



## Robert “Bob” Turton (1886 -1965)

Bob Turton was a landlord of The Avenue Inn. He was certainly occupying the premises in 1939 when the Register was taken following the outbreak of war in September of that year. He was married to Mary Jane Turton (nee Kelly), born on 23/11/1885.

Turton was born on 28/4/1886 in the Davy Lamp pub in Kelloe. Perhaps it was this that led him to follow his future occupation. His father, William, was a miner.

Jack Turton (no relation), chair of Coxhoe Local History Society and friend of SLHS, informs us that the name Turton is common in East Hetton and across the East Durham coalfield. The family moved to Coxhoe where, in 1891, they were living in “Smokey Row” which gives some indication of the living conditions at the time. 1901 saw them living on Front Row, again in Coxhoe. Robert was listed as a driver in a coal mine at the age of just fourteen. He had two siblings, John, aged 19, and Mary, aged 16.

Bob and Mary lived in 3 Wylam Street in Bowburn in 1911 and in 1921 they were in Clarence Houses in Coxhoe. Robert was still a miner, but no children were listed. Precisely when the Turtons took control of The Avenue needs to be ascertained.



*Fig 1: Robert Turton outside The Avenue.*

Thanks to a member of SLHS, Stephen Pragnell, we have a photograph of Robert Turton standing proudly outside The Avenue, part of the Vaux brewing empire based in Sunderland. We cannot say for certain who the females are, but we must presume they are relatives of some sort.

There are a couple of things to note. The lamp on the left-hand side on the first floor is still there and can be seen behind the modern sign. The brewery was not shy of advertising its ownership of the pub. The windows lull customers in with “Vaux’s Ales” although the signs are on an acid etched background which would hide them from the passing public. This was a common feature in many public houses and is a tradition that stretched back to the Victorian era when attitudes towards alcohol consumption were quite different from today. It must also be borne in mind that Shincliffe Colliery contained many Methodists who would have found the consumption of alcohol offensive. There is a sign above the door which would have been illuminated in the evening. This would have been important at the time as the main A177 passed straight in front of the pub before the bypass was completed. The windows are in an art deco style. They would have been traditional sash windows when first built and indeed they have now been restored to this format.

The United bus timetable is also fixed to the wall. However, as Stephen Pragnell has informed us:

*“The buses stopped where the bus stops are now – across the road from the pub and at the end of Overman Street. People from Bowburn used to stand at the front door of the pub finishing their last drink whilst looking out for their bus coming around the corner at the top of High Street. When they saw their bus coming, they used to quickly down their drink, leave their glass on the outside window ledge and run like mad to the bus stop. After seeing people fumbling in their pockets whilst running and dropping loose change all over the place, I used to search the grass verge next to the bus stop for coins quite regularly. Tuppences and sixpences were quite common - I hit the jackpot if I found a shilling or a half crown!”*

Number 1 Avenue Street, just to the left, has been annexed by The Avenue and is used as part of the kitchen for food preparation and cooking.



*Fig 2: Bob Turton pulling pints in The Avenue*

Stephen Pragnell, via his siblings, Charles, and Mary, has kindly identified some of the people in the shot. John Parry, with his hat at a slightly jaunty angle, is on the left of the picture and lived at 12 Avenue Street. Jack Bellis, with his pint raised, is in front of him. He lived at 3 Overman Street with his parents, Charles, and Phoebe Bellis, who died in 1957 and 1959, respectively. Jack remained in Overman Street for a while before departing for the south Wales coalfield and thence to Kellingly Colliery in Yorkshire. Gordan Dunbar, hatless and raising his pint, is behind John Parry. He lived at the now demolished 12 Love Street. The man at the end of the bar with glasses, and staring at the camera, is Arthur Roberts from 3 Avenue Street. To Arthur's right, the man with the cap looking at the camera is Tommy Hood who lived at 2 Love Street. The woman next to Bob Turton is believed to be his partner, Olive Harrison. Olive was famous for selling ice-cream lollies from a window at the rear of the pub. The lady with the glasses could be Olive's sister. Olive had a daughter, Daphne.



*Fig 3: Charles Bellis enjoying a pint in The Avenue.*

*Charles Bellis was a miner and staunch trade unionist both before and after nationalisation.*

A comparison between the two photographs of outside and inside the pub indicates that they were taken on the same day. The two women are the same and they are wearing identical clothing. Bob Turton is also smartly dressed in his suit. Being an ex-miner would have given him much common ground with many of his customers who would have continued to be employed at the Bowburn Colliery and elsewhere.

If you have any information about the people highlighted in this piece, please do not hesitate to contact us at: [contact@slhs.uk](mailto:contact@slhs.uk).