghton and surrounds had over fifty pubs and clubs! The list is considerably dwindled, here in 2012, and following the recent news that the Spring Inn is currently being converted to a convenience store in the Market Place, let us take a look at some of the pubs from the past.



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# PUBLIC HOUSES

A full list of Houghton-le-Spring's pubs and clubs can be found here:

1. Albert Inn, Newbottle Lane;
2. Bay Horse, 60 Sunderland Street;
3. Black Boy, New Town, Houghton-le-Spring;
4. Black Horse, Market Place;
5. Black Lion Inn, Sunderland Street;
6. Bonnie Pit Lad (aka The Hole in the Wall), near John Street, Newtown;
7. Britannia Hotel, 2 Newbottle Street;
8. Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes, 24 Sunderland Street;
9. Buffs Social Club, Frederick Place; The Wild Boar (opened April 2011);
10. Burn Inn (formerly Burn Hotel), Hetton Road;
11. Colliery Inn (aka The Tavern), Quarry Row;
12. Comrades Club, Pear Tree Place;
13. Copt Hill Inn, Seaham Road, Copt Hill;
14. County Arms, 54 Sunderland Street;
15. Cross House, Hetton Lane (opposite where the Burn Inn now stands);
16. Derwentwater's Arms;
17. Drill Hall, Henry Street;
18. Dun Cow;
19. George & the Dragon, Market Place;
20. Glendale Club, 10 Church Street then moved to Hall Lane;
21. Golden Lion, Sunderland Street;
22. Houghton-le-Spring Golf Club, Seaham Road;
23. Grey Horse;
24. Half Way House, Quarry Row / Newbottle Lane;
25. Houghton Social Club (aka The Big Club), Newbottle Street then Houghton Hall then Hall Lane;
26. King's Head, 9 Church Street;
27. Lamb Inn, 107 Newbottle Lane;
28. Lambton Arms (opposite Silver Grid fish shop), 87 Newbottle Street;



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# PUBLIC HOUSES

29. Malsters' Arms, Seaham Road, Market Place;
30. Market Tavern (renamed as Jolly Farmers, and most recently Spring Inn), Gilbert Street, Market Place;
31. Masons' Arms;
32. Mill Inn, Prospect Place [location tbc];
33. Mill Inn, Rainton Bridge;
34. Nags Head, 97 Newbottle Street;
35. Neshams Arms Inn, Nesham Place;
36. Newcastle Arms, Newbottle Street;
37. The Old Bank, 16/18 Sunderland Street (Dec 2008 – Oct 2009);
38. Plough Inn, Rainton Bridge;
39. Prince of Wales (aka the Flying Poker), Hopper Street;
40. Queen's Head (aka The Pillars), 32 Sunderland Street;
41. Ram's Head Inn, 122 Sunderland Street;
42. Red Lion Inn, 1 Church Street;
43. Ye Robbie Burns (aka Robert Burns Inn), Newbottle Street;
44. Robinson's Brewery inc Aries Club, Bird's Nest Club, Inn Cognito, and Rafters, Durham Road;
45. Royal Oak Inn, 15 Newbottle Street;
46. Houghton Rugby Club, Dairy Lane;
47. Sportsman's Tavern, New Town;
48. Sun Inn, Market Place;
49. Victoria Inn, 10 Robinson Street;
50. Welfare Hall, Station Road;
51. Wheatsheaf, 20 Nesham Place (converted to a house in 1973);
52. White Lion Hotel, 1 Newbottle Street;

Making a brief appearance on the list was the Old Bank on Sunderland Street, which opened on December 19th 2008 but closed in October 2009. The building originated as a branch of the North-Eastern Banking Company in the mid 1800s.



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# PUBLIC HOUSES

Local resident Wendy Davison recollects socialising in Houghton's pubs during her formative years.

*"During the mid 1980s, when I was 18, everyone started in the Brit and worked their way along Newbottle Street. We used to end up in the Lambton Arms which was opposite where the Silver Grid fish shop is now. It was a nice pub with a good atmosphere. We also used to go to the Birds Nest and Incognito on a Friday or Saturday night. These were inside the old brewery and were the only places where you could get a drink after 11 o'clock. They also played requests. The bouncers on the door used to think they were the God's gift! Houghton was always packed and it was a good night out."*

Wendy also has fond memories of one of Houghton's many publicans.

*"Jack Wheatley had the Brit about 15 years ago. He was a lovely fella and was related to the Wheatleys who had the sweet shop. His sister, Elizabeth, used to do the karaoke nights, which drew a good crowd."*



THE BRITANNIA PUB, 2011



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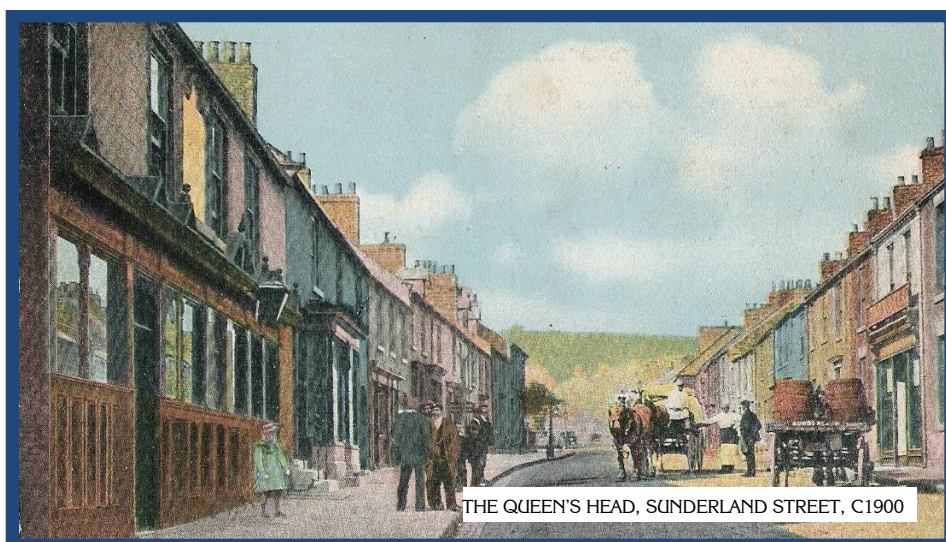
# PUBLIC HOUSES

No article on Houghton's public houses would be complete without mentioning the town's four lions - The Black Lion; The White Lion Hotel; The Golden Lion; and The Red Lion Inn. These four lions guarded Rectory Square (now the Broadway) for many a year but now only the White and Golden Lions remain. The Red Lion Inn is mentioned in 1798 as one of the main Postal Inns from which riders and coaches conveyed both mail and passengers. In the 1800s, Houghton's Magistrates were based on the top floor of the White Lion. You could get drunk on the ground floor, be sentenced upstairs and sent down (literally) to the two cells in the basement.

Houghton also has its own famous fictitious pub, the Blue Lion, as found in author Sheila Quigley's crime novels. The Blue Lion, which is located in the middle of Houghton, was run by the evil Mrs Archer and is the scene of many gritty goings on.

The real public houses were, of course, a favourite place for the area's many pitmen to relax and socialise in, while some date back much further than the nineteenth century and originated as old coach inns. Former Houghton miner, George Davison, was one such pitman and has many memories of the long-gone pubs in Houghton:

*"The Colliery Inn and Half Way House were within the vicinity of the pit gates, and some miners would call in for a pint before going home. Like everybody else, we used to do the rounds on a Friday night, starting at the Lambton. In the 1950s, the landlord of the Robbies was Tommy Lynn, and he had a jukebox in the bar which played records for a shilling per song. We'd head up to the Pillars on Sunderland Street where there'd be a concert party with somebody playing the piano."*



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# PUBLIC HOUSES



THE ROBBIE BURNS PUB, NEWBOTTLE STREET, 2008

But things were very different in the 1950s as George further explained.

*"There was no TV then, just the wireless, and we couldn't afford to go out every night, but everybody knew everybody and we could have a bit chat and natter with our neighbours. The beer was bloody strong and only cost about a shilling a pint! Women weren't allowed in the bar – they had to go into the snug. Once you had five in the snug, it was chocca!"*

George also recollects visiting one of Houghton's pubs before the age of 18 – on an errand for his grandmother:

*"Before I was 11, I'd sometimes go along to the Colliery Inn on a night with a tea caddy can. I'd knock on the bar door and the landlord, Jack Robson, used say, 'Another gill for auld Lena?' and fill it up. I once had a sip on the way home and said 'I'm not drinking this stuff'"*



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# PUBLIC HOUSES



George remembers one incident in the 1950s when Eddie 'Cantor' Elliot, a fellow miner, got drunk at the Comrades Club and the ingenuity of the pitmen came to the rescue:

*"Nobody could carry Cantor home so we went into the pit yard and borrowed a tub bottom. A bit like a bogey, it had two sets of wheels and was made of iron. We wheeled him home to Grasswell in it!"*

Recently, His Royal Highness, Prince Charles, celebrated his 60th birthday but probably not in a pub. Houghton's own Prince of Wales was a public house on Hopper Street, and was known locally as 'The Flying Poker'. The late Houghton historian, CA Smith, gave an explanation in the Sunderland Echo in October 1960 as to how the pub got this strange nickname:

*"The landlady kept a slate on which unpaid bills for drinks were entered in 'Baff' week, when wages were fortnightly. Usually these debts were wiped off the following weekend, but woe betide the defaulters, who were chased out of the house by the landlady who would fling a short poker, generally used for mulling ale, after him, hence the appellation! As time went on the poker got shorter consequent, presumably, on her unerring aim. Then John Thornton and some of his friends decided to make her a new poker at Hopper's Forge – which they inscribed the 'Flying Poker.'"*

Times certainly have changed, as have the pubs, many of which have come and gone. Imagine the scenes that the old pubs have been witness to over the years. If only walls could talk...

Paul Lanagan

PAUL LANAGAN BA HONS  
LOCAL HISTORIAN  
H-L-S HERITAGE SOCIETY



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# PUBLIC HOUSES

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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