

The Eight Streets of Grangetown: immigration, assimilation and dissemination

Building Grangetown

The rapid growth of Teesside during the second half of the 19th century put strains on housing supply. The population of the area covered by the Middlesbrough Poor Law Union increased by fifty per cent – from 60,037 to 89,853 – during the 1870s¹. By the end of that decade, Bolckow Vaughan and Company had opened the area's first Bessemer steel plant at its Eston Works, and in 1881 commissioned Lord, Carter, Wade and Company to build eight streets of housing to accommodate some of its expanding workforce. The story of the eight streets, which the company named Grangetown, is essentially one of immigration, assimilation and dissemination: people arrived, became a community and then left for new horizons to start the process over again

The Daily Exchange of 1 November 1882 described the development of the eight streets as 'one of the largest and most important building undertakings in England.' In its initial phase, it provided 768 cottages accommodating around 6,000 people in streets named after men who had connections with Bolckow and Vaughan: Bessemer, Vaughan, Stapylton, Laing, Holden, Wood, Vickers and Cheetham. There were actually sixteen half streets: Whitworth Road, a street of shops, ran through the centre. Although the streets were initially envisaged as an extension of South Bank, they were somewhat isolated from that town by a branch railway line running to Eston and the iron workings in the Eston Hills. The railway line, and the steelworks and river to the north of the town, created what John O'Neill (2004) describes as a 'geographical ghetto', which 'perhaps appeared a little forbidding to outsiders.' The location meant that Grangetown could not be part of anywhere: it had to be a town in its own right; and one in which its residents worked, lived and played.

Each dwelling in the streets consisted of a living room, scullery, two bedrooms, and a backyard with a coalhouse and a dry closet.² The builders boasted that the cottages – with a floor space of 46 feet by 13 feet – were bigger and better than workers' cottages in Middlesbrough. They had access to running water, courtesy of the Stockton and Middlesbrough Water Company, and gas provided by the Normanby and Eston Gas Company lit the streets and houses.

Bolckow Vaughan and Company described the cottages as high-quality housing for working people but the working people begged to differ. Joseph Toyn, President of the Cleveland Miners' Association, told a crowd attending a protest meeting on Grangetown Market-square that:

He could point to houses in other parts of Cleveland where there are six good rooms and every convenience at a rental of 3s weekly: but in these cottages at Grangetown [for which the rents were 4s 6d per week] there were two rooms on the ground floor – only one of which could be

¹ GB Historical GIS / University of Portsmouth, Middlesbrough PLU/RegD through time | Population Statistics | Total Population, *A Vision of Britain through Time*. URL:

http://www.visionofbritain.org.uk/unit/10063220/cube/TOT_POP. Date accessed: 15th March 2017

² Flush toilets were installed in the 1930s

occupied – and two small chambers above. So that where a man has a wife and family, the boys and girls were compelled to sleep together or with their parents, while in the case of lodgers he was puzzled to know how they were disposed of. (A Voice: 'We peg him on a clothes line,' and laughter).³

Most of Bolckow Vaughan and Company's workers seem to have shared this view. They did not want to move their families to Grangetown; primarily because they thought the rents, which the company would take out of their wages, were unreasonable. Some of the workers could afford them since they were 'making fourteen, fifteen and sixteen shillings a shift when at work but for each one earning such high wages there were ten or twenty more drawing the labourers' pay of 3s 6d a shift, or a guinea a week when in full work.'⁴

The company, given its investment in the project, needed to secure occupancy of the dwellings. If the workers refused to move, they could either attract them by reducing the rents or find ways of making them move. They opted for the latter approach. Firstly, they made travelling to work from outside Grangetown difficult by withdrawing provision of trains that took workers from South Bank and Middlesbrough to the Eston Works.⁵ This meant higher journey-to-work costs for those who insisted on living outside of Grangetown. In such circumstances, the idea of moving to Grangetown became a bit more attractive, especially for the lower-paid workers.

The company also threatened to dismiss two hundred miners at its Crowell Mine at Eston unless they took up residence in Grangetown.⁶ Although many of these men complained that they were paying 2s to 2s 6d for their current accommodation, they had no option other than to bend to the company's will and pay the higher rents in Grangetown. This led to some problems in the eight streets, however, because there was considerable friction between the miners and the Irish steelworkers.

More than half of the original inhabitants of the eight streets were of Irish origin – an important issue at the time. The influx of Irish immigration, which escalated following the Irish Potato Famine of 1845 to 1851, provided much of the cheap labour that the Industrial Revolution desperately needed. However, although these Irish immigrants were technically British their fellow citizens were not welcoming of them. Owners of industry welcomed Irish migration because it gave them an abundant supply of cheap labour but the working people resented it, partly because they felt their presence served to deflate the wages of indigenous people. In his study of migration into the UK, Robert Winder (2013) purports that few immigrants have been less welcome, reminding us that:

These Irishmen were not the Aran-sweatered fisherfolk of modern advertising. They were confined in ghettos as ugly as any that have disfigured this country. They were penniless, unhealthy, unshod and unclean, lacking even the wherewithal to wash. They were also despised. A people that prided itself on carrying the banner for Christian virtue, that had abolished slavery and emancipated Jews and Catholics (officially), welcomed a new group of extremely hapless

³ Northern Echo 28 September 1886

⁴ Daily Gazette 15 September 1883

⁵ Daily Gazette 29 January 1883

⁶ Daily Gazette 21 February 1884

immigrants – their own colleagues under the Union Flag, indeed – as if they were rabid and dangerous wild animals.

Moreover, the Irish were not particularly overjoyed about being in England. As Winder points out:

They were driven almost solely by distress and misery. The slightly better off and more adventurous went to America, where the Irish enjoyed high repute as tough entrepreneurs. Those who fled east were not only desperate; they were angry and resentful at having to throw themselves on the far-from-tender mercy of the country that was largely responsible for the agricultural and political system that had ruined them in the first place.

These feelings were certainly prevalent in Teesside, especially in Grangetown with its particularly large Irish contingent that was ostracised by the mining community. As the Daily Gazette reported at the time, ‘any unwary Irishman who made his appearance underground was soon chivvied out again.’⁷ Hence, it was no surprise when a ‘disgraceful faction fight’ took place’ in April 1884, following an argument in the Grangetown Hotel, between a miner and an Irishman, which developed into a serious brawl involving the throwing of bottles, glasses and items of furniture. The affray ended, temporarily, when the hotel management ejected the leading participants, but hostilities resumed next day, in the streets, with such furiousness that the local police force had to call in reinforcements from North Ormesby. At the same time, scores of miners were heading from Eston armed with cudgels and pockets full of stones, determined to give the Irishmen a real beating. By the time the truculent miners reached Grangetown, however, the Irishmen had all gone home, but the miners spent the rest of the day marching up and down empty streets, with their cudgels over their shoulders, singing, ‘*Hail, the conquering hero comes,*’ and smashing windows in cottages in which they believed Irish families lived. In addition, several shopkeepers had their plate-glass windows broken.⁸

Shortly after this confrontation, the owner of the Grangetown Hotel applied for planning permission to make changes its internal structure to enable him to keep miners and his Irish customers apart.⁹ Fortunately, however, outbreaks of violence grew less frequent as miners and steelworkers grew to tolerate each other, and to recognise that it was to their mutual advantage if they worked together to obtain better working conditions from their common employer. Class interests gradually outweighed religious and nationalistic differences. Nevertheless, given the hostilities of 1884, the way the community came together in April 1887 in opposition to a Government Bill aimed at controlling the activities of Irish Nationalists is somewhat surprising. The Bill allowed imprisonment of Irish activists without trial, and banned them from organising protest actions such as rent strikes. The Gazette described reaction to the Bill in Grangetown thus:

Last night an open air meeting of miners and steelworkers was held in Grangetown Market-square, to protest against the Government Coercion Bill, and, notwithstanding the fact that the announcement had only been made an hour previously by bellman, there were over 1,000 men present. Mr Hugh Linden, president of the Steelworkers’ Association, presided, – Mr R. Brown, secretary of the South Bank ward of the Middlesbrough Liberal Association, proposed a resolution condemning the Coercion Bill. He deprecated the abolition of trial by jury, and said

⁷ Daily Gazette 12 April 1884

⁸ Northern Echo 22 April 1884

⁹ Daily Gazette 26 September 1884

that anything which strikes at what is right and just, as this Coercion Bill did, was going back to the days of Barbarism (applause). – Mr Spellman, miner, seconded, and said a sensible man who works hard for his bread could see that Toryism was no good for him. (Loud Applause) Mr S Groves (North Ormesby), in a forcible address, also supported the resolution, which, on being put by the Chairman, was carried unanimously and with enthusiasm.¹⁰

In his celebrated study *The Making of the English Working Class*, EP Thompson (1980) suggests that, 'It is not the friction but the relative ease with which the Irish were absorbed into working-class communities which is remarkable.' However, something more than assimilation of the Irish was going on here: the miners were making a significant step towards them. It seems that politics had become a positive factor in the development of community cohesion.

Developing community

Governance

Relationships between miners and Irish steelworkers seem to have improved after this point. However, neither group had much control over their lives in what was very much a company town. Asa Briggs (1963) has observed that, 'the sheer growth of Middlesbrough made it more and more difficult for either one man or group of families to control it,' but Grangetown offered real potential for paternalism. The eight streets came under the governance of the Eston Local Board, most of the members of which had close connections with Bolckow Vaughan and Company.¹¹ This gave the company considerable influence over Education, Sanitation, Health and Burial Boards also. Although few working people could vote during the early days of the streets, there was a lot of political activity around the town, including occasional mass-meetings on the Market-square. However, it took a long time to gain working-class representation in local power structures. As late as 1914, only one member of Eston Urban District council – which had replaced the Eston Board – was a 'working-class man.' His council colleagues were two grocers; a draper; a licensed victualler; two farmers, one of whom managed Bolckow Vaughan and Company's farm; a house agent who managed the company's properties; and three of the company's foremen.¹² However, most of the rateable value of the district came from the contribution of Bolckow Vaughan and Company, and the Local Board deserves credit for its efforts towards bringing governance and essential services to a newly established community.

Religion

The Daily Exchange of 1 November 1882 suggested that Grangetown was a 'Godless town' due to the absence of churches in the development plan, although some of the denominations were conducting church services in cottages at the time. The Anglican community opened St Matthew's Church in 1883; then replaced it eight years later with a larger building when its 150 places proved to be inadequate. The Catholics followed a similar pattern: St Mary's Church, which they opened in 1905, was a replacement for a previous church building, which became part of St. Mary's school when the new church opened. By this time, there were also Congregational, Wesleyan and Primitive

¹⁰ Daily Gazette 29 April 1887.

¹¹ The reference to the 'company' is important here since both Henry Bolckow and James Vaughan were dead by this time.

¹² Wilson (1972)

Methodist chapels, and a Salvation Army citadel. Rather than being a Godless town, the worship of God had become central to the town's development.

Education

Many of the original residents of the streets were uneducated, but the 1881 Education Act made education of 5 – 10 year olds compulsory and forbade children under thirteen from entering employment unless they had a certificate proving that they had attained the necessary educational standard. School Boards had the responsibility for providing educational services and the Eston Board opened its first Grangetown-based school in January 1884, prior to which children had attended schools in Eston and South Bank. It was not a time for gender equality: the School Board paid the headmaster of the boys' school a salary of £105, while paying £70 to the headmistress of the girls' school.¹³ A Catholic school opened in 1888.

The Board had problems getting all children into school. The idea of compulsory education took some time to sink in, so the board employed an Attendance Officer and took legal proceedings against recalcitrant parents. Some of parents that did send their children to school seem to have had concerns about some of the practises that went on inside it. At a School Board meeting, the Chairman stated that the 'committee had gone into the question of the alleged unnecessary flogging of the children by the teachers.' The outcome of these deliberations was that, 'The committee were of the opinion that no unnecessary punishment had been inflicted. They were also convinced that no child was punished because it could not learn: the punishment was chiefly for impertinence and inattention.'¹⁴

Leisure

Although long hours of work in the steelworks left little time for leisure – for the workers at least – by the end of the 19th century Grangetown had its own brass band, choral society and chess club. A Literary Institute with a library and reading room, billiards and games rooms and a connected slipper baths opened in the early 1890s. One of the finest recreation grounds in England¹⁵ – with a bandstand, bicycle and running tracks, and football and cricket pitches – catered for physical activities. The recreation ground featured regular cycling and running competitions with participants from throughout the UK. There was seldom a shortage of competitors: at one meeting, the 100 yards sprint attracted more than a hundred entries¹⁶ while a cycling event held in June 1899, which attracted most of Britain's top cyclists, attracted a record crowd of 9 – 10,000.^{17 18}

For many of the workers, however, leisure facilities meant the public house. The Grangetown Hotel opened in 1884 and the Station Hotel came shortly after, but right from the start there had been illegal drinking dens in cottages that the police constantly endeavoured to close down. There was also an active temperance movement.

¹³ Daily Gazette 26 October 1883

¹⁴ Daily Gazette, 29 October 1886

¹⁵ Budd (2012)

¹⁶ Daily Gazette 7 May 1896

¹⁷ Northern Echo 26 June 1899

¹⁸ The recreation ground had to make way for extension of the steelworks after World War 1.

Commerce

Grangetown families could get most things they needed in the wide range of shops operating on Whitworth Road, which smaller shops on almost every street later complemented. These street shops tended to be operated by widows who had turned ground floors of their cottages into retail spaces. There were no Widows' Pensions in those days, but no shortage of widows due to the dangerous nature of work in the steelworks and mines – and later to two world wars. Horse-drawn carriages and, later, electric trolley buses were available to take people to Middlesbrough but most people had no need to go there since they could get whatever they needed from the businesses on Whitworth Road.

From August 1883, there was a town market every Saturday. In advance of it opening, Bolckow Vaughan and Company changed the workers' payday from Friday to Saturday, and the workers were not happy about that.¹⁹ They had become accustomed to spending their wages at South Bank's market on Friday night. Clearly, this would not have been conducive to the success of the company's proposed Saturday market. However, receiving wages on a Saturday, rather than a Friday, was probably more of an inconvenience for those employees who lived in South Bank than it was for Grangetowners.

Whitworth Road brought essential services to Grangetown, and afforded a richer social mix. However, the steelworkers and miners living in the streets much outnumbered the shopkeepers, physicians and schoolteachers on Whitworth Road. There can be no doubt that Grangetown was very much a working-class town. The 1891 census returns show that some professionals and skilled workers lived in the streets, but the vast majority of householders were low-paid labourers. They had to work for Bolckow Vaughan and Company although their children were free to seek work elsewhere. Most of the sons, however, followed their father into the steelworks or the iron mines. Some of their daughters found employment in the shops on Whitworth Road, but most of them went into service.

Hard times

Insecurity

Life was undoubtedly hard for the residents of Grangetown. The work in the steelworks and iron mines was hard, dirty and dangerous, and the men spent most of their lives at work, especially before the phasing in of eight-hour shifts after 1894. During ninety-nine years of mining in the Eston hills, as many as 375 miners lost their lives at work.²⁰ I am not sure whether anyone kept a count of the number of steelworkers that met a similar fate, but the Daily Gazette had no shortage of reports about such tragedies. Moreover, the risk of accidents extended beyond those who were employed at the works. In March 1885, a shunting train knocked down and killed Mrs Jane Bilton as she was taking a short cut home through the steelworks after visiting friends in Eston Grange.²¹ In September of the same year, nine-year-old Arthur Thomas, of Wood Street, who went into the works to take his

¹⁹ Daily Gazette 18 July 1883

²⁰ <http://www.pancrack.tv/subject.html>

²¹ Daily Gazette 10 March 1885

father's dinner to him, was hit in the neck by a plank overhanging from a train 'with such violence that he choked immediately and died.'²²

Right from the time people began moving into the eight streets employment at the Eston Works was inconsistent and insecure. In 1883, Bolckow Vaughan and Company informed its workers that they were going to reduce wages by ten per cent because of falling steel prices. When some of the craft unions responded by threatening strike action, the company posted notices on 7 May, throughout the works, indicating that they would be terminating all workers' contracts in fourteen days. A second notice, posted on 11 May, announced that the works would close for a week, from 14 May, and that when it re-opened a new pay structure, with an across-the-board ten per cent reduction, would be implemented. The unions, however, indicated that their members would only return to work if the existing pay structure continued. They proposed referring the matter for independent arbitration, but the company refused to go to arbitration and declared the workers to be on strike. On the other hand, the unions argued that the company's rejection of arbitration meant it was not a strike but a lock out.

These events created concerns that went beyond those directly involved. According to the Daily Gazette, 'Grangetown shopkeepers [were] alarmed at the serious aspect of affairs, while those in South Bank were no less frightened.'²³ Despite these alarms, the standoff continued for four weeks during which workers and their families, who were living a hand-to-mouth existence dependent on a weekly wage, experienced considerable hardship. They were particularly angry at the realisation that the company had manipulated them into a situation where their options were limited by the inextricable link between their employment and housing circumstances. One irate correspondent to the Daily Gazette brought attention to this when he wrote:

Some people call this business a strike, so as to blame it on the men, but I call it an arrangement to take advantage of the men. It is bad enough to require a reduction of wages under any circumstances, but it is worse when, as a preparation, the men are forced to leave a chosen residence for one in an employer's barracks, and to pay heavy rents. It is worse still when the men are put, without explanation or interview, clear out their situations, to be 'taken on again' if they meekly submit to a reduction.²⁴

After a month of deadlock, the company allowed workers in the mechanical department to return to work on their old terms, while submitting the terms of those in the manufacturing department for arbitration. The industrial peace was short-lived, however: within six months, the company imposed an across-the board ten per cent reduction, which the workers, following another month on strike, had to accept. Even then, the work situation continued to be precarious. A visitor to Grangetown, shocked by the poverty he observed, wrote to the Daily Gazette about it. His letter, which the paper published under the heading, *Shocking Case of Poverty in Grangetown*, states:

For some time past, I have been touring for business purposes and the benefit of my health in the North of England, and many of the cases of truly genuine distress that I have come across were simply appalling, a scandal, and a disgrace to our beloved country. Only the other day a poor

²² Daily Gazette 25 September 1885

²³ A pluck is 'the heart, liver and lungs of an animal as food.'

²⁴ Daily Gazette 30 May 1883

creature, impelled by hunger and want, visited a butcher's shop at Grangetown, near Middlesbrough, stole a pluck, and made home with it. He was followed at some distance by the owner, a kind-hearted butcher, who, along with a policeman, visited the poor thief's miserable home, and found the wife, husband, and family ravenously devouring the pluck in its *raw state!* We spend vast sums of money in so-called religious uses – building palatial churches and chapels, and sending vast sums to Christianise the heathen, when we have thousands literally dying at our doors.²⁵

Although Bolckow Vaughan and Company were producing more iron and steel than it had ever done – and probably more than any other company in the world was – they claimed their profit margins were falling. Moreover, as a limited liability company, it had to return profits to its investors. Joseph Toyn, President of the Cleveland Miner's Association, told a crowd attending a public meeting on the Market-square that, 'limited liability companies were a great curse to the country' and entreated them all to 'join their respective trade associations' so that 'united, they could compel the directors to hear them and act fairly by them.'²⁶

Despite increased membership of these respective associations, the workers had to struggle to gain what they thought was a fair share of the benefits of the increased output that their labour was providing. On the other hand, uncertainties in world steel markets were apt to threaten the very existence of Bolckow Vaughan and Company. On June 1891, the Daily Gazette reported on 'considerable anxiety' among the working population and tradespeople with regard to the likelihood of the Eston Works closing down completely. It seems that the company had paid off a number of men because of the slackness in the demand: they were producing only about half their usual amount of manufactured material. Consequently, 'most of the workers who were not laid off were working short time.' In September 1891, the Daily Gazette reported that:

Since before Christmas the steelworks have been running very irregularly . . . and for the past six months they have not run, on the average, more than half-time, with this additional drawback that rarely, if ever, have the whole of the works been employed. One department would run three days this week, another department three days the next, and so on.

In a report headed '*Semi-starvation among the steelworkers: feeding the bairns in Grangetown,*'²⁷ the paper described in some detail the reality of having house rents extracted from due wages:

Not only is the full week's rent deducted from each pay, but when the tenant is in arrears an additional half-week's rent is also deducted on account of the arrears. For instance, John Jones, labourer – he is a mythical individual of course – is off work a week, and since he has no pay to draw, his rent falls a week in arrears. Next week John works three shifts, for which he should be paid 10s 6d; but at the pay office that week's rent and half the previous week's is deducted from his scanty pay, and 3s 9d is all he draws in cash to keep his wife and four or five children on. In one case, for which a local tradesman vouched, a poor fellow with several children to keep was entirely idle one week, got a couple of shifts the next, and had ninepence to draw for the fortnight.

²⁵ Daily Gazette 17 October 1885

²⁶ Daily Gazette 1 October 1886

²⁷ Daily Gazette 15 September 1891

Health

The proximity of the streets to the smoke and dirt of the steelworks was not conducive to sound health, and neither was the degree of overcrowding, exacerbated by some families needing to take in lodgers to get by. At a meeting of the Local Board, its Medical Officer reported an instance of eight adults occupying a two-bedroomed dwelling.²⁸ It was not just a problem of overcrowding within dwellings: the dwellings were too close together. There were too many people packed into too little space, and that meant the inevitable epidemics were difficult to control.

The Health Board found its resources seriously stretched in 1892 when a measles epidemic, which started with a pupil at the Catholic school and led to twelve deaths, coincided with a lay-off in the steelworks and iron mines that was brought about by a strike in the Durham coalfields. The Medical Officer's report described the circumstances thus:

The whole of the Iron and steel works and the ironstone mines were suddenly stopped, throwing almost every wage earner in the district out of employment. For upwards of three months, almost the entire population of the district was dependent on the charitable communities for food. Children and adults had to be brought together in numbers daily to be fed by the soup kitchens, and although as far as possible, where sickness existed, food was given for home consumption, yet owing to the fact that measles is infectious even at a very early stage, the disease spread wholesale, and only died out when all the children capable of taking it, had had it.²⁹

Panic set in again in September 1893, when typhus came to the streets. Bolckow Vaughan and Company allowed the Board to use houses on Vaughan Street as a temporary isolation hospital for over fifty sufferers. That was a crucial factor in getting the epidemic under control but the matron of the temporary hospital, Mrs Darling, developed typhus herself and subsequently died.³⁰

Clearly, the early years of the eight streets of Grangetown were difficult for the people – migrants from all corners of the UK who had come to Teesside hoping for better lives. It looked just as grim from the outside also, as indicated by the following, which appeared in the joke section of the North Eastern Gazette on 11 December 1890:

Editor: (giving out assignments to reporters): 'You, Mr Jones, are to go on foot to Land's End, and write up your experience.'

Jones: 'Very good, sir, I will start at once.'

Editor: 'You, Mr Brown, are to steal something, and go to Durham Gaol, and get us a description of prison life from the inside.'

Brown: 'All right, sir, that's pretty tough, but I'll do it.'

Editor: 'And you, Mr Smith, are to spend a week in Grangetown and --'

Smith: 'Hold on, sir! I'll do anything within reason, but I never could stand that.'

²⁸ Daily Gazette 16 January 1890

²⁹ Wilson (1972)

³⁰ York Herald 16 December 1893

Moving on

The years of settling in to the eight streets were clearly difficult. Nevertheless, the ragbag of residents – drawn from a range of different circumstances that had forced them into leaving their previous homes in search of better lives, and with initial distrust and even hatred of some of their neighbours – had grown into a vibrant community by the end of the 19th century. Circumstances were improving also: Bolckow Vaughan and Company had become the most important iron and steel manufacturer in Britain, and maybe in the world. A new management team led by David Evans, together with stronger trade union representation and acceptance of collective bargaining, facilitated better industrial relations, while improved productivity brought increased prosperity for all – workers, management and shareholders – and a period of relative security for Grangetown families. This security ended in 1914, however, when World War 1 took the men away from their homes and families. The Grangetown War Memorial bears the names of 136 of them who did not come back.

Employment in the iron mines declined during the first half of the 20th century as the company increased importation of foreign ore, but displaced miners generally switched easily into employment at the steelworks. The nationalistic and religious differences that had been a source of hostility between them and the Irish seemed less prevalent, especially as the men were now working alongside each other and were in the same trade unions. In any case, as time passed, fewer residents had actually been born in Ireland. People still practiced their various religions and Catholics and Protestants attended separate schools, but the different congregations were more content to live alongside one another than previous generations had been.

As the 20th century progressed, Grangetown extended beyond the eight streets. Bolckow Vaughan and Company invested in construction to the south and east of the streets before and after World War 1, and sold land to Eston District Council for development of council housing, including a garden city estate to the south of the streets. Residents of the streets, attracted by the superior housing that was appearing in other parts of the town, began to move out. Expectations were changing: people wanted hot running water, bathrooms, inside toilets and gardens, and many of them were now able to afford better conditions than those in the streets. Following years marked by relatives living within adjacent streets, families began to disperse. My paternal great-grandparents, all immigrants from Ireland, were among the first residents of the streets; my grandfather, grandmother, father, sister and brother and I were all born there. Four generations inhabited two streets until my parents moved us to a council house in South Bank in the 1950s. Between us, my siblings and I have twelve children, of whom only one lives in the Teesside area while the others are scattered between South-east England, France, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand. However, isn't that just the history of the human race?

The eight streets – in which the houses were little improved since they had been built, in the 1880s – became subject to slum clearance, and demolition commenced in the late 1960s. Their historical significance meant little to the town planners of the time, and they had served their purpose by then. They had provided people with homes for almost ninety years, and Bolckow Vaughan and Company had benefitted from having a workforce, close to the works, who were dependent on them for both jobs and homes. Moreover, assuming full occupancy of the cottages and shops, the company ought to have recouped its investment within just over ten of the ninety years that the

streets lasted. They actually outlived Bolckow Vaughan and Company, which was taken over by Dorman Long in 1928.

Few people mourned the passing of the streets at the time they were being demolished, but those who spent any time living there tend to have fond memories about them. John O'Neill, who was born in Holden Street, has created a popular website dedicated to the place.³¹ In his book, *Around Grangetown*, John recalls 'a unique town, designed to accommodate the vast numbers of ironworker immigrants as they flocked from all corners of the United Kingdom,' to create 'a town of differing cultures, values and traditions which grew into a pleasant, hard-working place, isolated from its neighbouring towns, but quick to learn to adapt itself to the twentieth century and to tolerate its neighbours with a relaxed, steely sense of humour.'

While Sid France, once of Vickers Street, left the following eulogy in his *Clean Steps and White Pinnies* homage to old Grangetown:

What is indisputable, because it is my personal opinion, is that the Grangetown of the Eight Streets lives in my memory as a place where a baby could play unharmed in the street, where a woman or old person could walk, even along an unlit back-arch, without any modern fear of being mugged for a few coppers and where people did not steal from their own kind. Does such a town exist today?

It seems a fair question although the premise is maybe overstated. Like any community of its size, Grangetown had its share of troubles. A perusal of old newspapers reveals more than enough tragedies and misdemeanours. Nevertheless, it is clear that the eight streets of Grangetown became a different place than the one to which the local newspaper once suggested was no fit place to send its reporters.

The eight streets of Grangetown were clearly a melting pot. The people who inhabited them were all migrants from somewhere: desperate people hoping for a better life than the one they had left behind. They came from a range of backgrounds, mostly rural, and would have had found some of the customs and mores of their neighbours somewhat alien. It was an uneasy mix, and the situation, in the shadow of a steelworks on which their very livelihood depended, remote from their families and cultural foundations, was usually precarious. Nevertheless, despite the hardships, the men provided the labour to build one of the greatest industrial powers that the world had seen, while many of them gave their lives to king and country during two world wars. It is important, also not to forget the contribution of the women. They looked after the workers, raised their children, forged the relationships that made the people who lived in the eight streets a community and helped to keep the steelworks functioning whenever their country called upon them.

The Bolckow Industrial Estate, and the main road that links Middlesbrough with Redcar, occupy the space where the eight streets once stood. The industrial estate retains some of the old street names but, otherwise, all that is left are fond memories of people who once lived there – nostalgia for something that is lost. Soon, there will be nobody left to feel nostalgic even.

³¹ Grangetown in Times Past <http://grangetownintimespast.weebly.com/>

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