

# Rowlands Gill: The Great War and the Great Peace

## Lesson Plan: Rowlands Gill in the years leading up to the First World War

<b>Teacher/s</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Subject</b> History and Citizenship	<b>Year</b>
<b>Learning Objectives</b>  To interpret the range of historical buildings and how they help to build a picture of economic and social life just prior to the First World War	<b>Success Criteria</b> To gain knowledge of Rowlands Gill on the eve of the Great War.
<b>Key Question</b> What has changed and what has stayed the same in Rowlands Gill? What was Edwardian Rowlands Gill like?	
<b>Starter Activity</b> Choose one of the photographs as an example of analysing this type of historical source? What information do they give about life prior to 1914? What are the strengths and limitations of using photographs as historical evidence?	<b>Resources</b> Historical trail photograph booklet
<b>Main Activity</b> Starting at the school. Follow the trail laid out in the notes. More information than is needed is given in the notes and it will be necessary to adapt to the children concerned.	<b>Resources</b> Historical trail photograph booklet
<b>Plenary</b> Discussion – What was the village like in 1914? What has changed in the village since World War One? Plot the route taken by the heritage trail. Caption each part of the village you discovered.	Children's answers.



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## 1 School

**General info Rowland Gill** The land where the village is situated was once owned by Robert Rowland. 'Gill' referred to a stream.

By 1920 Rowlands Gill was an established village of two communities - the miners living in the Rows, and the business people and professionals living "over the railway line".

The early waggon ways were made of local beech wood and the cauldron shaped trucks were pulled by horses. The journey distance worked by a man and a horse per day in leading heavy wagons down the line and the empties back up again was known as a "gate" - a word found in many local place names such as Hookergate, Leadgate and Catchgate. The word "gate" had no specific connection with waggonways and does not imply any particular distance; it is from the Old Norse "gata" and simply denotes a route, road, direction or way. However, by the middle of last century a branch railway line was built to take Burnopfield coal direct by steam engine to Gateshead. It was initially called the "Bucksnook Way", and is usually referred to today as the "Western Way" or "Western III". It principally served collieries at Bucksnook, Collierley, Pontop and Tantobie. The waggonway opened in 1728 was definitely out of use by 1800, long before the Bowes Railway reached Burnopfield. But in 1881 an outcrop of coal was discovered bursting through the roadside at Busty Bank, Burnopfield, more was unearthed in Gibside Estate, and with prospecting ripe in the Valley, Rowlands Gill was about to be born.

And what about schooling for the children? In 1896 after a delegation of parents had consulted Blaydon School. Board, to try to better conditions for children who either had to walk to Winlaton Parish School, or to Burnopfield up a steep lonely road, or

even go to Whickham by donkey, - permission was given for building a new school between Cowen Terrace and the Lilley Drift Pit, and this building had new extensions added as needed. Rowlands Gill ratepayers first asked for a school in 1890, the delegation and agreement referred to was in 1894, and the school opened on 21st September 1896. As Rowlands Gill Village grew bigger, many children from Strathmore Road area attended Highfield School. Highfield School began in 1883 as Victoria Garesfield British School and in 1905 it was taken over by Durham County Council. On 17th August 1908 the staff and pupils moved to the present Highfield School premises and the old school at Victoria Garesfield became houses - they still exist.

After 1912 a new Grammar School was opened at Blaydon, catering for a wide area.

## 2 Lilley Terrace and Cowen Terrace

Joseph Cowen of Blaydon had prospected for coal in this area and decided it was worth his while to sink the "Lilley Drift" into the hillside about a quarter of a mile north of Rowlands Gill Station, so houses had to be built for miners - seven of them at first were the beginning of "Cowen Terrace". In 1881 was the first "cavil" a cavil being the periodic drawing of lots for allocating the sites of work on the coal face. As the colliery got bigger more houses were added to Cowen Terrace, then Lilley Terrace was built behind it. Hard-working Primitive Methodist families collected money to build themselves a Chapel, and this was built with the whitish bricks to match the houses -bought from Cowen's brick yards at Blaydon, and erected on land given by Joseph Cowen. This chapel opened in April 1883 and closed in 1955 - it is now the Scout and Guide Centre. The coal was led under the main road to the colliery yard to be screened, and the miners' free coal was led by horse and cart past Low Thornley farm to the Rows.





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## 3 Lilley Brick Works & Colliery

When it was discovered that the coal had good coking properties, coke ovens were built in the colliery yard. But soon vast quantities of clay were being brought from underground so it became more prudent to convert the coke ovens into a brick yard the necessary extension to the chimney being still quite visible. The brickworks closed in 1977.

## 4 The 'Bottoms'

As the colliery made more profit the management bought a strip of marsh land near the river where children had gathered nuts and skated on small ponds, and there were built five rows of houses and flats officially called 'Mafeking'. The name was "Ladysmith" and it was built to house miners working at South Garesfield Colliery near Low Friarside which opened in August 1887, but always known locally as "The Bottoms". In the 1920s a miner returning home after a shift was struck by lightning, the bolt attracted by the shiny miner's lamp he carried on his back.

## 5 The Coop and War Memorial

Groceries had to be brought in from other places, Broughs of Newcastle and the Newcastle Tea Co. both sent representatives by train to seek orders and deliver goods fortnightly. In 1889 Burnopfield Co-op was built, and a covered cart brought goods to Cowen Terrace, to the delight of young boys who had previously walked to Winlaton or Blaydon on messages for 1d. Tweddle the family butcher from Blaydon, Tommy Best the dealer from Swalwell, and Irish packman "Whistling Jack" Pagan arriving by trap on fine days and in the train if wet, with bundles of fine linen cloths. Davison of Consett with paraffin, a woman with clothes pegs, crickets and baskets from the Hagg Farm, a dentist from Winlaton, a chemist from Leadgate, Polly Donkin and

daughter Mary Gay with fresh fish from Cullercoats Dr. Andrew Smith from Ryton, - all these people served the village with their trades and wares, in the days when there was virtually no motor traffic and small boys lay down on the road to listen for the sound of the horses' hooves heralding an expected tradesman still half a mile away.

In 1903 a branch of Burnopfield Co-op was built in the village.

## 6 The Station

In December 1867 a railway was built from Scotswood (Newcastle) to Leadgate and Consett passing up the Derwent Valley in front of the Gibside Estate. Here where the railway crossed a small ravine.

The railway closed for passengers in 1953 and for goods in 1962. The track was lifted in 1966 and in 1972 the track-bed became the Derwent Walk.

## Stirling Road - Murder most foul!

On Thursday, 1st November, 1855, Dr. Robert Stirling left the surgery at Burnopfield where he was employed, to visit patients at Garesfield and Spen. He was a native of Kirkintilloch, eight miles from Glasgow. He had studied at Glasgow University, and was working with Dr. William Henry Watson as his assistant, to gain some experience before joining the Turkish army as a doctor in the Crimea. He was a cheerful young man of 26, smartly dressed in a black suit, who was noted for his fast striding pace, and his habit of twirling his walking stick when on his daily rounds. He had only been in the district for ten days, but had already endeared himself to many of the patients with his friendly manner. He completed his rounds at the home of Mrs. Corn at Low Spen.





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leaving there about 2 p.m. When he failed to return to the surgery, his employer became worried. The next morning he informed the police, and sent a message to Dr. Stirling's father. The police mounted a search and when Charles Stirling and another of his sons, Andrew, arrived, they too joined in the hunt. After a long search, the body of the doctor was found by his father and Thomas Holmes, a local man, in a small wood near the bottom of Smailes Lane, Rowlands Gill.

A reward of £500 (over £30,000 today) was offered for the discovery of the killer or killers. The inquest opened on Wednesday, 21st November and after two adjournments, finished on 9th January 1856. It was conducted by J.M. Favell, the coroner; also present were Mr. Hudson, deputy coroner; G.H. Ramsay, J.P. of Derwent Villa; Major White, Superintendent of Durham Rural Police; William Hutt, M.P. and R.S. Surtees of Hamsterley Hall. The jury had assembled, but the foreman, Thomas Burnett, was absent. The coroner severely censured his conduct and fined him £40 (£3,000 today). Evidence was given by Dr. Watson and one of his students, G.S. Thompson, regarding the time Dr. Stirling left the surgery - shortly after 9.30 am. Thomas Holmes told of finding the body. Then William King Eddowes, surgeon of Derwent Cote House, described the wounds on the body : gunshot wounds in the right abdomen, with a spread of shot about the size of the palm of a hand. There were knife wounds on the left side of the face, 2 inches long and 2 1/2 inches deep. The face was badly beaten, and the nose was broken.

WHISKY JACK who gave his name to a brook near the village, was a smuggler from Norfolk who roamed Scotland and the Border Country and fell in with illicit distilleries. He came to the Coquet and Tees areas, acquired a still of his own, and marketed in mines and factories. In 1885 he lived in the woods near Rowlands Gill and was tried for, and acquitted of, the murder of local Dr. Stirling. Joseph Cowen then employed him for 13 years as

gardener, and he proved sober, honest, reliable, and most industrious and knowledgeable, but he eventually emigrated it is believed, to Australia, though it is reported he was seen in Kentucky. Whisky Jack was John Kane - born 1797 - and his cottage was situated where Woodside Cottage, Lintzford Road now stands.

There were many confessions to the murder, but none were consistent with the facts. The perpetrator was never found. Smailes Lane (the section where the murder took place was renamed Stirling Lane)

## 8 The Toll House

A road, the Rowlands Gill Turnpike of 1835, also ran up the valley and near to this Station another road led off to Burnopfield along the track of the old wagon way. This road junction was controlled by a Toll House, with gates, until 1888 when the Toll was taken off and the house used as a residence only. The Toll had been a halfpenny for a donkey, a penny per horse and threepence for a horse with vehicle.

Toll House Mill Robina Robinson became a resident there. She took orders for sewing, as well as being postwoman for 30 years, collecting every week the "doctor's money" long before the National Health.

## 9 The Townley Arms

Near to this Toll house and the station was the Towneley Arms, a Road house used by itinerant cattle dealers. The stables at this Inn housed four horses belonging to the wealthy-coal owner Priestman of Shotley Bridge, who liked to change horses on both outward journeys to Newcastle and home again. It was also the local pub for farmers and workmen in the district and at such times as Col. Cowen's 5th Durham's camped in Gibside grounds, the beer flowed very freely indeed. Also when Irish workmen were



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visiting the area to build the railway it is recorded that a Special Constable was appointed to help the local priest to whip up his flock on pay-Friday nights and get them back from the Towneley to their billets.

## Wor Nannys a Mazer

Wor Nanny an' me myed up wor minds te gan an' catch the train,

'Te gan te the toon te buy some claes for wor little Billy and Jane:

But when we got to Rowland's Gill the mornin' train wes gyen,

An thor wasn't another one gan' that way till siventeen minutes te one

So aa ses te wor Nan its a lang way te gan an

Aa saa biv hor feyce she wes vext;

But aa ses nivvor mind we heh plenty o'time, we'll

stop an' we'll gan on wi' the next.

She gove a bit smile an wen Aa spok up an ses, ther's a

pubblick hoose along heor,

We'll gan along there and git worsels warm an' a glass

o' the best bittor beer.

But Nan wes se stoot Aa knew she'd not waak an she

didn't seem willin' te try.

Wen a tink o'the trubble Aa'd wiv hor that day,

Aa's like te borst oot an' cry.

## **10 The Methodist Chapel**

The Wesleyan Methodists began to erect a fine stone chapel on a commanding site in Strathmore Road, opened 31 May 1902, where they had previously worshipped in a

temporary wooden hut opened 31st December 1899, and the Anglican community purchased a very central site and put up a pleasant temporary church of wood, dedicated 11th June 1904, which was replaced in 1957 by a new brick church dedicated 13 June 1956.

1911 Charabanc Disaster. The disaster took place on Saturday, August 26, 1911, and the bus was carrying members of Consett Co-op Choir who were due to sing at Prudhoe Flower Show. The brakes failed on the infamously steep bank at Medomsley and the soft top roof squashed right down to the seat-backs. Ten died and only 4 of the 33 on board escaped serious injury. The bus had been named 'The Coronation Car' in honour of the coronation of King George V which had taken place on 22 Jun that year. . Among the dead was 33 year-old Amelia Annie Maude Davison, of Hope Street, Blackhill, who was headmistress of Rowlands Gill Infants School.

## **11 Smailes Lane**

At the beginning of the Century foodstuffs such as milk, eggs, and potatoes could be supplied in Rowlands Gill from the local farms such as Gibside Farm, Smailes Farm.

## **12 Victoria Garsfield and the Alloy Works**

Alongside these Coke Ovens was a small factory locally known as "The Alloy" where for a time during the 1914-18 war very hard steel was manufactured for the sides of battleships, made by a secret process, and the smelting was done by electricity. Since 1907 "The Alloy" had been producing ferrochrome, an alloy essential to the production of armour-plating, using electric furnaces. In WW1 overseas sources of ferrochrome were inaccessible, so production at "The Alloy" was massively increased - new plant was installed, a new power-station was built and a supplementary electricity supply was provided through a new underground cable from Dunston. The workforce went up from a few dozen to over 1000 and



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production rose from 40 to 650 tons per week. It was the country's only source of ferrochrome throughout WW1, but at the end of the war demand for the material ceased, placing the company in an impossible position. "The Alloy" turned its furnaces over to steel-making, but this venture failed, and in 1922 the company - The Newcastle Alloy Company, a subsidiary of Priestman Collieries - went out of business.

### **13 Orchard Road**

A group of 44 business men from many places in Northumberland and Durham Counties banded together to buy and develop this land as a residential area for the better-off. Under the guidance of Clayton Gibson solicitors of Newcastle, they drew up an "Indenture of Mutual Covenants" regulating the apportioning of the land into building sites, and the general layout of the estate.