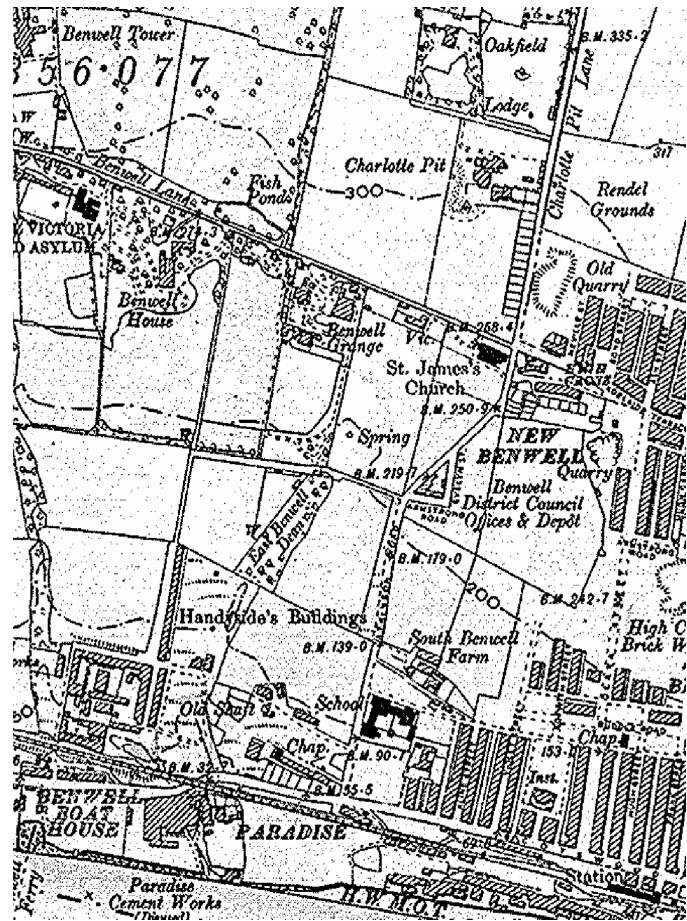
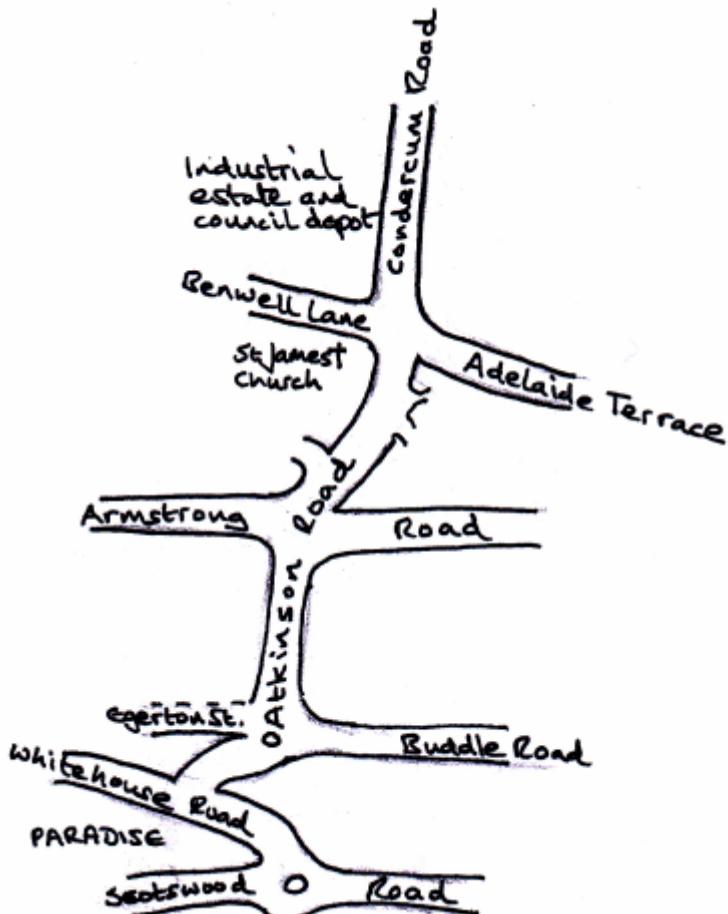


Benwell's Lost Coal Mines

A Walking Trail

Sketch plan: St. James' Church to Paradise

Compare: This area in 1899



Route description: The walk is on pavements but involves climbing back up a steep hill

This Walking Trail was produced by St James' Heritage & Environment Group as part of its *Men's Lives* project

Thanks to David Kidd for devising and illustrating the walk and to the Mining Institute for providing images

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Introduction

The walk follows the route of the waggonway which carried coal from the Edward, Charlotte, and Beaumont pits to the staithes on the riverbank where it was loaded into keels to be taken to colliers waiting at Shields. This map shows the waggonway as it was in 1809 when it had iron rails and a self-acting incline which used full waggons going down to the river to pull empty waggons back up the hill to the pits.



The walk starts on Benwell Lane at St James' Church. Condercum road which runs north from here was originally called Charlotte Pit Lane. It led to Charlotte Pit sunk in 1766. This was on the site now occupied by the council depot. Benwell Lane crossed the waggonway from Charlotte Pit on a bridge and the waggonway then ran south through St James' graveyard.

Walk south down Atkinson Road from the traffic lights where it meets Condercum Road, Benwell Lane and Adelaide Terrace (pictured here about 1902). Follow Atkinson Road down the hill by the side of the church to the next traffic lights. The waggonway was modernised by John Buddle in 1809 and the road is named after his nephew Robert Atkinson. Robert inherited Benwell Colliery from John Buddle in 1843. John Buddle and Robert Atkinson are both buried in St James' graveyard at Benwell.

At the traffic lights, cross over Armstrong Road and continue down Atkinson Road. The road now follows the line of the waggonway down to the bottom of the hill. The waggonway was out of use by 1835 when Benwell Colliery stopped supplying coal to the London market and instead supplied house coal to Newcastle.

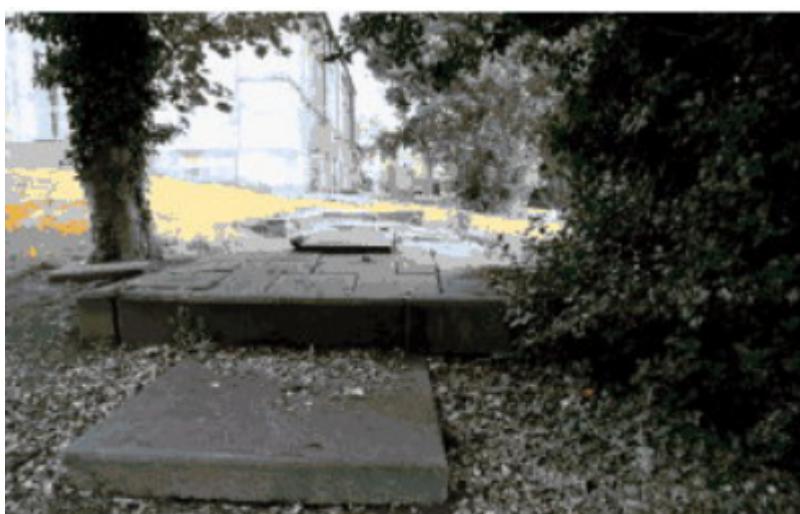




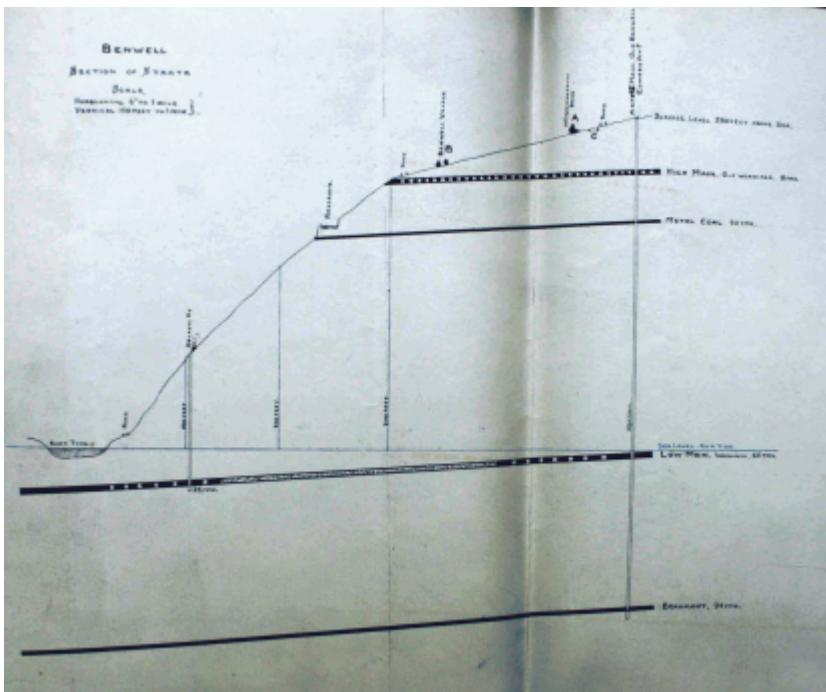
The Beaumont shaft of Benwell Colliery was on the right at the bottom of the hill. The site is shown on this extract from the 1937 Ordnance Survey map. Today the road south of Egerton Street curves around in an S-bend before it reaches Scotswood Road, whereas it previously ran in a straight line south crossing Scotswood Road to reach Paradise.



Beaumont Pit was abandoned in 1848 and the old shaft then known as the Paradise Pit was the cause of the Montagu Pit disaster in 1925 which cost the lives of 38 men and boys when miners at the Montagu View Pit broke into the old flooded workings in the Brockwell Seam. The plans of the old Beaumont Pit were in the Benwell Colliery offices but the owners of the Montagu Pit did not check them when they planned to extend the View Pit workings. This picture shows the Montagu Disaster memorial in Elswick Cemetery.



Now return to St James' Church to see the grave of John Buddle and Robert Atkinson near the side entrance to the church. Buddle was buried in the High Main seam which is near the surface here. Buddle's sister Ann, his lifelong companion, is also buried here.



Drawing from Buddle's papers showing cross-section of strata at Benwell with the High Main coal seam outcropping near St James' Church

In this drawing the vertical line at the right hand side cuts through the strata below the Edward pit on the surface and the horizontal lines represent the coal seams and the high tide level of the River Tyne.

In order, from the surface they are:-

High Main Coal Seam

Metal Coal Seam

High Tide Level of River Tyne

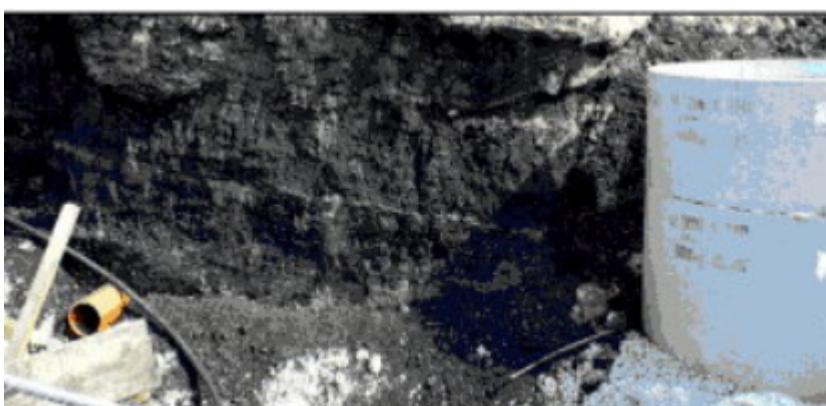
Low Main Coal Seam

Beaumont Coal Seam

Coal Seams at Benwell

The first coal to be mined at Benwell came from the High Main Seam. This six foot thick seam of good coal was worked by the Romans, but by the 17th century it was exhausted and miners found the Low Main or Benwell Main Seam near the river. In the 17th century the deeper Beaumont Seam, said to be named after its discoverer, was mined using "fire engines" (early steam engines) to pump water from workings deep under the river. Benwell coal made Newcastle rich at the time of the Civil War and the first railways in the world, wooden waggonways carrying coal from the pits to the river, were built here. By the beginning of the 19th century the most productive mines in the North were at places like Wallsend nearer the coast but it was the early mining at Benwell that made them possible. At Wallsend the High Main Seam is hundreds of feet below ground but John Buddle, the mining engineer and pioneering geologist who is buried at St James' Church, studied the coal seams at Benwell and used what he learned to understand the geology of the coalfield and lay the foundations of the great coal industry of the North East.

Coal mining finished in Benwell almost 80 years ago but there is still coal under your feet.



A coal seam exposed by builders in the Pendower Estate in September 2013.