

The Boy and The Hall



BY RON HENZELL



Introduction

During the 19th century, the west end of Newcastle was at the forefront of technological advance and industrial development, not just in Britain but worldwide. The fortunes of the area are commonly seen as linked to the growth of Armstrong's, the huge engineering works that dominated the West Newcastle riverside, and had the capacity to build and equip a warship from processing the raw materials to fitting the guns.

However, long before Armstrong started his first factory at Elswick in 1847 a wide range of industrial activities had been established along the banks of the Tyne, including ironworks, foundries, leadworks, and glass and brick factories. And above all there was coalmining, with pits scattered across the west end, each with their own wagonways to the river. For those with the capital and foresight to invest, there were, in the words of one coalowner, "fortunes beyond the dreams of avarice".

By the 19th century most of the land had been acquired by entrepreneurs for speculation or to protect their interests in coal. Until the beginning of the 20th century, however, most of Benwell remained a rural area, its green fields rising steeply above the industrial riverside to the high point on the West Road where the Romans had built the fort of Condercum because of its commanding views of the surrounding areas. Many of Newcastle's leading industrialists

and bankers still lived in the area in large houses and mansions surrounded by fields and trees.

One of these was Benwell Hall, built in the 18th century. It was home to, among others, the Surtees family (with extensive banking and coal-owning interests), the Cuthbert family (chemical manufacturing), the Cooksons (coal-owners and industrialists), and the Liddells (merchants and coal-owners).

Industrial development not only meant more factories along the West Newcastle riverside. The 19th century also saw a rapid growth of dense housing developments for the workers drawn into the area from rural Northumberland, Ireland and further afield, to meet the growing demand for labour. The older rich and powerful families withdrew from the west end, often to country estates isolated from the impact of the industrial revolution to which they had contributed.

In the 1920s Benwell Hall became home to the Bramble family. William Bramble became known as the "Dick Whittington of Newcastle" because, so the story goes, he arrived in the city to seek his fortune with his possessions in a bundle on his back. Bramble represented a new kind of entrepreneur whose route to wealth and power was through property and retailing services for the burgeoning working and middle class areas around the city. He was chairman of Northern



The new Excelsior Academy under construction on a former housing site in Scotswood where the Henzell family used to live, 2008 (Judith Green)



The new Excelsior Academy under construction on a former housing site in Scotswood where the Henzell family used to live, 2008 (Judith Green)

Counties (later Northern Rock) building society for 15 years, and was also a significant figure in local politics, becoming Lord Mayor of Newcastle.

The Brambles were the last inhabitants of Benwell Hall, and after them the great house fell into disrepair. Today almost all of the big houses and mansions have gone. They are remembered in the names of some of the area's housing estates and streets, such as Benwell Grange, Hodgkin Park and Benwell Hall Drive – and also in the memories of many of Benwell's older residents.

In recent decades, as the local economy has collapsed, the west end of Newcastle has undergone a further transformation, from respectable working class suburb to a place often publicly associated with inner city decline, prevalent poverty, and multiple social problems. Despite all this, Benwell remains an area where many people love to live and which inspires fierce loyalties. This is especially true of older residents, most of whom have made a positive choice to remain in or return to Benwell.

For many residents, the links with the past are of great importance. Shared memories provide an important element of stability and meaning in a context of major and continuous change. Many older residents have been compulsorily re-housed several times during their lifetimes, and have seen the physical landscape in which they live re-shaped again and again.

The remembered past plays an important part in shaping people's sense of belonging and community in the present and their vision of what they want for the future.

The Boy and the Hall is a story of the links between the past and the present through the autobiography of one individual. The places where Ron Henzell lived as a boy have gone. Rye Hill was demolished in the major postwar clearances of Newcastle's thousands of sub-standard dwellings. More recently large swathes of housing in Scotswood were removed as part of a policy of "going for growth", and the site of the Henzell family's former home now lies underneath the brand new, privately run Excelsior Academy.

Ron Henzell was born in Rye Hill in 1944. He took up writing three years ago as an escape from the agoraphobia that has kept him at home for 20 years. He now lives with his family at Benwell Hall Drive, on the site of the old Benwell Hall. This is the story of his life and of the fascination that the old Hall has exerted on him for more than fifty years.

Life as a child

Little did I realize the turn of events that would lead up to me writing this story. For me to begin my story, I need to go back sixty years.

I was born in a big house in the west end of Newcastle, but my house wasn't stately or luxurious. It was where I lived with another five families.

We lived in two rooms on the second floor, with my mam, dad, brother and sister. In later years my mam would have another four kids, all girls.

Poverty reigned supreme in those days. Everyone was poor.

We lived at the bottom end of Rye Hill, not far from a well-known bakery, I remember my mam would

send me up to the bakery on a Sunday night. That's when they baked for all their shops. I would knock on the side door, and ask if they had any burnt bread. Sometimes the bread used to be over-cooked, or the stotties would be out of shape. I remember it was nearly always the same old man. He would always say, "Not you again. Nip round to the side window, I'll see what I can find for you."

I would wait for ten minutes or so, then the side window would open.

"Hear, catch, and don't tell anyone where you got that from."

Then he would smile and wink and say, "Now bugger off and go straight home."



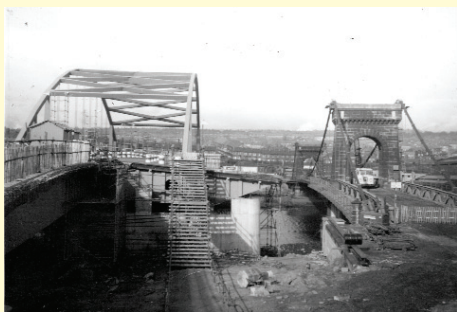
Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital, Rye Hill, 1986. (Jimmy Forsyth: West Newcastle Picture History Collection)



Looking down Rye Hill to Scotswood Road. Cambridge Street is on the right and the People's Hall on the left, 1960 (West Newcastle Picture History Collection)



Benwell postcard – "scenes from 1930"



Caption Here

The window would close, and I would run home with my bag of warm bread and stotties.

Life was hard in those days. My mother did the best she could for us kids. It was a constant struggle to keep us kids fed, and clothed. My Dad was a trolley bus driver, so we never had much money. My mam would tell us kids, "Never mind, kids, when we get our new house, things will get better."

She had been waiting for a council house since I was born, and I was now nine years old. In some ways I felt sorry for her, but in other ways I felt happy for her. At least she

had a dream to hold on to.

I remember one day coming home from school the local bully decided he wanted to beat me up and, true to his word, he beat me up. I sat on the ground crying, my knees were scraped, my lip was bust, and I had a black eye. But my tears soon turned to anger. Something had snapped inside me that day. I got up and went at him like a raging bull, punching and kicking, and to my surprise I beat him up. He lay on the ground battered and bruised, with tears in his eyes. We shook hands and decided to be friends, and even to this day we're still good friends. I went home

battered and bruised but happy. The local bully was now my friend so some good had come of it. It was a different story when I got home, mind. My mother said, "Where have you been, and look at the state of you."

I told her the story while she bathed my bust lip, and black eye.

"Look at the state of your shirt. It's ripped to bits."

I might add it was my only shirt.

"What I'm I going to do with you, you little bugger."

While she was talking to me I was thinking to myself, any minute now she's going to clip me round the

ear. Just then the room door opened, and in walked my dad. Now I was worried. My mother was the first to speak.

"Have you seen the state of this little bugger. You're going to have to speak to this one."

My Dad never said much, but what he did say he meant. My mother had told us kids that the war had changed him. He had fought in France, but he would never talk about it.

"What have you been up to now, lad?"

I told him what happened. He stood for a while just looking at me. Then with a wink and a slight

smile he said, "Behave yourself, lad, or one of these days you'll feel my belt. Now sit down and don't upset your mother."

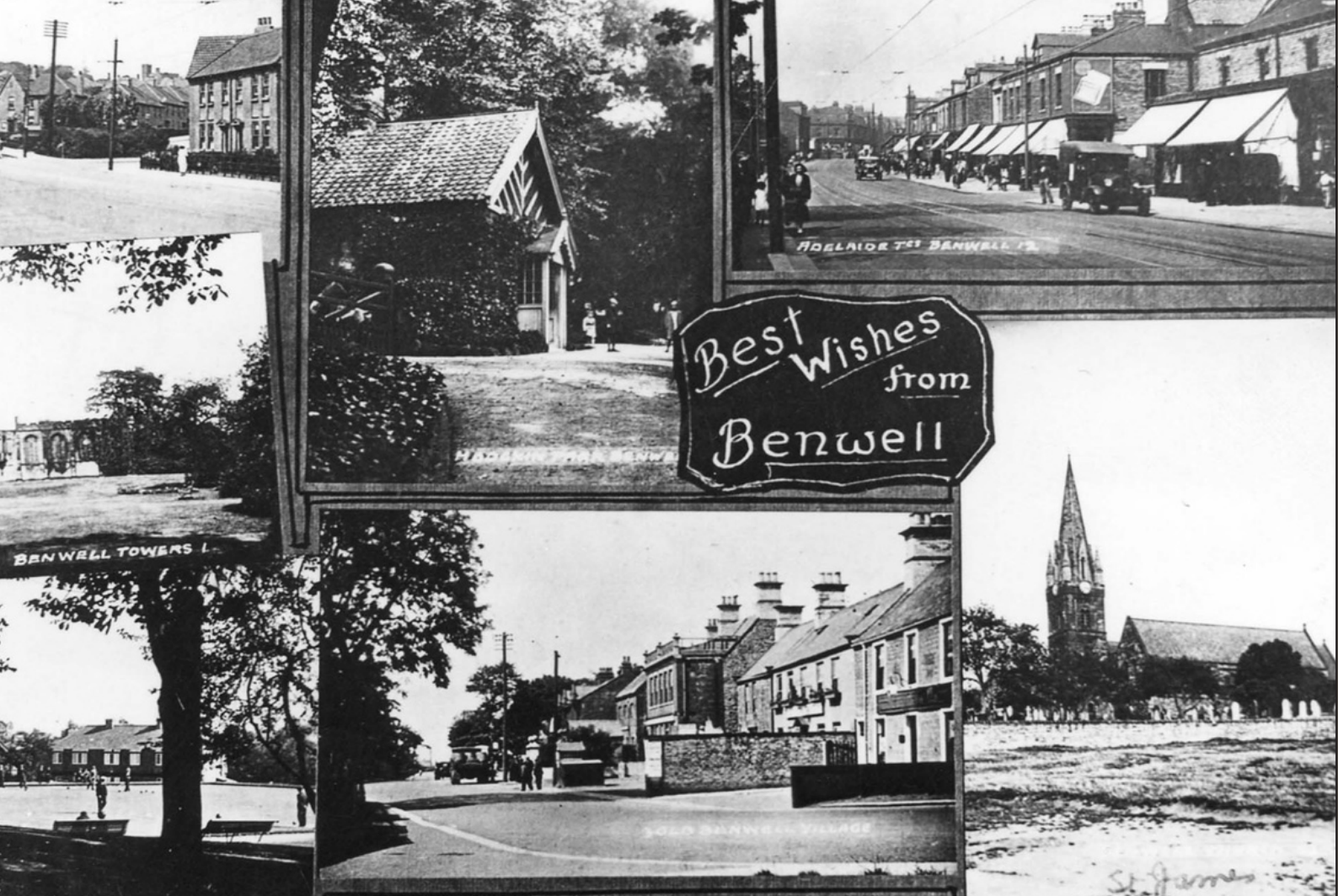
Mam looked at dad and said, "That's frightened him, I must say."

"Leave it now, pet. I've told him. Anyway what's going on? I went into the office to see if there was any overtime going. The boss said you had been in the office, and told him to tell me to come straight home. What's wrong?"

"Well now we're all here I will tell you. I've had a letter off the council. They have offered us a house in Denton Burn. We've got to go and look at it. If it's what we need, it's ours."



Scotswood Co-op grocery round



Benwell postcard – "scenes from Benwell 1930" ref BE08490

To my surprise and everyone else's, my mother began to jump up and down shouting, "We've got a house at last."

My Dad looked at us kids, then looked at Mam and said, "I'm glad you're happy, pet."

I might add that was the first and last time I ever seen my mam as happy as she was that day.

The next day my dad went to work as usual, Mam and us kids went to see our new house. As we walked down the street to our new house, I was a bit bewildered. The houses had gardens and hedges. All I had ever known was concrete and waste ground where we used to play.

This place was great. This house

was just for my family. We had a downstairs and an upstairs. We had a toilet just for us and a bathroom; no more tin baths for us. But best of all we had electric; no more gas mantels for us. Mam was so happy she shouted, "This is our new house, kids."

We soon settled into our new house. I got to know all the kids in my new school. Some of them lived in my street, which was great. After a few fights with the local kids, I was soon accepted as one of the boys, and was allowed to join the local gang. In them days it was important to be a member of a gang. Boys on their own would always be picked on by gangs like ours.

I remember one of my first dares as

a new member of the gang was with the help of one of the gang members. It was to climb over the back wall of our local off-licence shop and pass over a half dozen empty beer bottles. In them days you got money off your empty bottles when you took them back to the shop. I took the bottles round to the front of the shop, and got sweets with the money I got off the bottles. We all went to the local park and lay on the grass eating our ill-gotten sweets. Mind you, I never did it again. I think it was just to prove I was good enough to join this little band of warriors.

My sister soon made friends with the local girls. Each day after school they would head for the park where they would sit on the

grass, and talk about boys. I suppose that's what girls did.

But my older brother was a bad mixer, he would come home from school and you would find him in his pigeon hut that he had made in the back garden. Him and me never got on. Even to this day we can't tolerate each other. I remember every time we had a fight, I would always win. Mam would tell dad we had been fighting again. Dad would grab me by the scruff of the neck and say,

"Don't fight with your brother. Fight anyone else but not your brother. You two stick together."

The summer holidays soon passed, and before I knew it we were back at school. The evenings were spent playing football, knocky nine door, and pinching rhubarb out of people's gardens. One of us would get some sugar and we would sit round eating our rhubarb and talking about what we had done that day. As I think back, life was not so bad for our little band of warriors.

One of the lads in my class at school was also in the gang. Him and I became good friends. His name was John and he lived in Benwell Village, not far from where I lived. John told me his mam and dad both worked, and didn't get in the house till after six o'clock, so when we came out of school John would come back to my house for tea. I'm saying tea, it was only a sandwich and a piece of cake. After tea we would kick a ball

around for a while till it was time for John to make his way home. At the weekends John would come to my house and stay all day. We would find the rest of the gang and usually hang around the local park.

The nights were drawing in now, so after tea we would stay in our street so we were close to home. We might have been little tough guys, but when our mothers shouted for us to come in you had to go, or run the risk of a clip round the ear.

Christmas came and went. We didn't have a lot of money in them days, but we always got an apple and an orange and a little toy, and us kids were happy all the same.

The long winter nights were great, with the snow on the ground. Every kid on the estate would head for Norland Road. Norland Road was two steep banks. You would start at the top beside the welfare hut. I had a piece of cardboard, others had pieces of tin but, if you were posh, you had a proper sledge. You would slide down the first part, across Aldwick Road, then down the second half. Some would stop at the bottom of Norland Road but the brave ones, which I was one of, would carry on across Woodstock Road, bounce off the kerb and take off like an aeroplane, hitting the hedge and landing in someone's garden. You would always finish up at the end of the night with cuts and bruises. But we wore our cuts and bruises like medals of honour. To have cuts and bruises meant you hadn't stopped at the bottom of Norland

Road, so the other kids looked up to you.

We were never worried about cars in them days. There wasn't that many on the roads. I remember the only thing we got in our street was a horse and cart. I think it was a penny for a ride on the cart.

Discovering the Hall



The winter would pass and summer would come, and the gang would get back together, and we would soon get back to our mischievous ways again. The little warriors were back on the streets and I was happy once more. Things had changed for my friend John. His mam had a baby, so when we came out of school, he would come to my house for tea, and the next night I would go to his house for tea. Apart from John, the rest of the gang and me all lived on the council estate. John, however, lived in Benwell Village in a private house. The rest of the gang would call him the posh kid. He might have lived in a private house, but he was every bit as rough as we were. One night when I was at his house, his mam asked if I would like to come for dinner on Sunday. I said I would have to ask my mam first, then thanked her.

When I look back I think it was that Sunday that changed my life forever. We had our dinner and decided to go for a walk. We set off up the street. We passed the Rex picture hall. I had been there a couple of times with my mam and dad. We walked on a bit further when John said, "Do you fancy an apple?"

I said "Yes, but where are we going to get them from?"

"Follow me," John said.

He led me up the street and around the corner into the next street. Halfway up we stopped. John looked round, then started to climb the wall. "Follow me," he said.

The wall was about five foot high, and made of old stone, so it was easy to climb. I climbed that wall as fast as I could. By this time John had climbed up and over the other side. I followed, and for a moment we stood in the bushes to catch our breath. I think from the look on John's face he could see I was nervous. "Don't worry, I've been in here loads of times."

The only advice John gave me was, "There's a groundsman who usually walks around this place. If you see him don't run, just hide in the bushes till he passes by."

I followed John down through the bushes to where the apple trees were. I filled my pockets with apples and even put them down the front of my shirt. I had never seen so many apples in my life. John tugged at my sleeve and said, "Let's go."

We made our way back to where we had come in, we sat in the bushes eating our apples. My excitement had died down now and I began to talk. I asked John, "Where are we, and who lives here?"

John said, "We were in the school teacher's garden and this place is called Benwell Hall. And just behind those trees up there is the big house where she lives. John said, "Do you want to go up and have a look at the big house? It's spooky, mind."

"I'm not scared." I said.

But, as we made our way through the bushes, I could see through the clearing the biggest house I had



ever seen. We made our way round to the front of the house, we were really close to the house now. My heart was in my mouth now. I thought someone is going to come out of the house, but they didn't and we got right to the front of the house. The front of the house was, I suppose, spooky with its bay windows. When the sun shone on them it looked like the glass was black.

John pointed to the way we had come in and we made our way back. I was glad to be back in the safety of the bushes. John looked at me and said, "Well, what do you think, was it spooky?" I said, "Well, maybe a little."

We made our way back down to where we had climbed in, and climbed back over the wall. We made our way back down to John's house. As we stood at John's

gate, John said, "What do you think then, should we go back next week?" I looked at John and in my toughest voice I said, "That was great, and yes I think we should go back next week."

"OK," he said, "I've got to go in now but I'll see you tomorrow."

I made my way home with my shirt full of apples and give the apples to my mam.

Benwell Hall



"Where did you get these apples from?"

I told her I had got them off John's mam. "They have an apple tree in their garden. She said you could make an apple pie with them."

I know it was a little white lie, but what else could I say? She would have skinned me alive if she knew where I had got them from. We might have been poor, but my mam was as honest as the day was long. That night while I ate my piece of apple pie, I thought about the day's events, climbing into the Hall grounds, pinching the apples and, best of all, seeing that big house. It had been one of the best days of my life. I had my bath and went to bed and fell fast asleep.

We climbed the Hall walls quite a few times that summer, each time enjoying the apples more than the time before. For some reason, and I'm glad, we always sat where I could see the big house. We would sit eating our apples and making plans for the next day. John and I became inseparable that summer, so much so that we spent all our time together. The gang didn't seem to be all that important any more. We still had days when we would hang out with the gang, but they were becoming less and less.

The school days were here again, long days and long nights. We would play in the park, then into the dene where we had made a swing. There just wasn't enough hours in the day for us. I listen to the kids these days. All they can say is, "There's nothing to do, I'm

bored." What the hell happened to kids? When we were kids our mothers had to drag us kids in.

My best times was when John and me would go up to the Hall, just sitting there eating apples and looking at the Hall gave me great pleasure. I longed to go up and knock on the door and ask if I could look around. I think it must have been the Hall that sparked off my fascination with big houses and castles, and for the rest of my life I would visit hundreds.

I told John that when I grow up I would buy the Hall, and my kids would just be able to pick the apples and not have to pinch them like me.

Time passed by so quickly and our visits to the Hall became less frequent, until finally we stopped going. I think it was the girls in the park, that had become more exciting now. I think we were growing up.

Leaving School

The years slipped by, and John and I left school. I became a painter, John went into the shipyards. Over the next few years we both got on with growing up. John got engaged to a nice lass from Kenton, so I didn't see much of him. I got married to the finest lass in Newcastle, and I'm proud to say are still happily married.

The only time the four of us got together was at weekends, we would go to the local pub and have a laugh, and talk about the good old days, and the big house. John would say, "You and that bloody big house."

It was alright for a while, but I was starting to get itchy feet, I wanted to leave the North East, head south and make my fortune - or at least that was my dream.

My wife's brother lived in Sheffield, he said he could get us a house down there, and I would have no trouble finding a job. John wasn't very happy about us leaving, but we had a good talk about it and I think he understood. I said I would call at his house the Sunday before we left. John's mother said I had been like another son to her and she would miss me. John wished me all the best, and I said I would keep in touch. I don't know what it was, and still don't know to this day what the fascination for Benwell Hall was but, when I came out of John's, I walked up the street the same way John and I had done. I walked round the corner and walked up to where John and I used to climb over the wall. I crossed

the road to the other side so I could see the Hall. I stood there for a few moments remembering when we were kids. I smiled to myself and said quietly, "Goodbye, old house, thanks for the apples, and the happy times John and I had."

Little did I realize that would be the last time I would see the Hall standing. While I was working away, they would pull the Hall down.

When I left the Hall it looked a bit dilapidated, but I never thought for a moment they would pull it down.

It only took a few years for my feet to stop itching. I hadn't made my fortune but I didn't care. I was a Geordie lad and I needed to come home where I belonged.

We hadn't long been back in Newcastle, when one day my wife and I were in town. We were walking down Northumberland Street when we bumped into my wife's aunt. She said, "I heard you were back. Will you come and do some decorating for me?"

I said, "No problem, where are you living now?"

"Benwell Hall" she replied, "You know, there used to be a big house there at one time. But they pulled it down and built flats there, and I live in one of them."

"I didn't know they had pulled the Hall down. When did this happen?" I said.



Benwell hall 1981



Benwell hall 1982



Benwell hall 1982

"It was when you were working away. I did hear there was only one surviving daughter left living in the place. I think it got too much for her. It was a big house just for one," she explained.

I was told it had been sold to a housing association. They pulled it down and built flats. You could have knocked me down with a feather. The Hall was gone.

I told her I would call round the next day to see what was needed to do the job. As I drove up Ferguson's Lane, I didn't know

what to expect. When I got there they had taken part of the wall away to make a road into the estate. I found the flat easy enough. It was right on the front, overlooking Ferguson's Lane. She told me what she wanted, and I told her I would start the next day and left.

I decided to have a look around the old place before I left. I could still recognise the old place but it had changed quite a bit. Most of the apple and pear trees had gone; just a couple beside the wall were left. The little cottages had been pulled down where the groundsman lived. The wishing well had gone – well, I'm saying wishing well, that's what John and I called it.

I walked to the top of the grounds, where the Hall once stood. I just couldn't believe it wasn't there any more. This big house I used to sit and look at had gone. I found the spot where John and I had sat eating apples all those years ago. I sat on the steps that led up to the

top row of flats and lit a cigarette. I could hear John's voice in my head saying, "Let's go, the groundsman is coming up the drive." Great days those were. I finished the job for the wife's aunt and left. I never went back there again.

But little did I know the Hall hadn't finished with me yet. That night I lay awake. I couldn't get the Hall and grounds out of my head. That place had been part of my youth. My friend John and I had spent many a happy day in the grounds. Why had they pulled it down? The Hall wasn't in that bad a condition the last time I saw it. I decided I needed to know why the Hall had ended up a heap of rubble on the back of a wagon. I owed the Hall that much for the years of pleasure it had given me.

But my quest would have to wait another twenty-five years. My wife reminded me we had a family to bring up. The Hall would have to wait.



Benwell hall 1981

Moving back to Benwell

I remember that every weekend the family and I would visit some big house or castle. It was my passion in those days. I would love to walk round them. My imagination would run wild.

My wife, bless her, never complained. Mind you, the kids made up for it. All they ever said was, "Can we go some where else this weekend, dad? We're sick of big houses and castles." So we all compromised. One week we would do what the kids wanted to do, which was always the beach, fun fairs, and spending money - bless them. The next week it was back to big houses and castles.

As a father, I enjoyed my kids. I loved every moment I could spend with them. I used to love the winter nights, when we all sat round in the living room. I would tell them about when I was a lad. I remember my son would say, "You never went and asked for burnt bread, did you, dad?"

I would say, "Yes I did, son. My mother would send me because I was the youngest, and I had a little sad face. Times were hard in those days, son. Anyway, you kids..." and before I could finish my sentence, the four of them would look at me and say, "We know, dad, we've never had it so good." Then they would all start laughing. I looked at the wife and said smiling, "Have you heard these cheeky little buggers?" And at that moment I was the happiest father on the planet.

The years passed and the kids grew up. My son I didn't really

worry too much about. He was a big lad and I knew he could handle himself. The girls, mind, they were a different kettle of fish. I worried about them right up until the day they all got married.

As each of the kids got married and left home, it seemed like the house was getting quieter and bigger. By the time the last one left home, it took me ages to get used to no laughter, no shouting. I had been used to the girls fighting with each other. Towels, skirts, jumpers - you name it, they would fight over it. When I wanted a bath but had to wait my turn, I used to say to the wife, "I wish they would all get married and leave home." But now they were, and I could have a bath whenever I wanted. I was in charge of the remote control for the telly at last. I could go to the toilet when I wanted without anyone banging on the door. I stood in the kitchen one day with my wife and said to her, "Listen." The wife stood there for a moment, then said, "Listen to what? I can't hear anything."

I said "Exactly. I miss my kids, pet.

In some ways I could imagine what the last remaining daughter who lived at the Hall felt like. She must have wandered round that big old house by herself. I was lucky I still had my wife. I sometimes wandered round my house when the wife's gone shopping. I would stand at the top of the stairs and listen. There was not a sound. but in my mind I could hear the kids' voices all over the house.

"Mam, can I borrow the car?"



The large 10ft by 4ft stained glass window taken out of Benwell Hall and taken to Beamish Museum in 1989. Includes the family crest of the Liddells, with its motto 'Constans et Fidelis'.

"No, your brother needs it for work."

"Mam, can you lend me a tenner till pay day?"

"Ask your dad, I'm skint."

All the things that had drove me mad, I missed so much now. I was no longer a money lender, or a taxi driver at two o'clock in the morning, or a peace-maker, or a shoulder to cry on when they had a fight with their boy friends. My family had grown up and left home, and I was growing old and I didn't like it one bit.

The house was getting too big for just the wife and me. The wife found it hard to look after now. We talked about it and decided at our age we only needed a flat or a bungalow, but we didn't want to buy another place at our age. So we approached our local council housing office. They offered us some really run-down properties, but I refused every one they offered us. After a while they said they had nothing suitable for us, but they would pass our name on to a housing association. Months passed and we heard nothing, then one day to our surprise someone from the housing association came to interview us. After the interview, they said they would get in touch with us. Weeks went by and we heard nothing. Then one day, out of the blue, they came back and offered us a bungalow in Throckley. The woman said "Go and have a look at it. If you're happy with it, it's

Instructed by Messrs C. and L. Bramble Items removed from
Benwell Hall, Newcastle upon Tyne, and from various other
local residences.

THOMAS N. MILLER

WILL SELL BY AUCTION WITHIN THE

NEW GALLOWGATE SALEROOMS

NEWCASTLE UPON TYNE

on THURSDAY, 1st NOVEMBER, 1979
Commencing at 10 a.m.

ANTIQUE AND VICTORIAN FURNITURE AND EFFECTS

Including:

Very fine inlaid mahogany ornate angled display cabinet; 3ft. 11in. Mahogany beamed bookcase; 5ft. 1in. Heavy carved oak court cupboard; 5ft. 2 and 1/2 deep white style dining chair; 7ft. Mahogany breakfast bookcase; 6ft. Mahogany bookcase; Mahogany triple pediment dining table extending to 11ft. 6in.; 5ft. 1/2 Victorian mahogany dining chair; Mahogany regulation clock; 9 Greenfield clock; Inlaid mahogany corner cabinet; Two-over-top oak and cane table; Set Victorian chair; Victorian pedestal table; Piano Mahogany chair; Pair Carved Pedestal chair; Inlaid mahogany chair; Victorian armchair and Lady's chair; Mahogany curio cabinet; Inlaid mahogany tallboy chest; Rowland chest of drawers; Pine 6ft. 3in. 1/2 Victorian bedroom suite; Inlaid walnut dressing; 7ft. 6in. mahogany chest; Mahogany display cabinet; 6ft. 3in. Oak dressed with shell rock; Pine screen; Carved oak flower chest; Inlaid mahogany revolving bookcase; Oak Victorian bedside table; Victorian wall clock; Rowland Canterbury; Inlaid mahogany lamp; Chinese dragon clock; Brass harmonica; 2 Cellars; 4 Vases; Ceramical swans; Brass standard lamp; Brass curio; Candlesticks; Microtop; Saxtons; Porcelain and cut glass; Inlaid plates and vases; Victorian lustre vase.

SMALL COLLECTION OF COINS including Edward III Noble; Guineas; Sovereigns and Half sovereigns; Silver coins; Mahogany side; Metals and tokens.

JEWELLERY: Diamond, Sapphire, Emerald and Ruby dress rings; Gold Necklaces and chains; Vintagrate; Gold and Silver pocket watches.

SILVER: 3 Piece tea service; Cream jug; Castors; Sugar bowls and Newcastle cutlery.

OIL PAINTINGS: Water colour drawings and Engravings including work by M. J. W. Carmichael, J. Brown, J. Heron, I. Lee, H. Macdonald and others.

Chinese carpets; Brass bed; Ornate painted bird bath; Victorian cradle; Books; Pewter pieces and miscellanea.

ON VIEW: MONDAY, OCTOBER 29, from 9 a.m. to 7 p.m.
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 30, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 31, from 9 a.m. to 12 noon.

Catalogues 40p (including postage)

Auctioneers Office: 18-22 Gallowgate,
Newcastle upon Tyne.
Telephone (0632) 25617

N. JOURNAL 20/10/1979
BRAMBLES OF BENWELL HALL

Millers
saleroom ad

yours. Throckley wasn't that far away for the kids to come and visit us, so we decided to take it. Over the next few weeks we packed our belongings and headed for Throckley.

We spent five years there, and we hated every minute we were there. Finally we decided we had enough. Throckley was not for us.

My wife and I decided to ask the housing association if they had another place they could offer us. The letting officer came to see us a

few days later and told us she had a flat she could offer us in the Benwell area.

I asked, "Where in Benwell?"

She said, "Benwell Hall Drive." I could not believe it.

"Its a lovely little estate in its own grounds," she said.

I told her I knew exactly where it was. I asked her, "Was it the association you work for that pulled the big house down?"

She said, "No, we took over the association that cleared the land and built flats on it." She went on, "Anyway if you want to go and view the flat the keys are at the office, but you must let me know as soon as possible if you are going to take it. I've got a list of people who would like it." And with that she left.

My wife looked at me and said, "How strange is that? We could be going back to where you started from."

I laughed and said, "Can't believe it. What were the odds of this happening?" This was my third encounter with the Hall and it was about to get stranger.

We picked the keys up the following day and drove into the estate. I had the strangest feeling come over me as I slowed down so we could see the door numbers. I had forgotten the door number my wife's aunt had lived in, but I knew where the door was. I pulled up outside the flat the aunt had lived in and said to the wife, "What was the number we're looking for?"

When she told me the number, I shook my head and said, "You're not going to believe this, it's the same flat your aunt lived in." I looked at the flat door and thought to myself, my third encounter just got stranger. I said to the wife, "How strange is this? Of all the flats on this estate we get offered the one your aunt used to live in." Fate had brought me back to the Hall once again. "Let's go and

look inside."

We moved in a week later, but I still couldn't believe it was the same flat I had painted twenty-five years ago.

What was it with this place? Why had I been drawn back to it time after time? Was I missing something here or was this meant to be?



A large 18th Century or later Detached Residence standing in pleasant surroundings. Situated within 2½ miles of the city centre in a secluded area and yet close to all amenities.

The building is subject to a Building Preservation Notice which has the effect of giving it the same protection as a "Listed Building."

This attractive residence offers a first-class opportunity to acquire a house which will afford spacious living. It might also be suitable for some form of "office" use with residential use on the upper floors.

The accommodation comprises:

GROUND FLOOR
Entrance Hall, Dining Room, Drawing Room, Morning Room, Housekeeper's Room, Kitchen, Scullery, Wash Room and Store Room.

FIRST FLOOR
7 Bedrooms and Dressing Room, 2 Bathrooms, 2 W.C.'s, Work Room, Store Room and Billiard Room.

SECOND FLOOR
3 Small Attic Rooms.

CELLARS
2 Cellars reached from Kitchen.

OUTSIDE
Stables, Garage, etc.

R.V. £484.

The House and outbuildings are for sale as they stand in the condition seen and suitable for development. There will be covenants regarding the type of development which the vendor is prepared to agree to. The buildings do require modernisation and repair and a part of the outbuildings is unsafe.

Offers are invited for all those valuable freehold premises either as a single package or separately in the form of offers for the House or the House and stables/garage, or the stables and garage.

For further details and arrangements to view, Telephone Newcastle 841733.

Ad for sale
of Hall



Picture caption will appear here

I wish I could tell John where I lived now. He wouldn't believe it. I lost touch with John when the shipyards closed. He had written to me saying he was moving south and when he got settled he would write and let me know where he was. I never did hear from John again. I had lost touch with my best mate.

I was standing at the back door one morning. I looked up through the trees to where the Hall had once stood, and as I stood there for some reason the memories came flooding back to me. My wife came into the kitchen and said, "Do you fancy a cup of tea, love."

I looked at her and said, "You know, pet, I stood here in these grounds sixty years ago as a little lad. Now I'm standing here sixty years later as an old man."

The wife looked at me and shook her head and said, "You will never stop thinking about this place, will you? Why don't you write a book about the big house, and yourself. Its not like you had anything better to do, and I think it would be a good book."

I looked at the wife and laughed, "You're talking daft, I couldn't write a book. How would I go about it? Where would I start?"

"Look," she said. "Get yourself a pen and some paper, and ask yourself this. Where were you born? Write about how you spent your childhood. How did you first

come in contact with the Hall? When was it built, who lived in the Hall, and why did they pull it down? Get the whole thing out of your head and onto paper."

She smiled at me. "You can do it. I know you can. Anyway", she said, "There's your tea. I'm off to the hairdressers."

And off she went. I shouted after her,

"What about my dinner?"

The wife shouted back, "If you can write a book, you can cook an egg. See you later." And with that the front door closed.

I sat there drinking my tea and thinking maybe the wife is right, maybe I could write a book. Other people have written books, so why can't I? But where do I start? I don't know anything about writing a book. How would I find out about the Hall and its history? Where would I start? This would take some thinking about. But I suppose the wife is right, I've got all the time in the world. Now where the hell does she keep the frying pan?

My Quest

I decided the best place to start would be on the internet, but to my surprise all it said was, "Little is known about the Hall, apart from being two hundred years old."

I logged on to the heritage site. Again it said, "Little was known about Benwell Hall." What I did find out was the Hall was built in the late eighteenth century. I thought to myself that when I was a kid I was sitting eating apples and looking at a two hundred year old house. I sat back in my chair, and looked at the screen of my computer and thought. The Hall has to have had a history. There had to be somewhere I could find out what I'm looking for. This fine old house had been brick-built, and I would have thought no expense would have been spared when it was built.

This fine old house had stood in its own grounds with a five foot wall around it; that to me said class. Only people with lots of money could afford to live in a house like the Hall.

My next thought was the City library. If there was any information about the Hall surely they would have it. I was right, but it wasn't about the Hall's history, it was a lot of newspaper reports from 1981 at the end of its life when there were raging arguments going on between the conservation societies, the local council, and a housing association. Even the people of Benwell Village strongly objected to plans to demolish the Hall. I couldn't understand why it was so important to demolish the

Hall but I was about to find out as I read on.

A well-known builder at the time said he wanted to convert the Hall into offices, but in his opinion it would be cheaper to pull the Hall down. In my opinion he had no chance of getting his hands on the Hall and grounds. Next in line was the local probation service. They said - and I'm quoting from a local newspaper - "conversion to offices would be impractical." What a load of rubbish. These people had a five hundred thousand pound Home Office grant to spend. This didn't feel right to me but I would reserve my judgment till I had read all the newspaper reports.

Then it was the turn of the Environment Secretary to see if he could make a decision on what could be done with the Hall. I couldn't believe what I was reading. What the hell did this bloke know about Benwell Hall? Only what someone had written on paper? How did he know what the people of Benwell Village wanted? This person was asked to make a decision on a house he had never seen or knew anything about. How stupid was that?

But I know one thing for sure - if I had been in Newcastle at the time, I would have kicked up a hell of a fuss to save the Hall and grounds. In my opinion I think profit and progress had raised its ugly head and won the day. But that's only my opinion.

I delved deeper into what was known about the Hall. It had been

built in the later part of the eighteenth century, and by the mid nineteenth century the Hall had been extended, bay windows had been added, and a single storey extension had been added at one end. This work had been completed by a well-known architect, John Dobson, who was supposed to be the best in the North East. A short while later a ten foot by four foot stained glass window was added to the Hall. So it seems money was no object where the Hall was concerned.

The newspaper clippings had said that some of the richest and most powerful local families had lived at the Hall at one time or another. I needed to know who these families were. The man in the library said, "You should try your local library, they would be the ones I would have thought would have what you're looking for."

I needed to know why, if the families who lived there were powerful and rich, did the Hall fall into disrepair? Why hadn't it been looked after like any stately home would have been? I thought to myself, maybe it was because the Hall had never been anyone's home. Maybe it was just a big house that different families had lived in. I decided my next stop would be my local library, maybe there I would find the rest of the answers I was looking for.

As a small boy this house and grounds had given me so much pleasure. I thought to myself, how many boys before me had got the

same pleasure? This house had stood for two hundred years. I'm sure there would have been quite a few boys in that time. And if the Hall had been looked after, it might have stood for another two hundred years. But as I look round these days I think to myself, has my kind of boy gone now? These days it's all computers and iPods. Has the child of today lost out on what we had as kids?

I did realise the Hall was two hundred years old, but to me that was no excuse to let this fine house fall into disrepair. Someone must have been responsible for the maintenance of the Hall. I have looked around the area at some of the big houses still standing and they are in great shape. Benwell Towers, which the BBC took over for filming Byker Grove, and Dr Hodgkin's house, which later became a school for the blind. So why had Benwell Hall been left to fall apart. This fine old house was falling apart and no-one cared.

I was talking to a neighbour the other day, and I told her, "When I was a lad I used to pinch apples from this place." She said, she could remember her husband telling her he had done the same thing. I told her I was thinking of writing a book about Benwell Hall, and what I had got up to as a kid. She said she had a booklet on old Benwell Village, if I wanted to borrow it. It had been produced by a local man and it had some interesting things in it. That night I looked through the booklet and yet again to my surprise no



Wm Bramble digging at Darras Hall

mention of Benwell Hall. Benwell Towers was in the booklet.

Dr Hodgkin's house was also in the booklet. The houses on Ferguson's Lane, and even the little cottage that stood on the corner of Benwell Lane, were there. But no mention of Benwell Hall, not a word or even a picture.

I couldn't understand what was going on here. Did Benwell Hall have some big dark secret that I didn't know about? Some of the richest people in the North East had lived in the Hall, but why had it been forgotten?

In this booklet I was reading there were pictures of tram cars, shops, pubs, and fine houses, but no mention of the Hall. Surely the Hall should have had some mention in the history of Benwell Village? To me it was like the Hall didn't exist. How could a large house in its own grounds in a small village not even get a mention? I was mad now. From that moment on I was determined the Hall would not be forgotten. I would bring the big house back alive again in my book. In Benwell's history, the Hall would have its place.

As a small boy I was brought to the Hall and grounds. Later in my life I was brought back when my wife's aunt lived here in one of the new flats they had built in the grounds. And years later my wife and I would move here. So if anyone had the right to write a book about the Hall it was me.

The Hall had gone now, and I'm sad to think that I was not here when they demolished it. To take a two hundred year old house and demolish it, then take it away on the back of a wagon was beyond me.

My next stop would be my local library. There I hoped I would find the rest of the answers I was looking for. Or would they tell me the same as everyone else had told me? I walked into the library and said to myself, "This is going to be my lucky day. This place will have what I'm looking for."

As I looked around the room there were tables with little groups of people sitting doing whatever they were doing. I asked at the desk if there was anyone that could help me, and the lady smiled at me as I tried to explain what I was after. She pointed to a man standing at one of the tables and said,

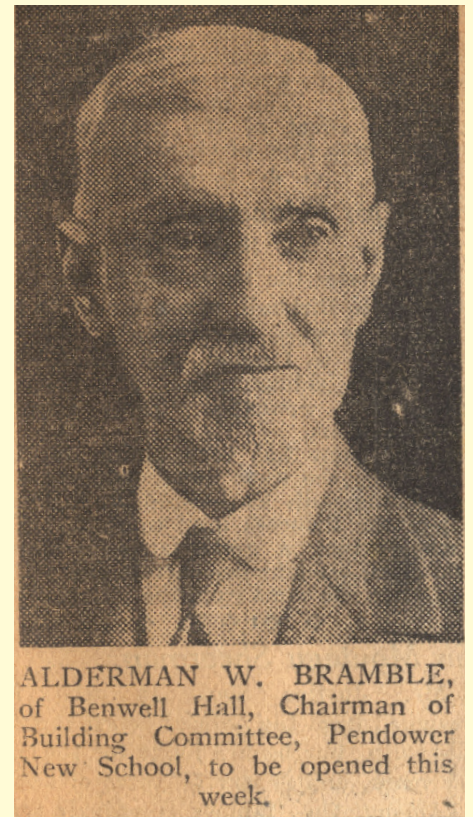
"That's the man you need to see. He'll tell you what you want to know."

I turned and looked at where the lady was pointing. The man was standing at a table talking to a group of people. I walked over to where he was standing and said, "Excuse me. The lady at the desk said you might be able to help me."

The man excused himself from the people sitting round the table.

I said, "I hope I haven't interrupted anything important."

He smiled and replied, "Not really.



Old press cutting with pic of Bramble from Journal – "Alderman Bramble" dated Oct 14th 1929



Picture caption will appear here

They are looking for their family trees. We get a lot of people these days looking for their family trees. Everyone wants to know where they come from."

"Now how can I help you? You're not looking for your family tree, are you?"

I said, "No, I'm hoping you can give me some information about Benwell Hall."

He looked at me and said, "Benwell Hall? I know the house you're talking about, but I'm sure we don't have a lot on that particular house. Let's go and see."

We walked over to a cabinet and he took out a large book and started to flick through the pages.

"Here we are," he said, "I was right we don't have a lot on that particular house. All we have is a few newspaper clippings and a poor picture of the house itself."

I asked him why nothing was known about this two hundred year old house. "Surely it must have had a history?"

He said, "If the Hall was not important at the time, it would not have had a history."

He looked at me and said, "I'm afraid that's all we've got on the Hall," as he slid the book over to me.

I looked at him and said, "How could a house stand for two hundred years, and have some of the richest families in the North East living in it, and not have a

history?"

The man looked at me and shook his head and said, "Look, let me try and explain about this house. Yes, you had rich people living there, but none of them was famous. If Dick Turpin had lived there or Jack the Ripper, or anyone who was famous who lived there in its two hundred years then, yes, your house would have had a history."

"Look" he said, pointing to the book, "It had a ten foot glass window, with a crest on it. There's even a list of people that lived at the Hall, and, yes, they were important people, but none of them were famous. So that's why the Hall never had a history. If one family had lived at the Hall for two hundred years it might have gained a history. But as it was, rich

families moved in and then moved out again. I'm sorry but that house never gained a history. It was just a house rich people lived in."

The man looked at me and said, "I'm sorry I couldn't be more help to you."

I said, "I understand now, and thank you for your time. I'll just glance through the book if I may."

The man said, "No problem. When you're finished with the book could you pop it back into the cabinet for me?" And with that he returned to his family tree group.

The only record I could find of the first one to have lived in the Hall was Aubone Surtees, made famous by his youngest daughter, Bessie Surtees.

Bessie had become famous when she eloped with her sweetheart, John Scott, son of William Scott, a Newcastle coal dealer who also owned keel boats. But John Scott was not the kind of man Aubone Surtees wanted his daughter to marry. The man Aubone wanted his daughter to marry was Sir Walter Blackett, known as the King of Newcastle, who was fifty years her senior. When this didn't happen and she ran away with John Scott, Aubone disowned her and refused to speak to her for years. Disillusioned, Aubone moved to Benwell Hall, and there he stayed for the next few years.

The next four families that were listed as living at the Hall were the

Bowes family, the Cookson family, the Armstrong family, and the Ridley family.

The next thing I looked at was the ten-foot stained glass window that had been fitted in the late nineteenth century. When the Hall was pulled down in the 1980s, the window was given to the Beamish Museum. On the window was a family crest, which I found out belonged to Mr John Liddell J.P. who lived at the Hall.

From the description of the surveyor's report Benwell Hall had been well built, but sadly not maintained. This house had been built with rich people in mind. It had once stood proud in Benwell village alongside the rest of the stately houses in the area. All that was left was a surveyor's description and a sad black and white picture of this once fine house.

I was so frustrated at this point. How could a house of this size stand for two hundred years but everywhere I looked, and everyone I had talked to all came up with the same thing, "Little is known about Benwell Hall"?

I closed the book and sat for a moment looking at it. I thought to myself that somewhere someone has what I'm looking for. Maybe someday this book of mine will be published, and maybe someone will read it and say, "I know what he's looking for, and I know where it is." I just hope it's in my lifetime.

I stood up and put the book back into the cabinet. I walked back

over to the table where the man who had helped me was standing. I tapped him on the shoulder and said, "Thank you for your help." The bloke looked at me for a moment then said, "I get the feeling this house meant more to you than just a bit of research." I smiled and told him my story. The man shook his head and said,

"Forget about the history of this house, it's got nothing to do with this. This is about you and this house. My advice to you is go away and write your book about you and the big house. That's all that matters." As we shook hands he said, "Write your book." I thanked him, and with that I left.

I got into my car and lit a cigarette. I sat there smoking my cigarette and thinking what I had read in the library. I had taken photocopies of it all, so now I would go home and try and make sense of it all. Or was the bloke in the library right? Should I just write about the Hall and me? Bloody hell this writing business is hard work.

My wife was in the kitchen when I got home.

"I was just going to make a cup of tea. Would you like one?" she asked.

I said, "If you don't mind, pet, I'd love a cup of tea."

"You're back early," she said. "I thought you would be gone ages."

I said, "No, I was a bit disappointed really. They only had



Picture caption will appear here



Canning Street School

*Picture caption
will appear here*

a couple of pages on the Hall, and it was stuff I've already got."

"Not to worry," she said. "You must have enough to write your book."

"Well, no," I said. "I really was expecting to find out a lot more about the Hall."

"Look," she said. "Sit down and drink your tea. Now far be it from me to tell you how to write your book but, from where I'm sitting, it sounds like you've lost your way. This book you're writing is about your childhood memories, the time you spent in the grounds of the Hall. You decided you wanted to know about the history of the Hall. Well, you've done that. It may not be what you wanted to find out about the Hall but, if there wasn't much to find out, there's not much you can do about it. So finish your book with what you know and can remember as a boy. The fact that Aubone Surtees lived at the hall around 1774 is fine if

you were writing about the history of the Hall. But you're not. You're writing about your childhood memories, so do it right."

I sat stunned for a moment just looking at my wife. "You're not just a pretty face are you?" I said. "I think I should let you write the book. I think you could write it better than me."

"No, I couldn't," she said. "The book is about your childhood memories not mine. The Hall has gone now, but the grounds are still here and now you live in the grounds, and as each day passes you think of nothing else but this place. So do the Hall justice and write what you feel, and finish the damn book."

I smiled at her and said, "You're a woman and a half. Thanks, pet."

She smiled at me as she replied.

"And you're a sentimental old bugger. Now write a book you can be proud of."



Bramble's drapers shop on Adelaide Terrace, 1900.





A Changing World



Picture caption will appear here

I spent hours looking through all the paperwork I had put together over the last few weeks, and trying to make some sort of sense of it all.

I knew from when I was a child, the last family to live at the Hall was the Bramble family. I now had information on when they moved in, but I knew that at the end there was only one daughter remaining at the Hall. I think she stayed there until it got to much for her. I think the housing association who bought the house from her came along at the right time. But I still don't think she would have sold them the house, if she thought they were going to pull it down. Catherine Bramble never sold the Hall for profit or gain. She simply sold the Hall because it became to much for her to look after. At least I hope it happened that way.

I know what happened to the Hall. I suppose I've always known. But I was always looking to put the blame on the rich people who had lived at the Hall. I wanted the rich people to have left the Hall in a derelict state, when I knew all along it had nothing to do with them. Their time had gone. They were in the past now.

I talked to some of the people that lived around the Hall and everyone of them said the same thing - vandals and scrap men were the downfall of the Hall. The day Catherine Bramble sold the Hall it was doomed .

But when I say scrap men, I don't mean the professional scrap men, I

mean those scruffy-looking men with their old battered pick-up trucks looking to make a few pounds. And the vandals who just want to destroy anything and everything. They smash windows just for the fun of it. They broke into the Hall just to destroy it. Two hundred years of history being destroyed just for the hell of it and no-one to stop them.

This fine stately home would fall into disrepair and end up boarded-up awaiting its fate where once well-dressed gentleman and ladies in fine dresses would walk around the grounds before having tea on the lawn.

But time was running out for this fine house. Its days were numbered. By the late 1980s the bulldozers would have moved in and brought this once fine house to a pile of rubble. Two hundred years of history would leave the grounds on the back of a wagon.

My deepest regret was that I was not here when all this was going on. I look round this estate now and I think, yes, its a nice little estate but the price was too high. I wish the Hall was still standing today, so kids like me could still have had their dreams and could still have enjoyed the apples that I enjoyed as a boy. To sit where I sat as a small boy eating apples without a care in the world.

I sit here now looking over the green to where the Hall once stood, and think to myself, progress and profit have a lot to



Picture caption will appear here

Benwell Hall may be pulled down

ONE of Newcastle's historic and officially protected buildings is likely to be demolished.

City councillors today agreed reluctantly to support an application for permission to bulldoze Benwell Hall in Ferguson's Lane.

It will now be up to the Environment Secretary, Mr. Michael Heseltine, to make the final decision.

Benwell Hall is on the Department of the Environment's official list of buildings of historic or architectural interest.

It was built about 200 years ago and has 19th century additions said to be by the famous Newcastle architect John Dobson.

One of the councillors who voted today to support demolition said the hall reminded her of Grayside, the famous stately home at Rothbury.

"It is a delightful property," said Coun. Mrs. Jean Baty (Ind.) at the development control sub-committee meeting.

Mr. Bill Cunningham, director of administration of the North Housing Association, owners of the hall, told councillors that everything possible had been done to save it.

But every scheme for converting it for housing or offices, using public or private funds, had proved too expensive.

Mr. Cunningham said if the hall was demolished, certain fittings would go to the Beamish Museum and the mirrors, which were a special feature, would be offered to the Laing Art Gallery.

The North Housing Association bought Benwell Hall and its grounds in 1979.

It has outline planning

By PETER MORRIS
Municipal Editor

permission for housing in the grounds and hopes to start building 63 homes in the autumn.

Mr. Cunningham said if the hall was demolished the site would be used for another 20 houses.

He said the association had taken the decision to seek permission to demolish reluctantly after exploring all other options.

Objections to demolition have been lodged by conservation groups and local people, and council planners also recommended today that demolition should not be allowed.

But Coun. Roy Burgess, chairman of the sub-committee, said: "I accept that the association has done everything possible to put this building to use. I won't take some convincing we should not agree demolition."

PLANS to demolish one of Newcastle's officially protected buildings have been attacked by conservationists.

They are opposed to moves to knock down the historic 200-year-old Benwell Hall, in spite of the dilapidated state into which the house has fallen.

City councillors have decided to back an application to bulldoze the house in Ferguson's Lane because they feel it has fallen beyond repair.

But SOCEM, the group to Save Our City From Environmental Mess, says such buildings are our heritage

Inquiry battle to save historic hall

By PETER MORRIS
Municipal Editor

THE fate of one of Newcastle's historic buildings was at stake at a public inquiry today.

The North Housing Association has applied to demolish Benwell Hall so that it can build homes on the site.

Conservation groups and the West Newcastle Ratepayers Association have objected.

Environment Secretary Mr. Michael Heseltine called the application in for decision by himself.

Today's inquiry was being conducted by Department of the Environment inspector, Mr. Stephen Marks.

Benwell Hall dates from the 18th Century with mid-19th Century additions possibly by the famous

housing associations, put a cost limit of £70,000 on the work at 1979 prices but the actual cost would have been between £120,000 and £130,000, said NHA chief executive Mr. Alan Kilburn.

He said it was now hoped to demolish the hall and build new homes.

Inquiry ordered

A PUBLIC inquiry is to be held into one of Newcastle's officially protected buildings.

No date or place has yet been set for the inquiry into the future of Benwell Hall, Ferguson's Lane, in the West End of Newcastle.

The City Council has already agreed to demolish the hall, stables and outbuildings. But a spokesman said the decision was taken "reluctantly."

A spokesman for the Department of the Environment, which is calling the inquiry, said the building was a Grade Two listed building of architectural or historical interest.

and should be saved at all costs.

Chairman Beverley Bagnall has called for a public inquiry by the Department of the Environment before the final decision is made.

The Hall which has 19th century additions said to be by the Newcastle architect John Dobson, has been empty for around two years.

It is on the DoE's list of buildings of historic or architectural interest and the councillors need their approval before any demolition can take place.

But Mr. Bagnall is convinced that the building is

not beyond repair and where parts have fallen into a tattered state, the DoE should finance repairs.

"Mr. Heseltine has said all efforts should be made to save historic buildings, but the DoE seems in general not to be following his words," he said.

The Hall is owned by the North Housing Association and Mr. Bill Cunningham, their chairman, says everything has been done to save it within the available cash limits.

In the event of demolition, fittings would go in part to Beamish Museum and the mirrors would go to the Laing Art Gallery.

answer for. I would have liked to have come back to Benwell Village and found the Hall still standing.

Just to see the old place where I spent a brief moment of my childhood. The Hall where the Sheriff of Nottingham lived and I was Robin Hood hiding in the grounds, and so many other games we played. My childhood days are gone now, and so is the Hall, but my memories will live with me till the day I die.

It's now 2006 and the bulldozers are back in the west end demolishing everything in their path. The streets I had played in as a small child growing up have all gone now. Where once houses stood, there are green spaces now, waiting for the planners to decide what they will build. Like the Hall, the fate of the Benwell and Scotswood area has been decided whether we like it or not.

But progress doesn't always mean better. When my family came to live in this area, it was great. The gardens were well kept, people took a pride in the streets they lived in. We may have been poor but we had pride.

Denton Burn where I grew up has been pulled down now. The last time I was along there showing my grand-daughter where I was brought up as a child, it looked like a slum area. Gone were the well-kept hedges and gardens. The hedges had been pulled out and replaced with scrap cars and black bags in the gardens. My grand-

daughter said, "Did you use to live here granddad?" But how do you try to explain to a five year old that this was not the place I had been brought up? People had made this place what it is today.

I was talking to a friend I hadn't seen for years, and he asked me where I was living now, I told him and to my surprise he said.

"Oh yes, I know. It's that little posh estate off Ferguson's Lane."

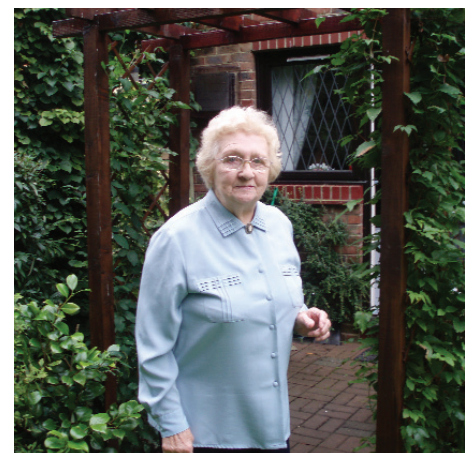
I said. "It's not posh. The people who live there take a pride in where they live, so we keep it as nice as we can."

I walk around the grounds of our little estate with my grand-daughter, and I say to her, "That's where the big house used to stand, that's where the apple and pear trees used to be. And over there is where your grand-dad and his best friend John used to climb over the wall and pinch the apples and hide in the bushes and eat them." My grand-daughter would look at me and say.

"You're very naughty, granddad."

I picked her up and said, "I know I was, pet, but I was happy."

My book's coming to an end now, and I'm a bit disappointed my world has changed, and so has the people in it. Profit and progress and the bulldozer will always win in the end. But in the meantime, I'll walk around my little estate with my memories. They've taken the Hall, but they can't take my memories.



Picture caption will appear here

Biography

The following books and sources are recommended as a starting point for anyone interested in exploring the history of Benwell further

Terry Quinn (1990) *Bygone Benwell*, City of Newcastle upon Tyne Libraries & Arts

Douglas Bond (1992) *Bygone Benwell Revisited*, City of Newcastle upon Tyne Libraries & Arts

Benwell CDP (1981) *West Newcastle in Growth and Decline*, Benwell Community Project: Newcastle upon Tyne

Benwell CDP (1978) *The Making of a Ruling Class*, Benwell Community Project: Newcastle upon Tyne

Thomas Faulkner and Phoebe Lowery (1996) *Lost Houses of Newcastle and Northumberland*, Jill Raines: York

West Newcastle Picture History Collection is a unique collection of more than 14,000 photographs and documents relating to the west end, maintained by an independent community organisation, West Newcastle Local Studies. The collection is currently housed in Benwell Library, and is about to be relocated to the Customer Service Centre, Condercum Road.

Newcastle Central Library also holds photographs and documents of local interest.

The churchyard of St James' Church, Benwell, contains the graves and family burial vaults of many of Newcastle's most famous and rich industrialists and entrepreneurs.

Ron Henzell lives with his wife Mary at Benwell Hall Drive in the west end of Newcastle, on the site of an 18th century mansion called Benwell Hall. *The Boy and the Hall* is the story of Ron's life and of the fascination that the old Hall has exerted on him for more than fifty years. In his words,

"I still feel to this day that Benwell Hall had become part of my life.

As a child my imagination ran wild. This was my little kingdom, and the big house was my castle. As I grew up I let go of the Hall and the past. Years later it was as if the Hall had called me back.

My dream was to buy the Hall and live there with my wife and children. My dream wasn't quite fulfilled as the Hall was demolished. But I still got the chance to live on the estate that I feel played a big part in my youth."



from a to b by the present
from a to b by the New

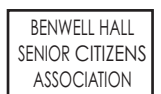


Ron Henzell lives with his wife Mary at Benwell Hall Drive in the west end of Newcastle, on the site of an 18th century mansion called Benwell Hall. The Boy and the Hall is the story of Ron's life and of the fascination that the old Hall has exerted on him for more than fifty years. In his words,

"I still feel to this day that Benwell Hall had become part of my life.

As a child my imagination ran wild. This was my little kingdom, and the big house was my castle. As I grew up I let go of the Hall and the past. Years later it was as if the Hall had called me back.

My dream was to buy the Hall and live there with my wife and children. My dream wasn't quite fulfilled as the Hall was demolished. But I still got the chance to live on the estate that I feel played a big part in my youth."



Published by the Newcastle Community Heritage Project in collaboration with Benwell Hall Senior Citizens Association and Search Project

Photos kindly supplied by Mrs Josephine Briggs, West Newcastle Picture History Collection and Judith Green.