

# Elswick through the years

## *In Maps and Pictures*

St James' Heritage & Environment Group  
in partnership with  
West Newcastle Picture History Collection



This book is the result of a joint project between St James' Heritage & Environment Group and West Newcastle Picture History Collection. It is based on an exhibition of maps and photographs displayed in venues across the west end during 2016/17. The images come from West Newcastle Picture History Collection's unique archive of over 20,000 photographs of West Newcastle from the 1850s to the present day.

### **Acknowledgements**

St James' Heritage & Environment Group and West Newcastle Picture History Collection are both wholly volunteer-run organisations. This book would not have been possible without the work of the many volunteers, past and present, who have collected photographs, carried out research on the history of this area, planned and curated exhibitions, and encouraged so many others to explore and enjoy the history of West Newcastle.

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## A Brief History of Elswick

Two hundred years ago Elswick was not part of Newcastle. It was a Township in its own right, and part of the County of Northumberland. In 1835 the Town of Newcastle expanded its boundaries beyond the medieval walls to include the streets of Westgate Township and the green fields of Elswick Township.

The earliest record of the name - then spelt Elstewyck - dates from 1292 when the area was owned by Tynemouth Priory. The Elswick estate had been part of the ancient Barony of Bolam, created after the Norman Conquest in the 11th century. It covered a much larger area than present day Elswick and included the island of Kings Meadow in the River Tyne and Arthurs Hill as far as the Nuns Moor.

In 1742 Elswick's 938 acres were purchased by John Hodgson and it was his descendants who demolished the small hamlet of Elswick Village and the old medieval hall in order to build the grand mansion of Elswick Hall. They also began to sell off parcels of land from the estate. In 1776 the land between Westgate Road and modern day Barrack Road was sold to George Stephenson, whose family then sold it to Isaac Cookson in 1826. It was Cookson who developed the first terraced streets, naming them after his sons John, Edward and William. He named his new housing estate after his eldest son - Arthur - hence Arthurs Hill.

In 1839 the southern 800 acres of Elswick, between Westgate Road and the river, were bought by Richard Grainger who had grandiose plans to develop the land as an industrial and residential suburb of Newcastle. However he was soon forced to abandon these plans and narrowly avoided bankruptcy. Others took over where Grainger had failed, and by the end of the 19th century the development of Elswick was almost complete.

By 1900, terraced housing covered almost the entire area. The population of Elswick increased from about 300 in 1801 to 59,165 in 1901. Scotswood Road had changed from a country lane to a thriving thoroughfare lined with homes, shops, pubs and factories. The riverside was filled with industries, notably Armstrong's huge factory which spread from Low Elswick as far west as Paradise in Benwell.

This book looks at the historical estate of Elswick bounded by Benwell in the west to Westgate in the east and from Kings Meadow in the south to the Nuns Moor in the north. It illustrates the development of Elswick over the 125 years between 1864 and 1989. The book is in four sections, each starting with an Ordnance Survey map giving a bird's eye view of the changing area, followed by a selection of photographs illustrating features of Elswick at different periods. A map at the end of the book shows the location of these features.

## Elswick in 1864

This map shows a largely rural Elswick with the main roads of Westgate Road, Elswick Road and Scotswood Road running between green fields. The biggest buildings are Elswick Hall and the Union Workhouse. Armstrong's factory can be seen at Low Elswick but it has not yet grown to dominate the riverside. Kings Meadow Island is visible in the middle of the Tyne.



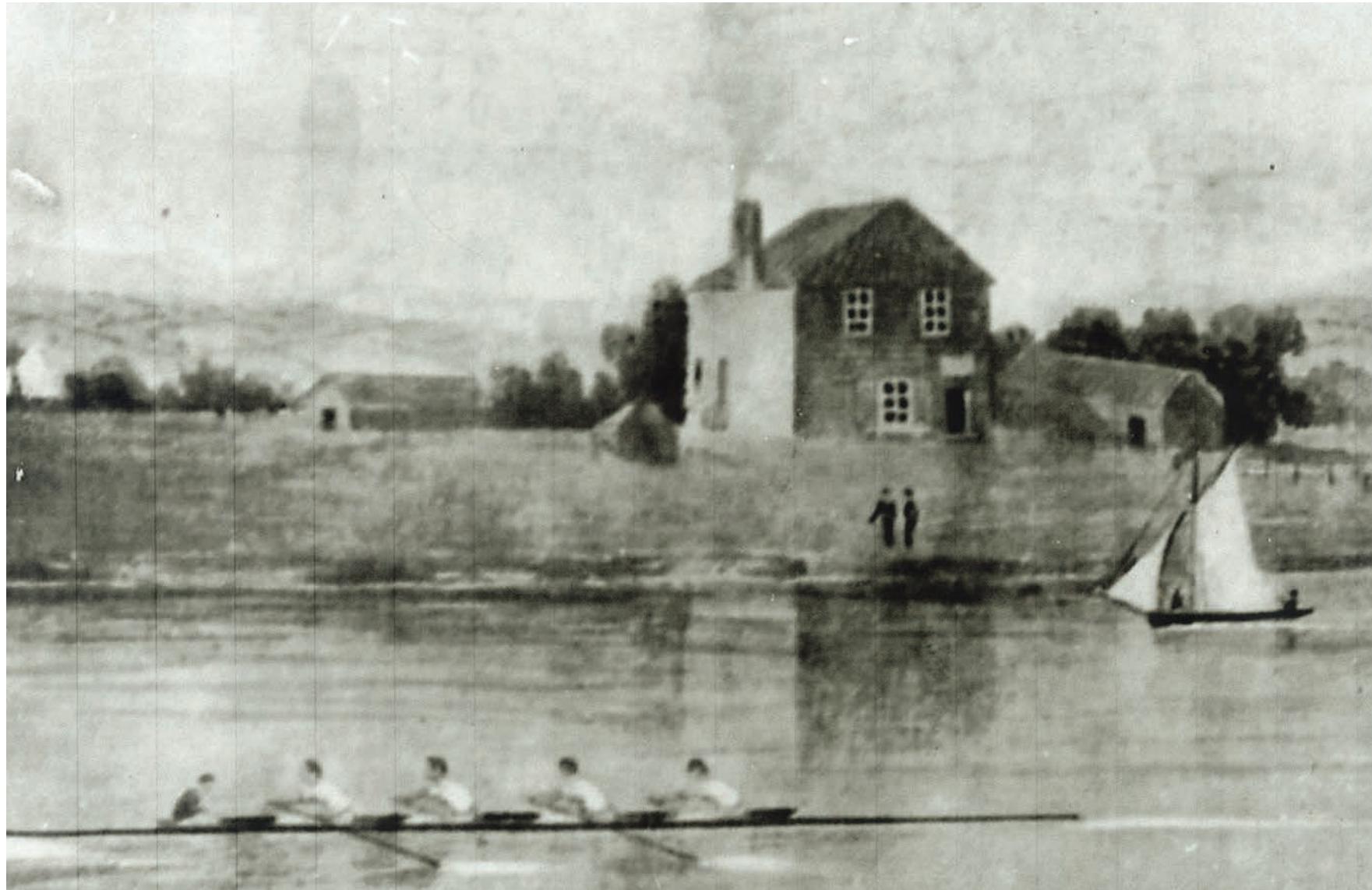
## 1. A view of Elswick



This painting by Thomas Hair, dated c1860, looks upriver to Elswick which is still mainly open country. The large island in the river is Kings Meadow, and the two small islands were known as the Clarence Islands. The original buildings

of Armstrong's factory are just visible to the left of the big tree. The spire in the centre background is thought to belong to St. Paul's Church.

## 2. Kings Meadow Island



This 1870 painting by an unknown artist shows Kings Meadow Island. A pub stood there called the Countess of Coventry. The island was approximately 30 acres in size, and lay in the river opposite what is now Newcastle Business Park.

To improve river navigation the Tyne Commissioners authorised the dredging of Kings Meadow and the neighbouring Clarence Islands in the 1880s.

### 3. Elswick Hall



Elswick Hall was built in 1810 on the site of an earlier medieval tower. With its extensive grounds, it also swallowed up Elswick village. The Hall and surrounding parkland were taken over by Newcastle Corporation in 1878 and opened to the public as a park and, for a time, as a sculpture gallery. This photograph was

taken from the Cruddas Park flats shortly before the Hall was demolished in 1978. Elswick Pool was built on the site of the Hall. The surrounding parkland remains a public park today.

#### 4. Elswick House



Elswick House, viewed here from the south in c1910, stood to the west of Elswick Hall. It may have been originally called Elswick West Villa. It was the home of Sir William Haswell Stephenson, a Lord Mayor of Newcastle and philanthropist, from the 1880s until his death in 1918. His gifts to Newcastle

included Elswick, Heaton and Walker Libraries, and several churches, notably the Bond Memorial Methodist Church on Adelaide Terrace. Afterwards the House became a children's home, and then St Anne's Convent School for Girls. It was demolished in 1984, and the Marie Curie Centre now stands on the site.

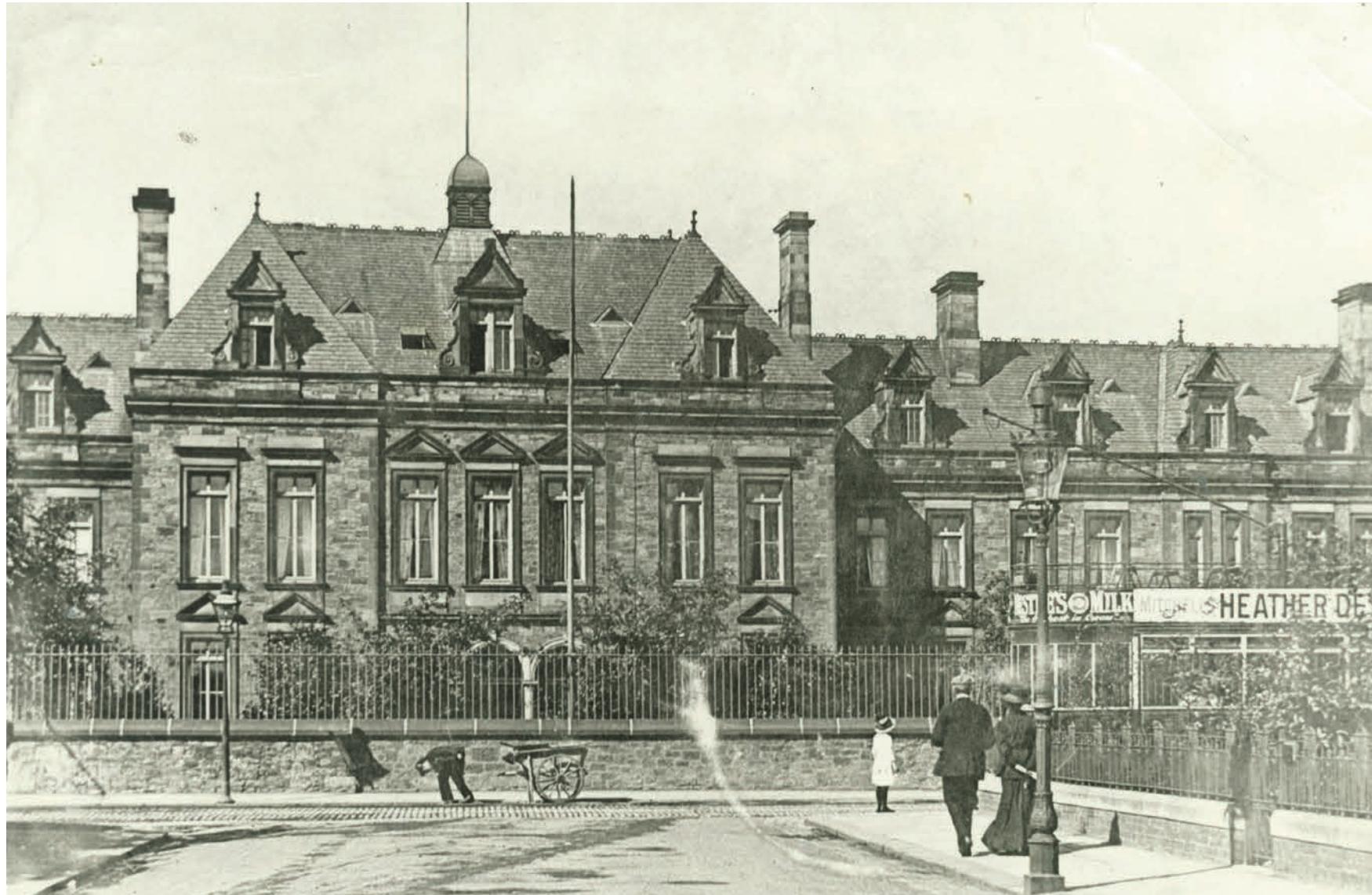
## 5. Elswick Mill



Elswick windmill was situated near Westgate Road at the top of Mill Lane to which it gave its name. The date of the mill's demolition is not known. A windmill had probably stood on this site for decades before the mid-19th century. This

photograph is one of the earliest images in the West Newcastle Picture History Collection. It is thought to date from 1856.

## 6. Union Workhouse (Newcastle General Hospital)



This complex of buildings began with the construction of the Union Workhouse in 1839. The original building, pictured here c1905, still stands today at the corner of Westgate Road and Brighton Grove. A hospital was built on the site in 1870 and, by 1921, the whole site became officially known as the Wingrove

Hospital. Following the creation of the National Health Service in 1948 the name changed to the Newcastle General Hospital.

## 7. North Elswick Hall



Situated north of the West Road, near present day Lewis Drive, North Elswick Hall was probably built in the 1830s. It was the home of the Milvain family between the 1850s and 1919, after whom Milvain Avenue was named. The Hall

was then sold to the Roman Catholic Diocese for use as a school. Initially St Aloysius School for Boys, it later became Sacred Heart Lower School.

## Elswick in 1899

By 1899 the residential expansion of Newcastle has encompassed Elswick, although the site of the future Grainger Park Estate and the area north of the workhouse on Westgate Road are still open fields. The eastern part of Elswick is covered by terraced streets whose orientation matches the field boundaries of earlier years. The layout of the streets south of Westgate Road contrasts with the strict grid pattern of those in Arthurs Hill. Kings Meadow Island no longer exists. Armstrong's factory now dominates the riverbanks.



## 8. The Gables / Hopedene



Situated at the corner of Elswick Road and Gloucester Terrace, The Gables was a Tudor-Gothic mansion typical of the grand residences being built in the mid-19th century for the wealthier inhabitants of the area. The Gables was the home of the Richardson family who owned the Elswick leatherworks. It was sold in 1919, becoming a private maternity hospital "for poor women". It was

later taken over by the Salvation Army, and run first as a maternity home under the name of Hopedene, and later as sheltered housing. The building was closed in 1975 and demolished a few years after this picture was taken in 1988.

## 9. Coal Mining in Elswick



North Elswick or Gallowgate Pit, situated near present day Pitt Street, is pictured here in the 1930s. The other pit still operating in Elswick at this period

was the Low Elswick Pit, situated near what is now Newcombe Street, which was connected to coal staithes on the Tyne by a tunnel under Scotswood Road.

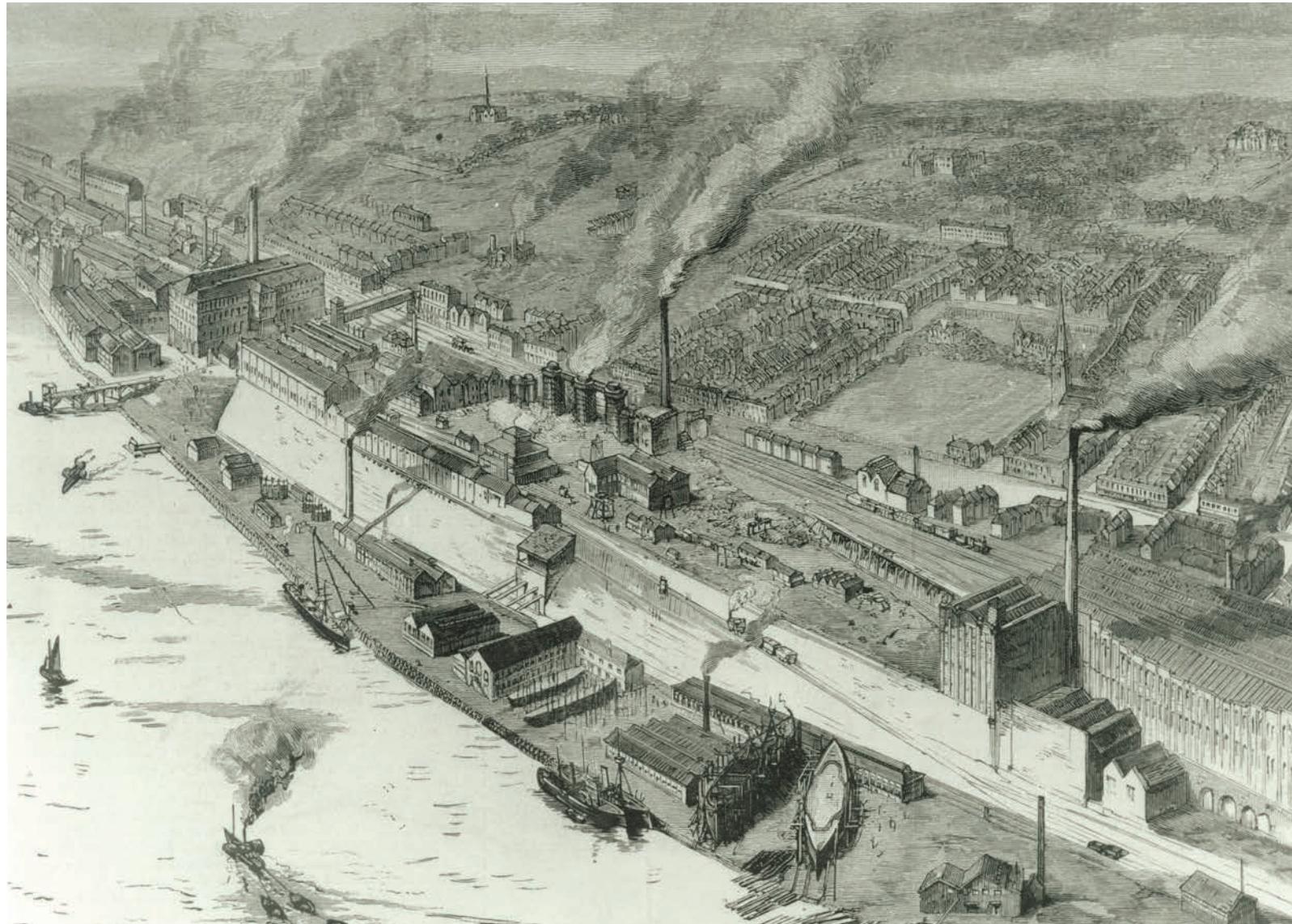
## 10. Richardson's Leather Works



This family business moved to Elswick, from the Gallowgate area of Newcastle in 1863. Pictured here c1900, the factory was located south of Scotswood Road. The Richardsons were Quakers and, as benevolent employers for their

time, built houses for their employees in nearby Shumac Street and Water Street. The factory closed in 1973.

## 11. Armstrong's Factory



Construction of this famous factory started in 1847 when William Armstrong and his partners purchased five and a half acres of riverside land, initially to manufacture hydraulic cranes. The company grew and diversified, and became for a period the biggest employer on Tyneside. This 1887 drawing shows the

factory with its new shipyard. One of the first ships to be built there can be seen standing on the stocks at the lower right of this picture. Elswick Hall is visible at the top right.

## 12. The Elswick Shipyard



By the end of the 19th century, Armstrong's Elswick works had become one of the world's most important manufacturers of warships and armaments. Following a merger with the Walker-based shipbuilders Mitchell's, a shipyard was opened at the Elswick site in 1884 concentrating mainly on building warships. With its own blast furnaces turning out high quality steel, the works now had the capacity to build and equip an entire warship from raw material to

finished product. This picture was probably taken from Kings Meadow before the island was dredged out of existence in the late 1880s to enable the passage of large ships. The site is now occupied by Newcastle Business Park. The spire that can be seen in the background is that of St. Stephen's Church in Low Elswick.

### 13. Wingrove House



Situated near present day Wingrove Road, Wingrove House was built in 1866 and was the home of the shipbuilder, John Wigham Richardson, a member of the same Quaker family whose main business was leather making. Richardson founded the Neptune shipyard at Walker in 1860, which later merged with Swan

Hunter's yard to become the most advanced shipbuilding facility in the world. Its ships included the Mauretania which held the Blue Riband of the Atlantic for 26 years. The House was demolished in the early 1900s.

## 14. Scotswood Road



SCOTSWOOD ROAD NEWCASTLE 5261 G.H.M.C

This picture of the eastern end of Scotswood Road was taken c1905. It looks eastwards towards the town centre. The Royal Oak pub, on the corner of Ivy

Street, is just visible on the left. Maiden Street is off to the right.

## Elswick in 1938

By 1938, buildings cover all the open spaces of Elswick. To the west, the boundary of Newcastle has been extended to include Benwell. The Union Workhouse is now a hospital and has expanded in size. Three of the former grand houses of Elswick have gone – Wingrove House, Elswick House and Elswick Lodge – and six remain, although only Elswick Dene House is still a private home. Armstrong's Elswick works is still growing. The two pits survive but will soon close.



## 15. Elswick from the air



©Historic England

This photograph taken in 1947 shows the extent of Elswick works and the rows of terraced houses which were home to so many of its workforce. The company is now known as Vickers-Armstrong, following a merger in 1927 making it one of the largest manufacturing employers in the country. The Tyne is still a

working river with several ships visible, while Scotswood Road is still a thriving thoroughfare in the heart of the community.

## 16. Edgeware Road



Edgeware Road ran from Elswick Road southwards past St John's Cemetery and then turned south-easterly down to Scotswood Road. This photograph dates from 1937, immediately prior to the demolition of the area. It shows the

junction with Scotswood Road. On the far right is the Forge Hammer, one of several pubs along Scotswood Road named after equipment or products linked with the Armstrong works.

## 17. Westmorland Road



The bend in the road is still recognisable today as is the Villa Victoria pub on the left, but that is all that remains of Westmorland Road as pictured here in 1957.

The right hand half of this site is now occupied by Newcastle College.

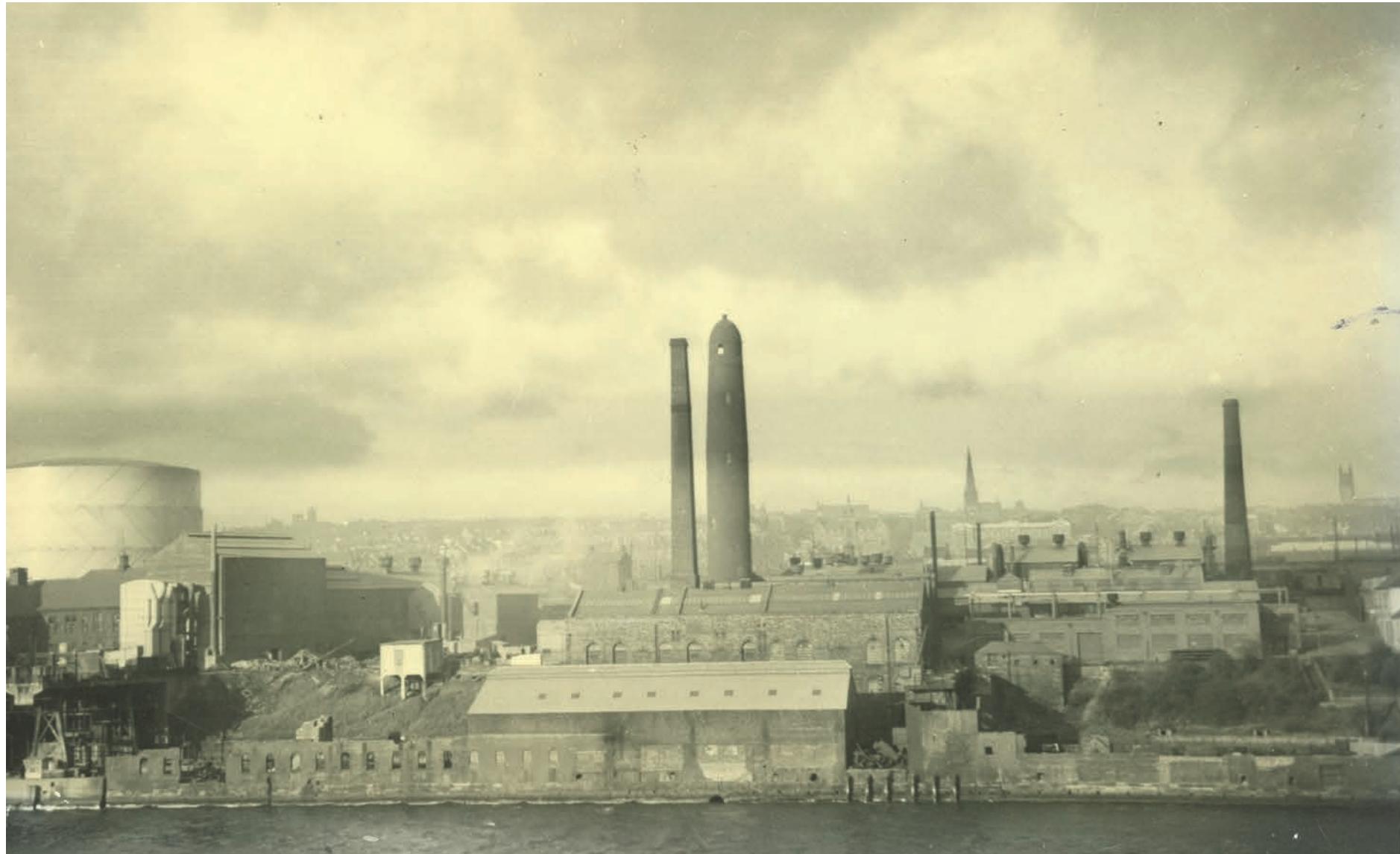
## 18. Scotswood Road



This picture, probably dating from the 1930s, shows the eastern end of Scotswood Road with Plummer Street visible off to the left. The large campus of Newcastle College now occupies much of the site to the north of here.

The identity of the big building in the distance, behind the telegraph pole, is unknown.

## 19. Elswick Lead Works



This business was founded in 1778. It originally smelted ore from Weardale and Teesdale on a site adjacent to the old Redheugh Bridge. When the factory closed in the 1960s, the site was cleared. The famous shot tower (visible in the centre of

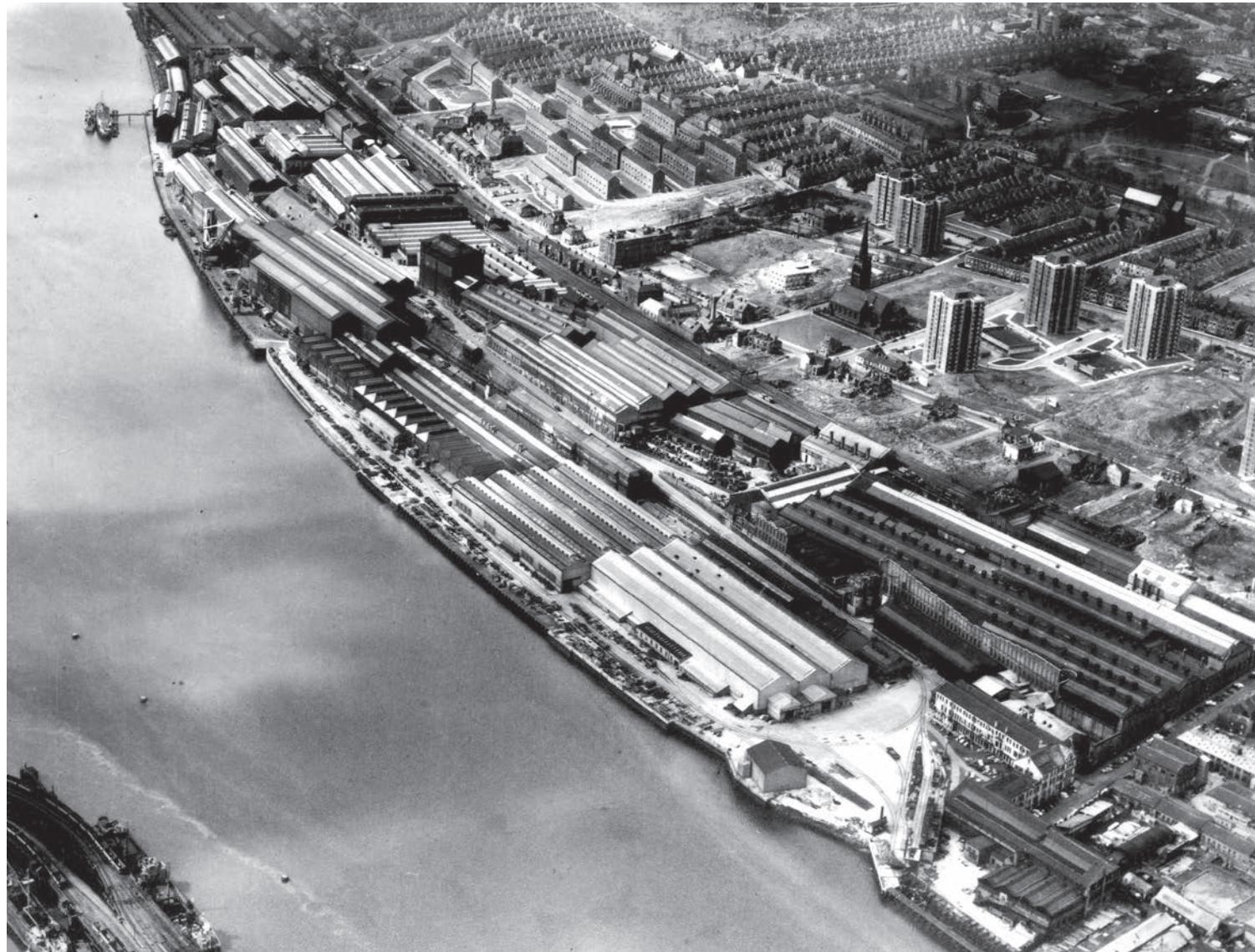
this 1956 photograph) partially collapsed during the site clearance and had to be "bandaged" with cables by the Fire Service to allow contractors to carry out a safe demolition.

## Elswick in 1989

This map shows the impact of the major house clearances of the 1960s and 1970s. Many of the old terraces of eastern and southern Elswick have gone, and new homes have sprung up. Of Elswick's grand houses, the only buildings to survive are North Elswick Hall, Elswick Dene House and Ashfield House. Vickers-Armstrong's Elswick factory has closed but the new business park that will replace it has not yet been built. Other factories to have closed in recent decades include the leatherworks and leadworks. The pits are long gone. Scotswood Road is no longer a place where people live and work but a fast route into the city for commuters. The railway line that ran east-west just below Scotswood Road has gone also.



## 20. Elswick from the air, 1970



The Vickers-Armstrong factory can still be seen in this 1970 aerial photograph, although it was to close completely within the next ten years. The areas alongside Scotswood Road have been cleared and the terraced streets of

Elswick have largely been replaced by high-rise flats and modern housing estates. St. Stephen's Church is visible in the centre of the picture. Today only the steeple remains, the rest of the church having been demolished.

## 21. Elswick Dene House



Built in the 1850s to a John Dobson design, this property was home to the Cruddas family throughout the second half of the 19th century. After that, the family retained ownership of the house until 1946 but rarely stayed there. George Cruddas was a founding partner with William Armstrong in the Elswick factory, and his son WD Cruddas followed in his footsteps as controller of the

company's financial affairs. When the family left Elswick Dene House, it passed to the Church Army as a home for ex-servicemen and other older people. Later it was taken over by the Cyrenians to provide accommodation and support for homeless people. Elswick Dene House survived the mass clearance programmes and still stands today, renamed Virginia House.

## 22. Old and New



This 1962 photograph, taken from south of Westmorland Road, shows the last remaining building in an area from which all the houses have been cleared. A fish and chip shop on Bell Terrace survives. Behind it can be seen three of

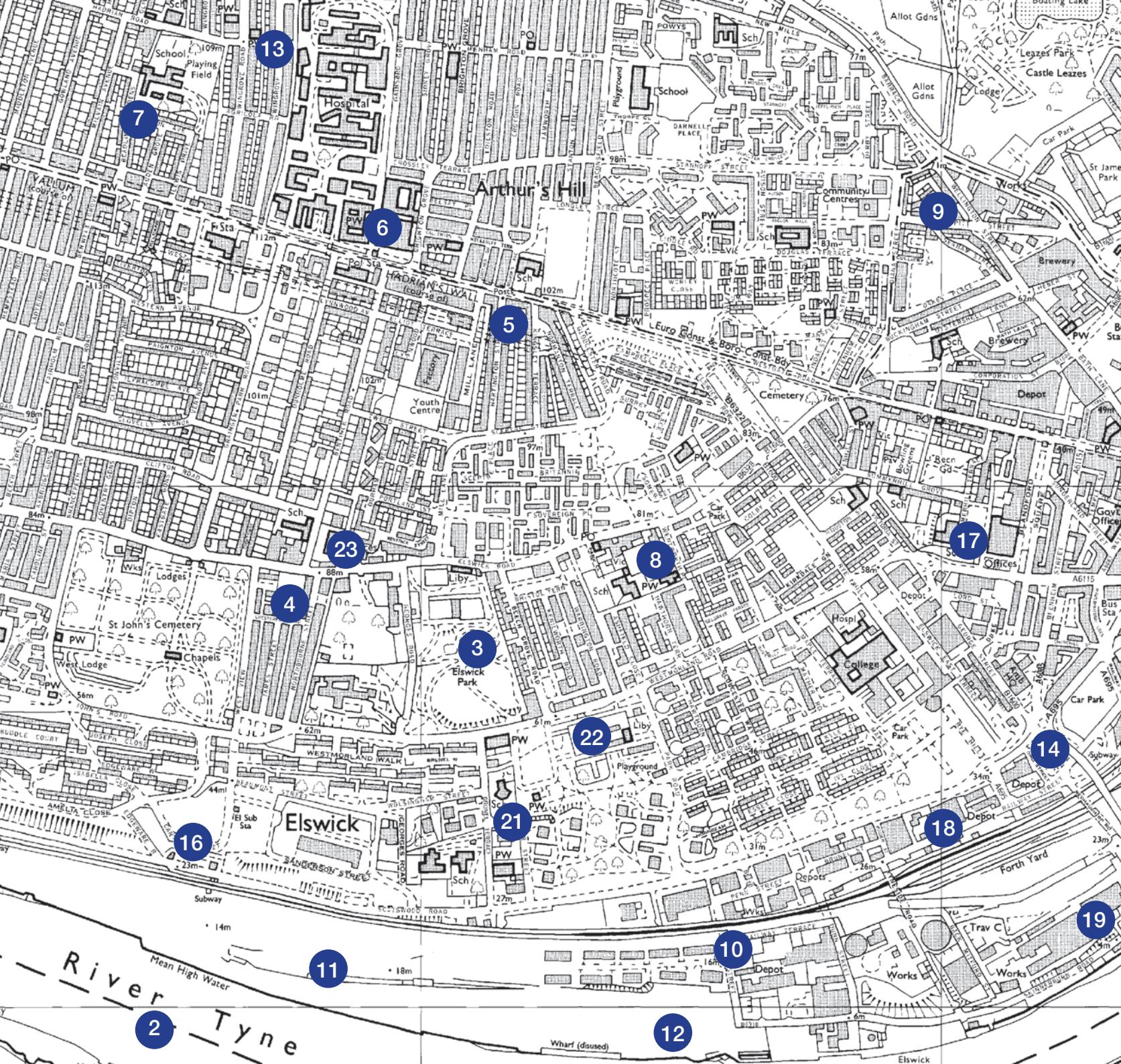
the newly built Cruddas Park tower blocks. There were originally ten blocks of these high-rise flats in all, but only five still stand today.

## 23. Elswick Road



This is the Crown Hotel, on the north side of Elswick Road near the junction with Bentinck Road, pictured in 1979. The pub was demolished in the mid-1990s and the site remains undeveloped today.

Many of the distinctive buildings of Elswick Road were demolished in the last quarter of the 20th century, including Elswick Road Methodist Church (1978), the John Knox Presbyterian Church (1983) and Elswick Road School (1984).



2. Kings Meadow Island
3. Elswick Hall
4. Elswick House
5. Elswick Mill
6. Union Workhouse
7. North Elswick Hall
8. The Gables / Hopedene
9. North Elswick Pit
10. Richardson's Leather Works
11. Armstrong's Factory
12. The Elswick Shipyard
13. Wingrove House
14. Scotswood Road
15. Elswick Dene House
16. Edgware Road
17. Westmorland Road
18. Scotswood Road
19. Elswick Lead Works
20. Bell Terrace
21. Elswick Road
22. Elswick
23. Elswick

# Elswick through the years

## In Maps and Pictures

This book uses maps and photographs to trace the development of Elswick through the 125 years from 1864 to 1989. During this period Elswick had changed from a largely rural area to become a densely populated and industrialised suburb of Newcastle. Once at the forefront of economic growth and home to some of the city's most influential families, the area began to experience economic decline, major physical transformation and population loss during the 20th century.

**Elswick through the years** is a joint project between two community organisations: St James' Heritage & Environment Group and West Newcastle Picture History Collection.



Toll House on Scotswood Road, c1900



Scotswood Road, 1956



Ashfield House, 1930

### Did you know that:

1. There was a thoroughfare in Elswick called "Curds and Cream Road" running along the riverside and inside Armstrong's factory?
2. Between 1887 and 1927 there was a women's prison in Elswick? Known as the Penitentiary, it was housed in Wansbeck Villa. The building still stands today on Elswick Road at the north west corner of St John's Cemetery.

### St James' Heritage & Environment Group

St James' Heritage & Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation that provides activities and resources for people of all ages to explore and celebrate the history of the west end of Newcastle, including maintaining and improving the historic graveyard of St James' in Benwell. This book is one of a series of local history publications by the Heritage & Environment Group.

Visit: Tuesdays between 1-4pm at St James' Church, Benwell Lane, NE15 6RR

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74 Adelaide Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9JN

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### West Newcastle Picture History Collection

West Newcastle Picture History Collection holds a treasure trove of over 20,000 photographs of West Newcastle from the 1850s to the present day. The group continues to expand its collection through gifts and loans from the public and by actively documenting changes as they happen.

Visit: Mondays 10am to 4pm  
at West End Library, Condercum Road, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9JH

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