CONSETT MAGAZINE

Issue 111 | Feb 2022

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Front Cover By:
Audrey Rogan



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Hello and welcome to the February 2022 issue of the Consett Magazine.

Good news! After receiving feedback from our readers regarding the readability of the print magazine, we have increased the size of text and made some of the backgrounds more contrasting to make the magazine easier for everyone to read. If you'd like to provide feedback on how we could improve the magazine, just let us know.

In this issue of Consett Magazine Lorraine Weightman talks about the legendary snow of 1963 and her monumental journey to school on page 4.

Joan and John Willis also write about their time working at Shotley Bridge Hospital and Crookhall Colliery on pages 6 and 11. And on pages 14 and 15 we have a story about the Consett Monster from Peter Jack Shaw.

Kind regards from Marco, Barry and everyone who makes the Consett Magazine possible!

We'd love to hear from local people about what's important to them, If you are interested in becoming a writer, blogger, photographer, or video producer with Consett Magazine, please contact us via email or phone. We have some exciting opportunities to get your story heard in DH8, both online and in print.

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SCAN ME

The Front Cover

The front cover this month is by Audrey Rogan. Send your drawings or photographs to: editor@consettmagazine.com

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Winter Warmer

By Lorraine Weightman

With so much going on, we are now being informed, that along with the common cold and flu, the coronavirus will live among us and we need to adapt to living with it. It's just as well adaptation is a constant human trait, and we are all skilled at it.

Not many of us escape the winter cold or infection, so we adapt our clothing to keep warm, while making wholesome nourishing food to sustain us. We invest in extra vitamins, stock up on paracetamol and lemons and make sure we have Vicks vapour rub available; just in case!

For extra comfort I swear by my Mam's recipe for chicken soup - which I still make lovingly today. And I can remember as a child being well impressed when I saw the big pan come out, ready for a hearty feast of mince and dumplings!

If you have lived in Consett you will know that we constantly adapt to the weather! Being almost 900 feet above sea level and perched on the edge of the north Pennines the town gets its fair share of strong winds and below zero temperatures.

We may have experienced 'the beast from the east' in 2018, yet I'm not sure that competes with my memories of attempting to walk over snow drifts to St Patrick's School at the beginning of 1963. At the tender age of six I was sent out alone in thick socks and wellies - which mercilessly drew in the cold to numb tiny toes - a fur lined bottle green duffle coat, bobble hat and gloves; yet still totally unequipped for what lay ahead.

Where the roads had been partially cleared by snow ploughs, mounds of compacted snow lined the side pavements next to deep drifts that were turning crispy and slippy as the thermometer plummeted. As I struggled, trying to cross the road at the traffic lights opposite the Braes on my epic journey from Henley Gardens to Stanley Street, I remember how a huge gust of wind - combined with my over sized wellies sticking tightly in a snow drift - forced me to lose my balance; which resulted in the biting ice, flushing my cheeks as face forward I created my first reverse snow angel.

Battered by the experience - with hindsight I should have turned round and returned home - I made my way up Medomsley Road towards school. Once there, exhausted, along with the other pupils, I left my wellies and coat in the soggy porch and wet sock footed, trundled into the steamy windowed classroom.

I was lucky enough to have my PE kit hanging in a homemade drawstring gingham bag on the back of my chair. Yet for others who were not so lucky, their quest was to try and find a matching pair of footwear from the rancid rubber smelling sandshoe cupboard!

I remember feeling quite queasy as the door closed and the heat from the sturdy iron radiators circulated the pungent smell of drying damp socks and gloves, mixed with the sickly aroma of the iced topped milk bottles melting in a crate by the blackboard.

I never found this environment conducive to learning and I was already dreaming of going home, sitting by our coal fire in my warmed pyjamas and dressing gown.

At playtime we were allowed outside but banned from throwing snowballs, so we contented ourselves by rolling giant ones to make a snowman. Once back inside, we repeated lines from the catechism:

Who made you?
God made me.

Why did God make you?
God made me to know him, love him and serve him in this world, and to be happy with him for ever in the next.

As I pondered over these words, I thought about my Nana, who always said we shouldn't complain about any discomfort we feel; but remember to 'offer it up for the holy souls' So on this occasion I did; and hoped that those in purgatory were a little bit more comfortable than I was.

At long last is was home time, and even though my socks were as stiff as a board I rammed my feet into them and lined up to go home.

Delighted to see my Dad at the gate, I held his hand and steadied myself on the now frozen glistening snow, transfixed as the light faded slightly and the winter watery sun glazed the whiteness, making it look magical.

And there it was when I opened the door, the big pan on the stove top, bubbling away with the hypnotic smell of mince and dumplings!

My pyjamas were warming on the clothes horse, and placed on the little table next to the fire were two of my favourite things, a glass of hot blackcurrant and a boiled egg with butter, mashed up in a cup!

I was home.

Memories of Crookhall Colliery

By John Willis.

The darkness down a coal mine is total. Without any form of lighting I could hold up my hand a few centimetres from my face and I would be unable to see it.

In my early days working at the colliery before the onset of electric cap lamps and hard headwear, we used to have to provide our own lighting. This was in the form of a carbide lamp. These lamps were constructed in two parts, an upper chamber and a lower chamber.

The way that these lamps were powered was by the reaction of calcium carbide with water. This reaction produces acetylene gas which burns as a clean white flame. This gas is produced when water from the lamp's upper chamber encounters the calcium carbide stored in the base of the lamp via a dripping mechanism.

At the time I did not understand the science behind it. It just happened! I got this information from Mr. Google There were two kinds of lamps. One was a more portable one which could be fixed to headwear.

The other was a bigger version which was carried in the hand. The putters of which I was one favoured the first one. We purchased the lamps from Davison's in Consett, where McKays used to be. We could also buy the carbide pieces there. They resembled small stones and gave off a really offensive smell.

It was valuable to have a lamp that gave good illumination.
The lamps came with a fitted reflector which gave a reasonable light but the more enterprising men used the top lids of shoe polish tins, which could be burnished and fitted to the caps that we wore. This improved the quality of the illumination.

As previously mentioned, I cannot recall any overweight men that I knew. The nature of the work was such that it demanded much physical effort to be a miner. I don't recall that there were any ' easy ' underground jobs.

A massive improvement in working conditions came with the provision of electric lights and hard safety helmets. When we went on shift we collected our lamps both electric and gas warning safety lamps, from the lamp cabin that was sited on the surface.

There were no poisonous or explosive gases at Crookhall Colliery, but it was a national requirement to carry the safety lamp with you at all times. I recall that it was a cardinal sin to extinguish the safety lamp either accidentally or deliberately.



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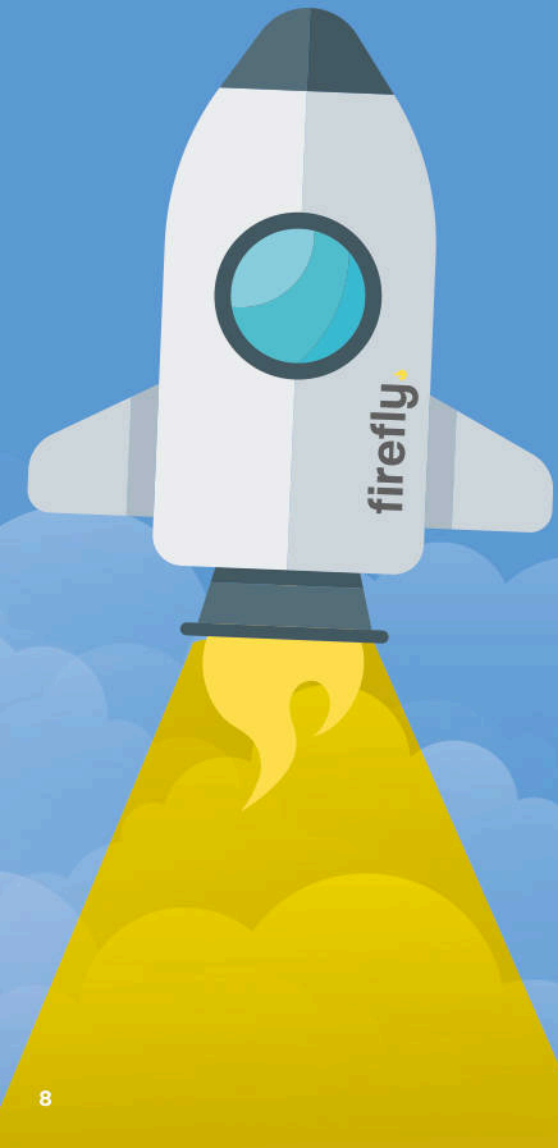

Step #1 Branding

Think of branding as the foundations of the business you're building. Without solid ground, there is no hope of building higher.

Branding consists of several elements that accumulate to create a "gut feeling" about your company. Branding is not what you say about your company. Branding is what your customers say about your company.

A Brand cannot be controlled, but it can be influenced.

Probably the most important step in the whole process is understanding your goals, your client's goals and your brand goals. We identify the essence of your business, whom you're providing value for, what your brand priorities are and the best way to action them. At the end of the discovery meeting we'll have a real insight into your business and we'll have a brief defined ready for the next stage.

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Step #2 Website

Think of your website as a full time employee. An employee that never sleeps, needs food, complains or takes days off, they don't even require toilet breaks!

Your website has several jobs to do, it should act like a concierge to every "guest" that visits your site. A service manager that can answer frequently asked questions, a sales manager to qualify and gather leads, a customer service rep to respond to questions, a social media manager to publish important news and updates.

Your 24/7 shop front.

The user experience is key in understanding what functions you need. Does the experience demand a contact form / call back request / live agent messaging? Should the information be behind a button / tabbed containers or in bullet points? We'll include all the essential functions to ensure the user is getting the best possible experience.

Step #3 Marketing

You have your brand, you have your website, the next thing to do is drive traffic to it and start generating leads!

Marketing is a game of numbers, if you get a million people visiting your site, 10% will show buying intent and only 2-3% will actually buy. 2% is still 20,000 people! What we've learned over the last 15 years is that the old "scatter gun" approach to marketing can work, but it's also very inefficient. We've developed a solid "go-to-market" strategy that works for every business, service, product or event.

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Four Seasons Health Care

Memories of Shotley Bridge Hospital.

By Joan Willis

My second placement as a pre-student nurse was on Ward 16 the 'so-called cancer' ward.

This was a male only ward with mainly face and throat cancers. Later maybe in the 1980's there was an enquiry to try to prove that this outbreak of face and throat cancers was somehow caused by Consett Iron Company but nothing was ever proven. There were a lot of cases for such a relatively small area.

Some of the facial disfigurements were horrific and very frightening for a 17 year old. Those poor men were very stoical and tried to appear cheerful. They were like wounded soldiers.

I don't think there were any viable treatments though some were tried. One treatment that was applied was the implanting of radioactive pellets into the affected sites.

One of my duties was the bringing the radioactive pellets from the X-Ray department to the ward in lead encased containers. They were very heavy and the word ' cobalt ' was mentioned.

The men on the ward were remarkably brave and cheerful especially at visiting times.
There was a bookcase at the end of the ward with donated books for the patients to use who were enthusiastic about them.

Being a voracious reader, I read them all. It was my introduction to Ian Fleming and Zane Gray.

Sad and happy memories.

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Obesity in Pets

Now that the festive period is over, it's a great time to start thinking about your pets' health and wellbeing.

Obesity is a HUGE problem in pets and can really impact on an animal's health and quality of life.

Medical problems that are associated with obesity or that can be made worse if your pet is overweight include diabetes, heart disease, osteoarthritis and high blood pressure.

It can be really beneficial to ask for help and advice if you're worried your pet might be overweight and your vet or veterinary nurse will be able to help you with this.

Once any medical problems have been ruled out, increasing exercise levels, reducing food intake or using special diet foods can all help your pet's weight to return to an acceptable level and improve their quality of life.

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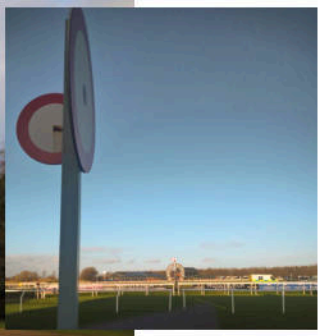

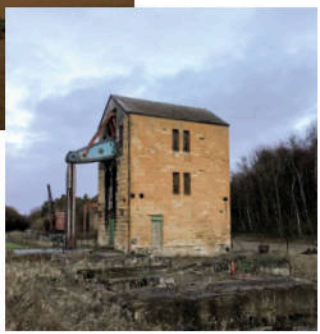

Musselburgh

Musselburgh is a town of 21,000 on the east side of Edinburgh, beyond the city boundaries, and is the largest settlement in East Lothian. To reach it from the north-east, you have to travel into Edinburgh on the express train from Newcastle, and then take the local train towards North Berwick retracing your route to the first stop at Musselburgh, where the station is on the south side of town. As a result, fares to Musselburgh are slightly higher than for Edinburgh, even though it is a shorter distance. I started my overnight visit by walking through the housing estate to Newhailes, a National Trust for Scotland site where the café is open through the winter even those the main house is closed.

I had a walk through the grounds after a warming coffee and was surprised to find the house front door open, even though it was closed to the public. Before long I realised this was a dwelling place for Santa's grotto, it being a weekend in the month of December! It is normally noted as a Palladian house that played a prominent role in the Scottish Enlightenment, but it also has a superb childrens' play area called Weehailes which is a play village that would fire many an imagination, but is closed until April.

I made my first acquaintance with bus route 30 to ride into the town. There's a choice on Lothian Buses of a single for £1.80 or a Dayticket for £4.50. For three or more trips a day, the Dayticket is a good deal, especially I was planning an evening trip into Auld Reekie (Edinburgh) for the evening service at Old St. Paul's. I passed the Ravelston House Hotel where I was staying for the night, and should have got off to leave my overnight bag, but carried on to maximise the time I could spend at Prestongrange Museum. It supposedly closed at 1530, and I was worried I would not have time to look around, but fortuitously it is just the Visitor Centre and exhibition that closes then, and the site itself is open to wander around, which I did until nightfall.

For over 400 years Prestongrange was a focus of industry. A harbour, glass works, pottery, colliery and brickworks have all left their marks on the landscape including winding gear, a vast brick kiln and a Cornish beam engine. Cradled by woodland the site is now a haven for wildlife where you can explore these monumental relics of Scotland's industrial heritage.

I had left bus 26 at the signposted entrance which was a long walk to the Visitor Centre, but a quick exit by footpath to the main road had me delivered to a convenient bus stop and picked up in less than a minute. The Ravelston House was comfortable. Day two was on foot around the town. First to Fisherrow, the harbour, and up the hill to Inveresk which is an NTS garden. I admired some of the architecture of Loretto, the independent school. Astonishingly (!) there was horseracing at the racecourse for the afternoon, a seven race card. But no winners that afternoon. After picking up my bag from the hotel there was still time to explore the Queen Margaret University campus adjacent to Musselburgh station and a brief period of relaxation in the first class lounge at Waverley station before my fast LNER express back to Newcastle.

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Richard Holden MP Demands Action on Unfair Petrol Prices in Consett

Richard Holden, MP for North West Durham, has demanded that Supermarkets address the unfair differences in petrol and diesel prices between the stations they run in Consett and neighbouring Bishop Auckland. Morrisons has slightly dropped their prices, but the MP says more needs to be done and calls on others to follow.

Constituents reached out to local MP, Richard Holden, to highlight a more than 10p fuel price difference between petrol stations in Consett and Bishop Auckland - despite being run by the same supermarket chain and just 18 miles apart. Both Morrisons and Tesco charge higher prices on both petrol and diesel in Consett than in Bishop Auckland, costing customers up to £5 more to fill up in Consett.

Richard Holden MP first wrote to the supermarkets on the issue in February 2020 but did not receive a response. He raised the matter again on Twitter last week, demanding an explanation from both Morrison's and Tesco. Yesterday he took to the House of Commons to call out their unfair practice.

Firstly, raising the issue with the Permanent Secretary at the Business and Energy Department (BEIS) during a meeting of the Public Accounts Committee. The Permanent Secretary stated that an any price collusion would be illegal and treated incredibly seriously by the Competition and Markets Authority and that she will ensure a team at BEIS looks into the matter.

And secondly, Richard raised his question in the Commons Chamber and the Minister of State Business, Energy and Clean Growth, Greg Hands MP, has agreed to meet with Richard at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss the petrol price issue.

Since his intervention, Morrisons have emailed Richard and have dropped their petrol and diesel prices by 1p each at their Consett site. However, they remain very significantly above prices in Bishop Auckland. Tesco have not yet responded.

Richard Holden said:

"My constituents are fed up with being screwed over by large supermarkets ripping them off with significant differences in the price of petrol between Consett and Bishop Auckland – despite pumps being only 18 miles apart.

"That is why I have called on both Morrisons and Tesco to amend this unfair practice.

"I appreciate that Morrison's have dropped their price difference by 1p, but much more needs to be done, and I look forward to meeting with the Minister of State for Business, Energy and Clean Growth to discuss just what can be done very soon."

"I will always do whatever it takes to stand up for my constituents against unfair practices."

A Consett Monster Story

By Peter Jack Shaw

From Snod's edge to Healyfield and Castleside to Rowley, the red dust from the monsters belly in Consett itself was ever omnipresent.

The men that cared for and powered the molten steel belching creature, making their daily journeys from their homes in Delves, Leadgate, Blackhill the Grove and Shotley Bridge deep into its dark heart at berry edge, where the only light often was the deep orange flickering glow of the furnaces themselves.

Some were lucky, they got to work outside driving loco's or directing traffic around the site, even more lucky still the managers and the suit wearing staff from the affluent and large homes along the promenade, site of the famous battle of the blue heaps, they sat in offices watching the molten monster do its thing from their office windows.

24 hours a day, 7 days a week, the monster belches out enormous quantities of molten steel, which the hard-working men of the Derwent valley hammer, squash and bash into so many different shapes, the mind boggles trying to keep track of it all, and the noise… oh my word, how ANYONE can concentrate and know what they are doing amongst all that noise.

The sparks, the fire, the raw red heat of metal girders that have not yet been fully born, it's as if the monster makes it's



children to order, and shapes them to be the adults they will become in the real world, before they even leave it's womb.

The men and the machines hammer on, bashing and rolling, re-heating and moulding, day after day, the red dust spews forth from the massive chimneys, you can see the beast breathing, every cloud of smoke an exhale of one breath, the people up in town feel safe, even if the air is thick to breathe sometimes. "Consett is a safe town" they all say, "The Monster protects us", the "Monster has always been here in many forms, looking over our town"

The bantling Lime kilns at Greencroft, the coal Mines at Dipton & Stanley, the Sandstone Quarries at Hownsgill and even as far away as Stanhope, even when the monster was young it had a veracious appetite, railways connecting far and wide formed the monsters tentacle's nowhere, was out of its reach, coals form Newcastle, Iron Ore and Sandstone from South Durham, trains full of food for the monster rumbling in and out of town several times a day and still struggling to keep up.

We continued to nurture it, let It grow, the bigger it became the more it protected us, and our children, and our children's children, "Consett is a safe town, the monster looks after us all".

OR SO WE THOUGHT, there's panic on the streets, not just in Consett but EVERY SINGLE PART of the local area.

The men who burrowed beneath the soil to extract the coal are worried that the monster won't require any more food, the sandstone and lime quarries are already closed, the monster has had it's fill of those, and for some time now the monsters favourite snack of iron-ore has come to it from large ships traveling from places as far flung as Australia and America.

Maybe we fed it too much and it just couldn't cope, could we put it on a diet, keep it ticking along just enough, so it continues to keep us safe.

NO THE MEN IN LONDON CRY….

"The Beast Must Be Slain", the voices ring out, but who will keep us safe if we do the Workers cried out?

"That you will have to sort out for yourselves" the men in London replied.

It's been 10 years now, the monster is silent, all traces of it ever being alive have gone, observing the valley from places such as Edmundbyers, show clean blue fresh air once more, Derwent reservoir and Allensford are popular outdoor activity venues, in some way the workers that worked hard to keep the beast alive have deserved their well-earned rest, but they worry the Town is no longer safe.

The children have a huge playground, there's no end of space, they don't seem to worry. There's space to ride bikes, build dens and still some secret places where parts of the monster can still be found.

The caves left behind after removing the monsters food, make excellent places to explore and chase one another. Being a kid round here… why should I worry about Consett being a safe town, I don't miss the monster, and I fail to see why those older than me make such a big deal about it.

I'm an adult now, I understand more than I did then, there's still a deafening silence in this town, but what's been achieved in the 40 years since the monster was silenced is nothing short of staggering, our future looks bright. Coal mines that where once bustling producing food to pour into the belly of the Beast have now been transformed into metal work craft workshops, the few buildings that belonged to the monster that are still standing house new enterprises and small growing businesses, new houses bring new people in from far and wide, purpose built units sit on derelict land where the monsters children used to be forged, Supermarkets, Fast Food outlets, Café's, Linen and Nick Nack shops there all here, 'the tourists love it', small businesses started by small groups of people, not dissimilar to the small groups of people who first helped form the monster all those many, many, many years ago.

No I don't think we'll see another monster, certainly not one with the appetite that our first one had, but the workers ethos still marches on, from Shotley Bridge over to Delves, Blackhill across to Castleside, Moorside & the Grove up and over to Leadgate, the monster may be silent now, but…

"Consett is still a safe town"

"we must never forget the monster that protected us well for so long, and got us where we are today"

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