

Benwell & Scotswood

in the early 20th century



St James' Heritage & Environment Group
Local History Series



BEFORE WORLD WAR ONE



Extract from 1898-99 Ordnance Survey map



Comparison of these maps shows how Benwell and Scotswood were transformed from semi-rural villages into built-up suburbs of Newcastle in less than 40 years.

The early years of the 20th century saw the completion of the transformation of Benwell and Scotswood from outlying semi-rural areas into fully urbanised suburbs of the City of Newcastle. At the end of the 19th century most of the 1,305 acres of Benwell and Scotswood were still covered by open fields and country lanes. The former Township of Benwell was part of an Urban District Council within the County of Northumberland, together with neighbouring Fenham. The area was not absorbed into the expanding City of Newcastle until 1904.



By 1900 a variety of industrial activities had spread across much of the land on the riverside, notably Armstrong's vast engineering and armaments works. As well as the factories, there were coal mines and quarries. The Charlotte Pit can be seen behind this quarry in Benwell Lane.

In 1900 the population of Benwell was centred on Old Benwell Village and its surrounding farms and mansions. These big houses and adjoining gardens and grounds occupied the best drained and most pleasantly situated land in Benwell. They were chosen as homes for the wealthy precisely because of the views and clean air offered by their elevated position and prevailing westerly winds. Here lived a small but close-knit community of successful business families, linked by class and wealth, serviced by a larger community of tradesmen, gardeners and domestic servants, many of whom lived in the mansions and houses that provided their employment. There were also some groups of dwellings scattered across the area, usually associated with coal mines and of a miserably poor quality. The small population of Scotswood was mainly concentrated near the riverside in mean dwellings adjacent to the pits and factories, with a scattering of grander houses belonging to wealthier families. To the west and north of the area lay the open fields and copses of trees that belonged to large farms such as Gowlands, Thorn Tree, and Benwell West Farm.

By 1900 this landscape was already under threat from the rapid expansion of industry and the westward sprawl of Newcastle's urban development. The land along the banks of the Tyne from the city centre westwards to Scotswood was by then almost wholly developed for industry. A mixture of older industries such as brick works, colour works and collieries jostled with newer factories such as the recently opened ordnance works of Armstrong Whitworth at Scotswood. The demand for labour associated with this industrial growth had already prompted some housing development. By now several new streets of terraced housing filled the slopes of the lower part of South Benwell, while to the north the area now known as New Benwell was growing up immediately around Adelaide Terrace. First to be developed were the streets north of Adelaide Terrace, followed by the dozen or so terraced streets on the steep slopes immediately above Scotswood Road. Soon afterwards, housing development began south of Adelaide Terrace in what became known as the High Cross area. Housing development was slower to happen in Scotswood, but the street plans had already been laid down for the cluster of new terraces about to be built in the south of the area.

However, the scale of housing development in Benwell and Scotswood was wholly inadequate to meet local needs. The continuing influx of factory workers would exacerbate the problem, resulting in levels of overcrowding and poor sanitation that contrasted starkly with the grand homes of the wealthy. In July 1914 one observer venturing westward from Newcastle described "the dirt and ugliness of such a street as this Scotswood Road" where there are side-streets that "take the cake" for unsightliness.



Scotswood Road at its junction with Atkinson Road, c1900. Note the unpaved nature of this major highway.



The big estates

John Buddle and Richard Grainger purchased large tracts of land in the west end of Newcastle in the 19th century in the course of pursuing their business interests. These investment decisions helped to shape the area's future development. Both men are buried in St James' Graveyard in Benwell.

As the urban area of Newcastle gradually spread westwards from the town, the potential value of land in Benwell and Scotswood became apparent. A vision of the future was provided to the east of Benwell where the 700 acre Elswick Estate, which had been bought by Richard Grainger in 1839 as a speculative investment, had already been largely filled with rows of terraced housing by the end of the 19th century.

The two large private estates that shaped the pattern of housing in Benwell and Scotswood were the South Benwell Estate and the Blackett-Ord Estate. The 108 acre South Benwell Estate had been bought by the mining engineer and coal owner John Buddle. The South Benwell Estate covered the whole area from Adelaide Terrace in the north to Scotswood Road in the south, and adjoined the western boundary of the Elswick Estate. Buddle's interest was mainly in the coal seams that ran beneath the surface, but over time the land itself increased in value as potential building sites. After Buddle died in 1843, no building took place over the next 40 years, although a section of the land was sold to St James' Church in order to extend the graveyard. Then in 1883 plans were announced for "A new town in Elswick". The estate was owned by Buddle's grand-nephew Frank Buddle Atkinson but, because of his young age, his affairs were managed by two trustees. These men - William Armstrong, owner of the big engineering and armaments factory on the riverside at Elswick, and Benjamin Browne, probably the most influential of the engineering employers on the Tyne - must have been acutely aware of the shortage of housing for the growing industrial workforce, not to mention the increasing value of the estate's land. The following 20 years saw a burst of house-building activity here.

The Blackett-Ord Estate, owned by the Ord family of Fenham Hall, covered a huge area of land bounded on the west by Denton Burn and the south by Scotswood Road, and including Scotswood as well as Fenham and Cowgate. Apart from the small cluster of terraces overlooking the bridge, little housing development took place in the Scotswood part of the estate before the First World War, but in the interwar period it became a major source of land for the new tenures of council housing and owner-occupation.

John Buddle



Richard Grainger

A housing crisis

When Benwell and Scotswood became part of the City of Newcastle in 1904 the population density was not excessive when compared to other parts of the city. However, this masked a number of deep-seated problems relating to the regulation of housing and public health.

The Newcastle Health Report for 1904 noted that in Benwell a number of the dairy and associated milk suppliers had premises "in an unsatisfactory condition" and would have to be dealt with to improve food hygiene. A report of 1905 by the Newcastle Inspector of Nuisances noted that in Benwell and Scotswood at least 274 tenements and 414 common yards and courts were inspected by health officials because they were deemed to be causing a nuisance. By inference, these posed a threat to public health. In 1908, a number of basement dwellings on Scotswood Road were compulsorily closed and West Pit Cottages (pictured here in 1902) at Paradise were made habitable through repairs and improvements.



Perhaps the most striking feature of the area's housing situation was the great contrast between the living conditions of the wealthy families in the big houses and those of most of their poorer neighbours in areas such as Paradise. Aside from the poor quality of much local housing, there was an acute shortage of accommodation for ordinary working people. There was an obvious need to increase the number of new houses, especially as some of the older properties no longer met even the most basic public health standards.

Wealth and poverty

This is the northern wing of Condercum Square, at the junction of Condercum Road and the West Road, pictured in 1900. Condercum Square was one of the worst examples of poor quality housing in Benwell. It was a collection of cottage dwellings at the top of Charlotte Pit Lane (as Condercum Road was then called). In 1901 the census had recorded 29 people living in eight separate dwellings at Condercum Square, the number of rooms per dwelling being just two. The occupants included domestic servants and coal miners. Ten years later, the occupants included a family of eight living in just two rooms; the head of the household was a gardener and the only other wage earner was his eldest daughter aged 20 who was employed as a domestic at a café.



By contrast, the adjoining property, Spring Bank Villa, was a big house with extensive gardens attached. It was home to seven people, comprising the family of building contractor David Brims and his live-in cook and housemaid. Until land formerly used as gardens or grounds attached to big houses came onto the market, there was little available land on which to build new housing for the working class. By the time of the Second World War, however, most of the big houses were no longer family homes.

New homes

The period between 1900 and the start of the war saw a fall in house-building in Newcastle as a whole, as rising building costs exceeded people's ability to pay the rents required to make this a profitable investment. The situation was made worse by the clearance of older housing in the town and along Scotswood Road to make way for commercial and industrial development. The housing shortage was a major issue in Newcastle, prompting heated debates about how to tackle it. Legislation was already in place enabling councils to build houses, but few were built in Newcastle during this time. It was not until after the war, with the availability of subsidies from central government and faced with intense public pressure, that the council started to take seriously the need to provide homes themselves rather than rely on private investors.

New housing continued to be developed in Benwell and Scotswood, but at a much slower rate than in the last quarter of the 19th century. Some additional land had become available, notably on the site of the former Benwell Grove estate, but in total only 430 dwellings were built between 1905 and 1913. Most of these were pairs of Tyneside flats which offered a way to provide more homes at a lower cost.

As demand for labour in the booming industries along the riverside continued to grow, a serious housing shortage was developing. The main obstacle to house-building locally was the shortage of available land. Clearly there was plenty of undeveloped land, but this mainly comprised large private estates controlled by influential individuals with an astute business sense. There were also several smaller estates, most of which were the grounds surrounding the mansions and big houses.



Whitfield Rd was one of several streets built just below Armstrong Road in Scotswood in the first decade of the 20th century. Although they were not completed until the 1900s, the layout of the streets is already visible on the 1898-99 OS map. In Benwell, Caroline and Maria Streets to the east of High Cross were also built during the 1900s.



Even where new housing was built, it was not usually the poorest families who benefited.

One of the early residents of the North Benwell Terraces was John Atkinson Pendlington who lived in Fairholm Road. He was a successful engineer and businessman who was the founder of the Tyneside Supply Company which later became the British Electrical and Manufacturing Company of Newcastle and London.

Pendlington also had a passion for cricket and is famous for inventing the Linear Method of scoring used in first-class cricket until the computer age.

The North Benwell terraces

The earliest streets built immediately to the north of Adelaide Terrace dated from the 1870s. Gill Street, Bond Street, Ash Street, Cochran Street, Larch Street and Elm Street were known as New Benwell. In 1900, the sale of the large Benwell Grove estate had released land for new housing to the north of this area. All the streets in the area bounded by Condercum Road, Fairholm Road and the West Road were laid out on this estate. By 1914, Colston Street, Farndale Road and Hampstead Road were almost completely filled with homes, and building was underway in adjacent streets as far east as Wellfield Road. This extract from a 1913 map shows the development of New Benwell at this period.

Fairholm Road marked the old boundary between Benwell and Newcastle. When the area became part of Newcastle, the terraces of Tyneside flats built here benefited from byelaws and public health regulations that made these streets amongst the best quality housing in Benwell. For this reason, the rents were beyond the means of most working class families at that time.

The photographs below illustrate contrasting styles of property between the earlier streets such as Colston Street (pictured above) built before 1914, and Strathmore Crescent (below), which was completed after the Great War.



Creating a community



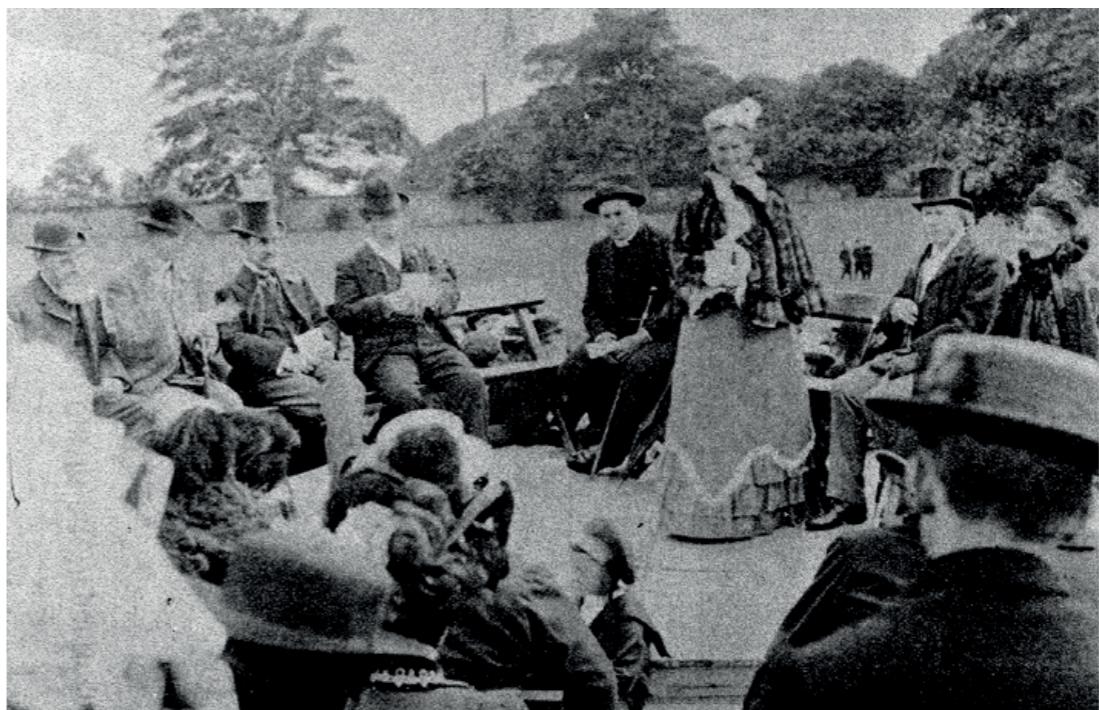
The growing population needed more than homes. Facilities such as shops, schools, churches, parks and libraries sprang up across the area. At the heart of New Benwell lay Adelaide Terrace (pictured above at the beginning of the 20th century). With its diverse range of shops and services, it was a well established feature of the area by 1900. By 1910 it included a large Co-operative Society store, as well as independent stationers, fruiterers, grocers, butchers, confectioners, drapers, milliners, pharmacists, boot and shoe suppliers and a branch of Lloyds Bank. Public houses, chapels and churches further enhanced this street's character as one of the busiest in Benwell.



Scotswood Road, pictured here in 1905, ran from Newcastle to Scotswood, parallel with the river. To the north was a dense residential area, while the south side was lined with factories such as Armstrong's engineering works. Scotswood Road served as the main shopping area for South Benwell, and was also famous for its pubs, most of which had names such as The Gun, The Rifle and The Hydraulic Crane which were connected with the adjacent industries.



During this period new government laws led to the mass provision of elementary education for children. In the decades leading up to the First World War seven new schools were built in Benwell and Scotswood. The first to be completed were Delaval School and South Benwell School both of which opened in 1893. The photograph above dates from the early days of South Benwell School.



Hodgkin Park had previously been the garden of Benwell Dene House, home of the Hodgkin family. Mrs Hodgkin is pictured here at the opening ceremony in 1899. The lower part of the park was added in 1906. The park had a bowling green, a bandstand, tennis court and other facilities.



Canning Street School opened in April 1903. It was one of the first developments built on the former Benwell Grove estate which was developed for terraced housing and flats from 1904 onwards. On Saturday 18th April, the new school was "thrown open to the public for inspection", giving parents from the area an opportunity to view the classrooms to be occupied by the 385 pupils enrolled on Tuesday 21st April. The school was built in response to the growing number of young families moving into the area. The Head Teacher recorded as early as 11th May that "the school is filling very rapidly. I now have 472 children on the books". Four years later, a visit by local councillors acknowledged the difficulty of growing demand for places, and the school logbook for 29th April 1907 recorded that "applications are made almost daily for admission which has to be refused".



This photograph of the church cricket team was taken in St James' Graveyard prior to 1910. In this period churches were very important to the social life of the community as well as being places of worship. St James' Church had several sports clubs as well as choirs, youth clubs and other groups. This church was built in 1833 when there were only about a thousand people living in Benwell, but the period leading up to the First World War saw many new churches set up in the area as the population grew.



Benwell Library opened in 1908. It was paid for by the businessman and philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, and had the distinctive features of a Carnegie Library - a light above the door representing the light of knowledge, with steps leading up to it. This was the first library in Newcastle where people were allowed to look at the books and choose what they wanted to borrow.



The imposing stone building of the Bond Methodist Church opened on Adelaide Terrace in 1899. It replaced a previous "iron chapel" – a building made out of prefabricated parts supplied in kit form. This method of setting up a church quickly and cheaply was common in this period.

DURING THE FIRST WORLD WAR

The First World War had a huge impact on Benwell and Scotswood. Many residents went away to fight, but not all returned home. The west end of Newcastle was an important centre for the manufacture of warships and armaments, and thousands of additional workers were recruited to work in the great factories along the riverside. Even children were affected as school buildings were commandeered for war purposes. Other local buildings found new uses such as hospitals and detention centres. Everyday life was disrupted, sometimes in ways that belied the myths of a patriotic people pulling together for the good of the nation.

Casualties of war

There was intense public pressure on people to volunteer to serve in the military. As part of the effort to boost recruitment to the armed forces, the Newcastle newspapers ran regular stories about "Patriotic Northern Families", celebrating families who had several members on active service. Among these were the Armstrong family of Cochran Street, Benwell, all five of whose adult sons joined up in 1914, and the Preece family of Violet Street, South Benwell, whose two sons and daughter served in the war. In the early stages of the war, the local newspapers carried news of the deaths of individual local men, but soon the casualties were so numerous that there was not room to report them all.

Thousands of local people were on active service during the First World War. Many died as a result, and many of those who returned home suffered physical or mental damage that affected the rest of their lives and had a lasting impact on their families.



Many of those who died are commemorated on war memorials such as this one for the parish of Scotswood. It was originally next to Denton Road Co-op. In the 1920s it was moved to its present position in the grounds of St Margaret's Church, Scotswood.



before joining the Northumberland Fusiliers. His brother David also joined up to fight in the war. He was gassed, but survived and became a successful builder.

The war memorial for Benwell parish is carved in oak panels inside the baptistery of St James' Church. One of the names on the war memorial is that of Robert Alexander who was killed in action in 1916 at the age of 25. His death had a big effect on his family because Robert and his sister Mary had looked after their brothers and sisters after the early death of their parents. The family lived in South Benwell. Robert worked as a brickyard labourer



The graveyard at St James' Church on Benwell Lane contains several memorials to people who died as a result of active service in the First World War, including 18 official Commonwealth War Graves and 23 names inscribed on family graves. One such is Thomas Thirlwell, the third son of Henry and Mary Thirlwell who lived in Benwell Old House, off Benwell Lane. Thomas Thirlwell died in France in 1917 while trying to rescue a group of men who had been trapped in a tunnel by enemy gas. In spite of wearing a mask, Thomas was affected by the gas and later died. He had been a colliery mine manager in Wallsend before the war, which was probably why he was put on tunnelling duties. A captain with the Royal Engineers, Thomas was awarded the Croix de Guerre for his bravery. A letter sent to his mother said, "a more gallant death no-one could have died."



Charles and James Bell lived in South View, Paradise. Both brothers joined up to fight in the war but only one came home. Charles, the elder of the two, had been an apprentice working at Armstrong's factory like his father and grandfather before him. At the age of 18 he joined the Royal Naval Volunteer Reserve. He was killed in action during the Gallipoli campaign in May 1915. His brother James joined the Seaforth Highlanders and was badly wounded fighting in the Mesopotamia campaign during 1916-17. He survived but had bullet fragments in his chest for the rest of his life.



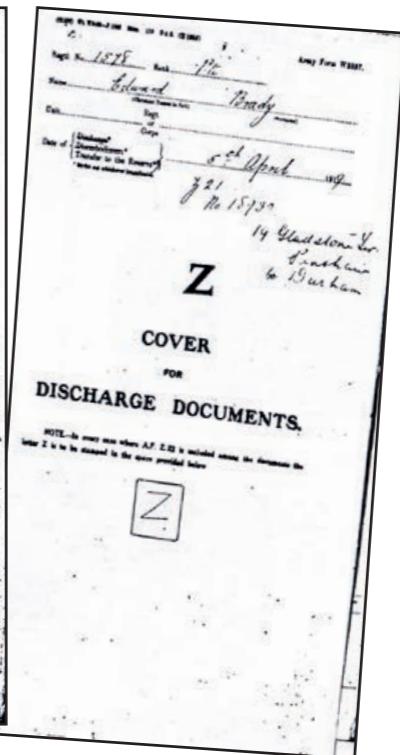
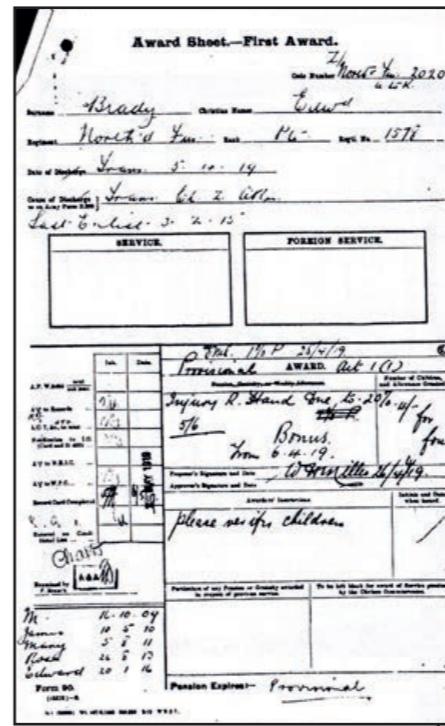
Samuel Willis was one of several young men who lied about their age in order to join the army. The military authorities usually chose to accept their word even when the boys were clearly younger than they claimed. Samuel lived with his family in Condercum Road and worked as a miner. He joined the Machine Gun Corps at the age of 17, claiming to be 19 years old. At this time he was a little over five feet tall and looked younger than his real age. Samuel was killed in France in September 1918.



John Ritchie of Maria Street, Benwell, died in January 1915 when the battleship HMS Formidable sank. Before joining the Royal Navy he had been an apprentice engineer at Armstrong's works, and he worked in the engine rooms of the ship. HMS Formidable was hit by a torpedo from a German submarine and sank, killing 547 members of the crew of 780 men.



George Routledge, a resident of Buddle Road, joined the army during a drinking binge one evening. Under pressure from his sister Lizzie, he returned the next day to explain that he was actually too old for active service. However, the army refused to release him, and he served in Northern Ireland for the remainder of the war. This card, which was made in France, was sent by George to his family in Benwell. The message reads: "from George to Brother John and Lizzie wishing you a merry Christmas and a happy New Year!"



Edward Brady, a miner by trade, enlisted in 1915. He served as a stretcher bearer with the Tyneside Scottish on the Western Front, and was involved in some of the worst battles of the war, being wounded on one occasion. In 1918 he was taken prisoner by the Germans and spent nine months in captivity living in appalling conditions in a camp. Edward finally returned home in December 1918.



Elizabeth Robinson died of malaria in July 1919 in Basra, Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq), where she was serving as a nurse in a military hospital with the Territorial Force Nursing Service. Elizabeth had spent her childhood in Benwell, living first in the lodge of Benwell Old House where her father worked as a gardener. This 1902 photograph shows the entrance to Benwell Old House from Benwell Lane. After the death of her father, the family moved to Neville Street (off Adelaide Terrace) and later to Ethel Street. Elizabeth became a hospital nurse, working in several different London hospitals, before signing up in November 1916 "to serve at home or abroad as a nurse to His Majesty's Forces". A letter sent by her sister in 1920 to the Under Secretary of State explains that "As my sister shared with me the responsibility of keeping a home for my widowed mother and myself her death is a great loss to us financially at home".



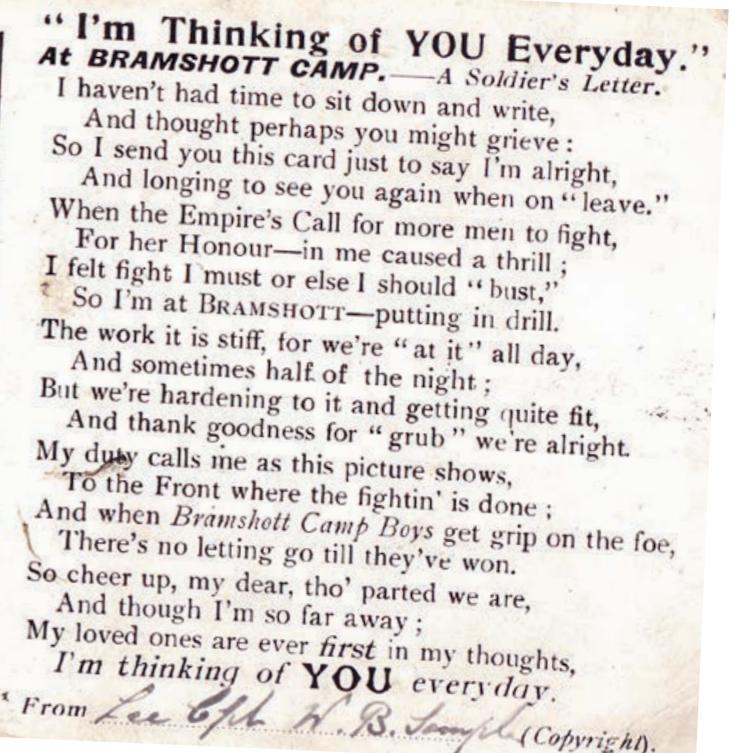
Geoffrey Buddle Atkinson is commemorated on a brass plaque inside St James' Church. He was related to the famous mining engineer John Buddle who owned Benwell Colliery and donated the land on which St James' Church and churchyard were built. Buddle Atkinson died in June 1915 at the age of 21 during the Gallipoli campaign. This campaign claimed the lives of about 45,000 men from Britain and other Commonwealth countries.



During the war, St James' Church sent Christmas and Easter cards to everyone from the area who was on active service, wrote to their families at home and sent parcels to prisoners.



This plaque commemorates William Stanley who served in the Hawke Battalion, Royal Naval Division. He was killed in action at the battle of Arras in April 1917 at the age of 19. The plaque states: "he died for freedom and honour". William lived in Green Street (formerly known as Edward Street) in Scotswood with his mother Mary, his father Thomas, who had been a hewer in a coalmine, and three sisters.

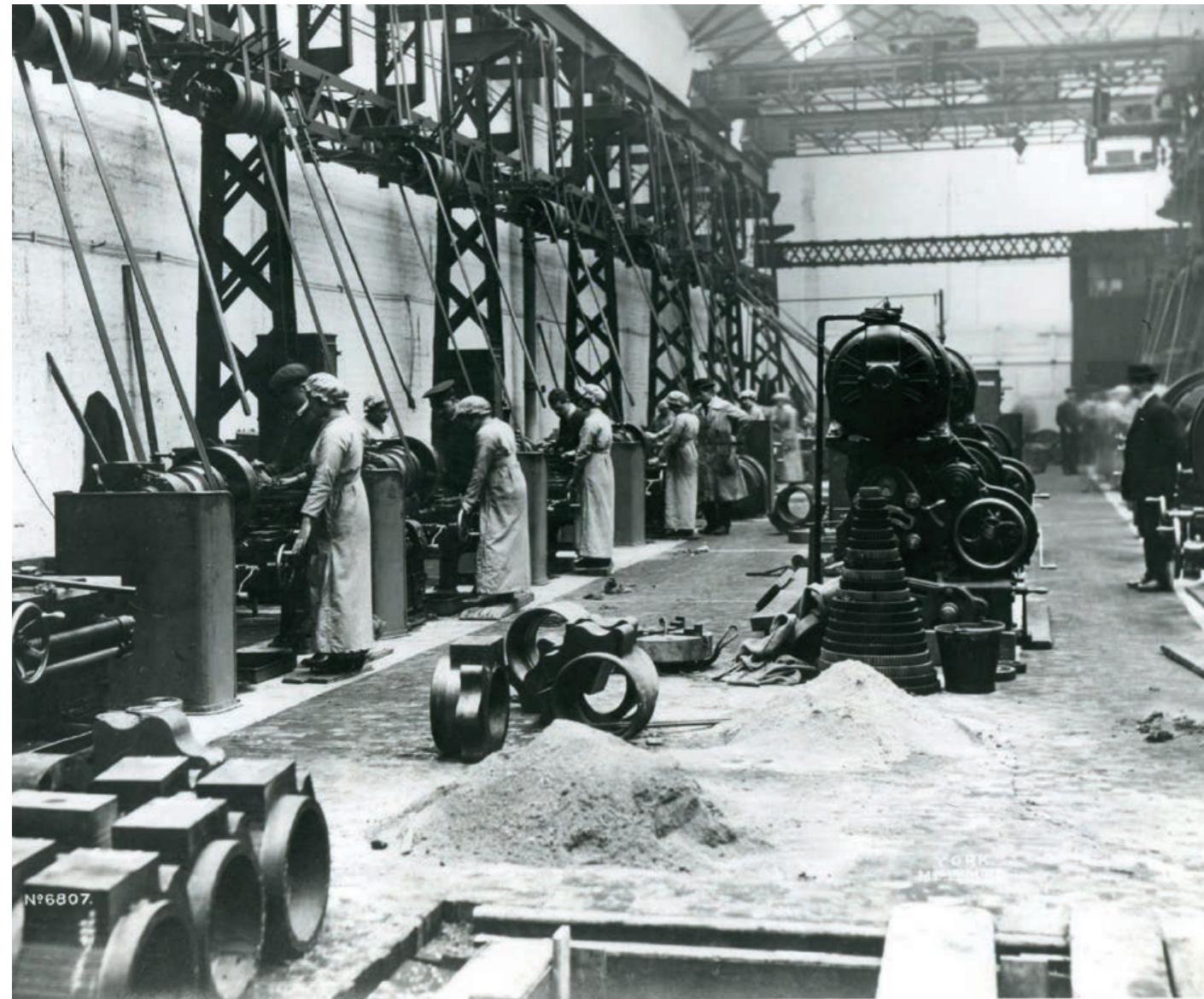


For some, active service involved duties in Britain. These postcards were sent to his family by a local soldier who was based initially in Frimley Camp in Surrey, which housed German prisoners of war, and later at Bramshott Camp, which was a temporary army camp set up on Bramshott Common, Hampshire.

Working for the war effort

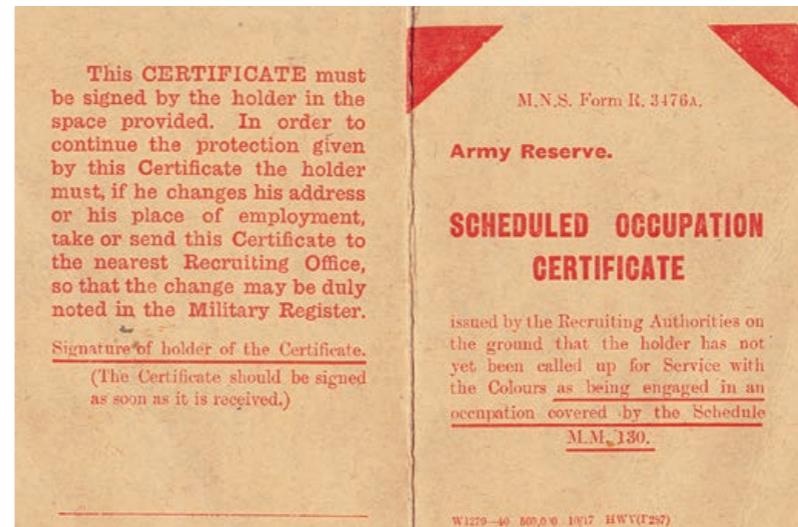
By the time the war broke out, armaments of different kinds had been made along the Scotswood Road for 70 years. William Armstrong had opened a factory at Elswick in 1847 which soon became one of the most important makers of warships, guns and other equipment in the world. In 1899 a second factory was built in Scotswood. This was a purpose-built munitions works, designed to mass-produce shells and fuses. By 1905, the Scotswood works was producing 5,000 fuses and primers per day. It employed 500 women and 1,200 men and boys.

The war meant a big boost in demand for Armstrong's products, and output and employment soared. By the end of the war, the firm employed 78,000 people of whom 21,000 were women. The Scotswood factory alone produced 13,000 guns, 14,500,000 shells, 18,200,000 fuses and 21,000,000 cartridge cases

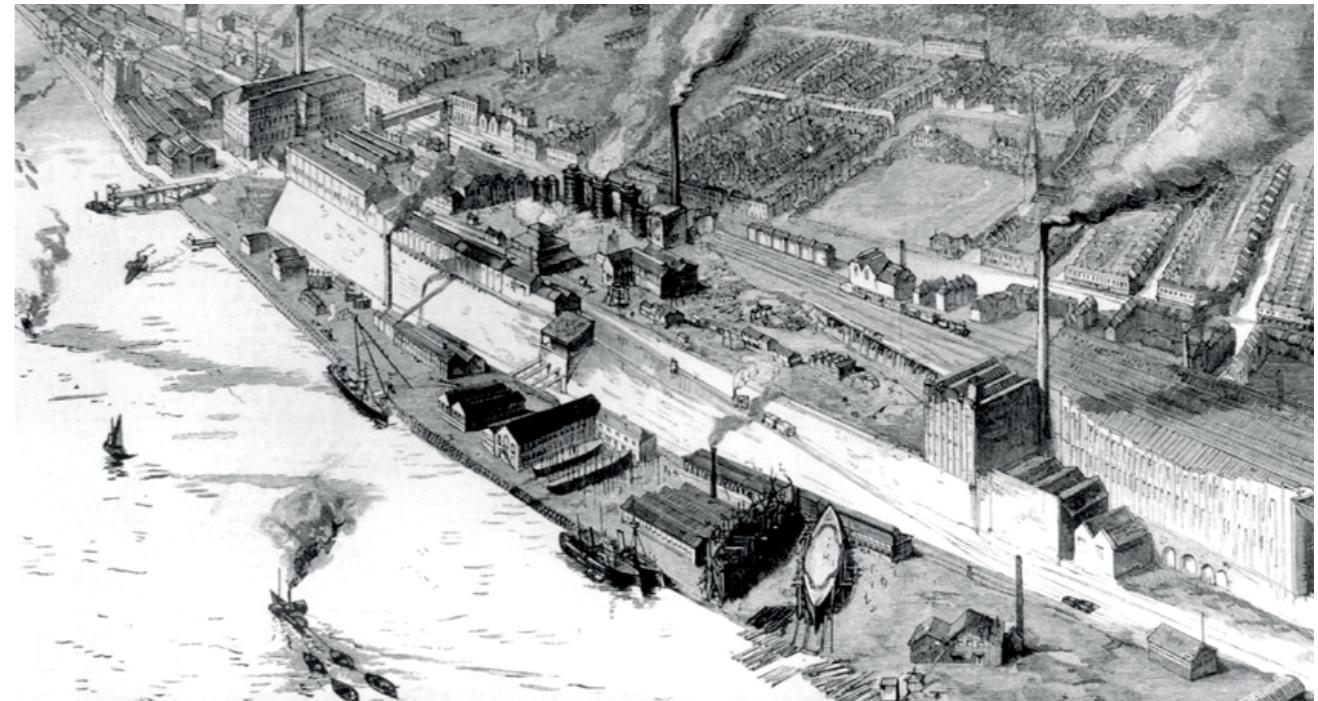


between 1914 and 1918. This was hard and often dangerous work. Production was very labour-intensive. These products required multiple parts, all engineered to high standards; for example, each fuse contained no less than thirty-five component parts. Lathe operators making one of the multiple parts of a fuse worked long hours standing up. This work involved precision cutting of brass or steel but it was repetitive work, doing the same task over and over again.

Before the war, trade unions had fought to defend pay differentials between skilled and unskilled workers. The advent of the munitionettes, as women workers were popularly called, provided employers with an opportunity to de-skill previously skilled jobs. Male workers' insecurity, combined with the prevailing attitude of the all-male factory management staff, meant that the women were often treated badly despite their undoubtedly contribution to the war effort.



In November 1914 badges inscribed with the words "Munitions of War – Imperial Service" were issued to men employed by Armstrong's to show that they were engaged in national service. In the climate of patriotic fervour during the war years, men of fighting age were often subject to harassment because they were believed to be cowards unwilling to serve their country. Pressure to contribute to the war effort meant that many people made public their roles. One such was the Vicar of St Aidan's in Elswick who was reported in the press in May 1915 to be about to spend his summer vacation working from 5am to 6pm doing munitions work at Armstrong's Elswick works.



Armstrong had opened a shipyard at his Elswick works in 1884. By the start of the war, the firm had become the most successful exporter of warships in the world. However, as a result of increasing demand from the navy for larger warships, production was moved to a new naval yard in Walker. The last warship to be built at Elswick was the aircraft carrier HMS Eagle, launched in 1918.

Thousands of men died on the battlefields, but factory work could be dangerous too. The manufacture of munitions was highly mechanised by 1914, but the combination of fast moving machines, overhead gantries, a crowded shop-floor, and the inexperience of a wartime workforce required to work long hours and acquire skills and expertise on the job often resulted in exhaustion and accidents.

Workers did not have protective clothing such as hard hats and goggles. Frank Brown was a 47 year old millwright. A skilled worker, he lost an eye when he was struck by a portion of a broken file in February 1917. He returned to work in May only to be discharged on 24th February 1920 owing to fall in demand after the war. During his period out of work, in Spring 1917, Frank was paid £1.00 per week, less than half his normal rate of £2.19s.1d. per week.

Nineteen year old Agnes Graham, a munitionette, was injured whilst working in the 58 Shop at Scotswood on 4th December 1916 and received £20.00 compensation from Armstrong Whitworth in respect of her injuries and inability to work. She was supported and represented by her friend May Whatnough of 24, Grainger Street West, a married woman employed at Scotswood as a machinist.

Alice Beattie was a seventeen year old girl working as a fuse-hand at the Elswick Works when she was injured on 23rd November 1916. A detonator exploded whilst she was handling it, resulting in the loss of the first joint of the thumb and forefinger on her left hand, and injury to the forefinger of her right hand. Alice was paid a good, steady wage of twenty shillings a week as a fuse-hand, and she was happy to return to work but her injuries were so severe that her wages were reduced to ten shillings a week pending a tribunal in January 1917 to determine a lump-sum compensation under the provisions of the Workman's Compensation Act of 1906.

Accidents could be fatal. Joseph Donald aged 15 died in 1914 in an accident at Armstrong's shipyard. He was working on a gangway when he slipped and fell. Joseph lived in Railway Street, just a short walk away from the shipyard.



During the war, Armstrong Whitworth opened a munitions factory on an island in the Tyne at Lemington, at a safe distance from people's homes in case of explosions. The factory employed young women whose main job was to fill large shells with explosive materials. Locally they were called "canaries" because the materials they worked with made their skin and hair turn yellow. They worked long hours under dangerous conditions, and the work could make them ill and even kill them.



To relieve the drudgery and stress of munitions work, efforts were made to provide workers with organised leisure activities that also served to strengthen teamwork and loyalty. Football was popular and, by the end of the war, Armstrong Whitworth & Co. Ltd had no fewer than nine football teams. There were separate teams for women. One of the female footballers pictured here was Elizabeth McQuillan who was employed as a munitions worker at the No. 43 Shop at Scotswood.

New and old buildings

House-building came to a virtual standstill during the war. There was a desperate shortage of lodgings for the large numbers of extra workers who were needed for the war effort. A report on housing in Newcastle written by the Medical Officer of Health in May 1915 showed clearly that areas such as Benwell suffered from a "house famine". As a result, in those areas where there was most insanitary property, "under present conditions, it is practically impossible to close (these dwellings), as existing tenants cannot get houses elsewhere". The report went on to describe how:



Munition Cottages continued to house families until the 1930s when the council bought the homes (by then in a poor condition) from the government in order to use the land for new council housing. Some of the residents were refugees who had come from Belgium as a result of the war.



Despite the disruption of wartime, the new church of St Margaret's in Scotswood was built during the war. This ceremony to lay the foundation stone took place in 1915.

"This appalling scarcity is greatly aggravated, though by no means entirely caused, by a large influx of workers at the munition factories..... Overcrowding is rife."

A survey in 1917 failed to find any vacant properties at all in the area. A report by the Medical Officer of Health identified Benwell as having one of the highest death rates in the city, with overcrowding cited as a major cause of mortality. Only six new homes were built in Benwell in the years 1914-18. The construction of temporary accommodation for munition workers in Scotswood ameliorated the housing crisis but did not solve it.

Housing munitions workers

In Scotswood, as a crisis measure, some 400 prefabricated homes were erected in 1916 just above Armstrong's works to house workers from the factory. These were known as Munition Cottages. Among the early residents was Frederick Hornby who was awarded a medal for "courage in assisting to extinguish a fire at an explosives factory at great personal risk" (in the words of the report in the Newcastle Journal of 28th October 1918). The Duke of Northumberland, who made the presentation at Newcastle's Moot Hall, explained that the purpose of the new medal of the Order of the British Empire was to honour civilians, as well as servicemen, who performed acts of gallantry or self-sacrifice.

While there was very little new building during these years, many local buildings were put to new uses as part of the war effort. Several of Benwell's big houses and mansions were converted or occupied. The area's reputation as a quiet retreat for a small number of wealthy residents was already being challenged by the end of the 19th century as new development took place along Scotswood Road and the West Road, extending Newcastle's urban industrial sprawl ever further westward. As a result, many of the families who had built or rented detached mansions north of Benwell Lane had begun seeking similar homes in places



One of the biggest houses in North Benwell was Condercum House. In 1914 the property was advertised for sale in local newspapers from February onwards. The house, with its twelve acres of fields and pleasure gardens, tennis courts and greenhouses, was advertised as ideally situated within "three minutes walk from the Westgate Hill tram terminus". By July 1914, the house and contents were advertised for sale by auction by Messrs Thos. B Sanderson and Son of Newcastle and London. However, within twelve months, the impact of the war's mounting casualty rate had persuaded the owners to offer Condercum House to the Army. In March 1915 a notice appeared in the Newcastle Journal thanking all those who had donated gifts to the patients at the York and Durham Infantry Brigade Hospital at Condercum House. These

gifts included "books and papers from Lady Browne, Westacres; chicken, eggs, and butter from Mrs Leonard Macarthy, Benwell Park". The hospital appears to have operated throughout the war until, in 1918, the house was returned to its owners. Condercum House never again served as family home. It was eventually sold in 1935, simply for the value and extent of its grounds which were acquired for housing development.



Pendower Hall on the West Road was also a convalescent home for wounded soldiers. The Newcastle Journal reported in 5th August 1915

"Yesterday afternoon an interesting contribution was made to the comforts of the wounded soldiers at Pendower, Benwell. Four schoolgirls, named Bessie Davidson, Gertie Scott, Nellie Brand and Lucy Milburn, on their own initiative, combined to put the first week of their summer holiday to some use. They organized a small bazaar, which was held in a backyard in Strathmore Crescent, Benwell, last Saturday afternoon, and which, much to their satisfaction and surprise, realised the sum of £3. Mr James

Davidson, father of one of the girls, immediately consulted Miss Pease of Pendower (a member of the family who owned the Hall) and learned that what the wounded men there most required was carpet slippers. Two dozen of these, along with £1 worth of cigarettes, were consequently purchased, and the four juvenile stall-holders, at the invitation of the prospective recipients, yesterday, partook of tea at Pendower, and duly handed over the gifts."

outside the expanding urban area of Newcastle, such as the Tyne Valley or north Northumberland. During the war, several of Benwell's big houses were occupied by the military or converted for use as hospitals or rest homes. These included Benwell Towers, which was used to accommodate reservists prior to their departure overseas, Benwell Grange on Benwell Lane, which became the Joseph and Jane Cowen Home for disabled soldiers and sailors, Pendower Hall and Condercum House, south of the West Road, which were used as convalescent hospitals for wounded soldiers.



Local schools and church buildings were also affected by the demands of war. In 1914 all the school buildings in the area were taken over by the military. Some re-opened after a few months, but schooling was continually interrupted throughout the war as buildings were commandeered for military use. St Joseph's School on Armstrong Road in Benwell was used to house German sailors who had been interned when the war began. Former pupils recall that there were carvings on the trees in the school grounds that were believed to be made by German prisoners. The photograph above shows a group of St Joseph's pupils dressed for a concert in 1915.

Pupils from Atkinson Road School attended school on a part-time basis for much of the war years because they had to share their building with other local schools. Schooling was also interrupted by the air raid drills and bombing raids, when everyone had to retreat to the air raid shelters built in the school yard. The school had been open for less than four years when the war began. The photograph below dates from this period.

The Log Book for Canning Street School records in detail the impact of the outbreak of war. An entry for 25th August 1914 records that owing to the "school premises being used by soldiers, the children are meeting for afternoon session only at Elswick Road Council School". From September 1914 the pupils were transferred to Atkinson Road School and the Benwell Parish Hall on Atkinson Road, both temporary measures that actually lasted until Canning Street School was handed back and re-opened in January 1918. The challenges facing both

pupils and teachers continued, as wartime disruption was followed by the outbreak of influenza in the summer of 1918. By October the school was forced to close for ten days owing to the influenza epidemic, and in February 1919 it closed again along with every other elementary school in Newcastle. These closures at least provided an opportunity for the Canning Street premises to be cleaned and repainted after four years occupation by the military. However, when it re-opened on 3rd November 1919, many of the gas mantles for the lights and a number of panes of glass from the windows were still missing.





Benwell Presbyterian Church, on the south side of Armstrong Road, was used at times during the war for teaching children whose schools were closed. The building also housed recreation rooms for soldiers run by the Benwell District branch of the Patriots League of Honour. The Newcastle Journal reported that the rooms were "admirably arranged for the purpose" and that a programme of music and other entertainments was planned.



St James' Church Hall on Atkinson Road was occupied by the army for periods during the war. At other times it was used by local schools whose buildings had been taken over by the military.

A divided community

The start of the war prompted widespread anti-German feeling. There were many Germans living on Tyneside, many of whom earned their living as pork butchers. There were a number of incidents of homes being attacked in the west end. When they were officially classed as 'enemy aliens' by the government in 1915, 10,000 German men of military age were interned. One of these was Theo Fiedler who was married to Annie, daughter of the landlord of the Robin Adair pub. Theo was seen as an enemy despite the fact that his eldest son was serving in the British Army. He was sent to Switzerland as part of a prisoner exchange because of his poor health. Meanwhile Annie took a job at Armstrong's factory to support her family, living with her parents in Benwell. Theo was not allowed to return to Britain until 1927. That was the first time he met his daughter Frieda's husband and her two children. Theo's three children are pictured here.

As well as hostility to people considered as aliens, there were other causes of social unrest in the area.

In August 1914, four days after war was declared, a number of shops on Adelaide Terrace were attacked and ransacked by crowds of local residents. As the Newcastle Journal reported on 10th August:

"Regrettable scenes were witnessed at Benwell on Saturday night, where a large crowd, incensed, it is stated, by the rise that had been made in the price of provisions, attacked a certain shop, and vented their anger by smashing the windows and scattering the goods within. Afterwards they did damage to other similar establishments."

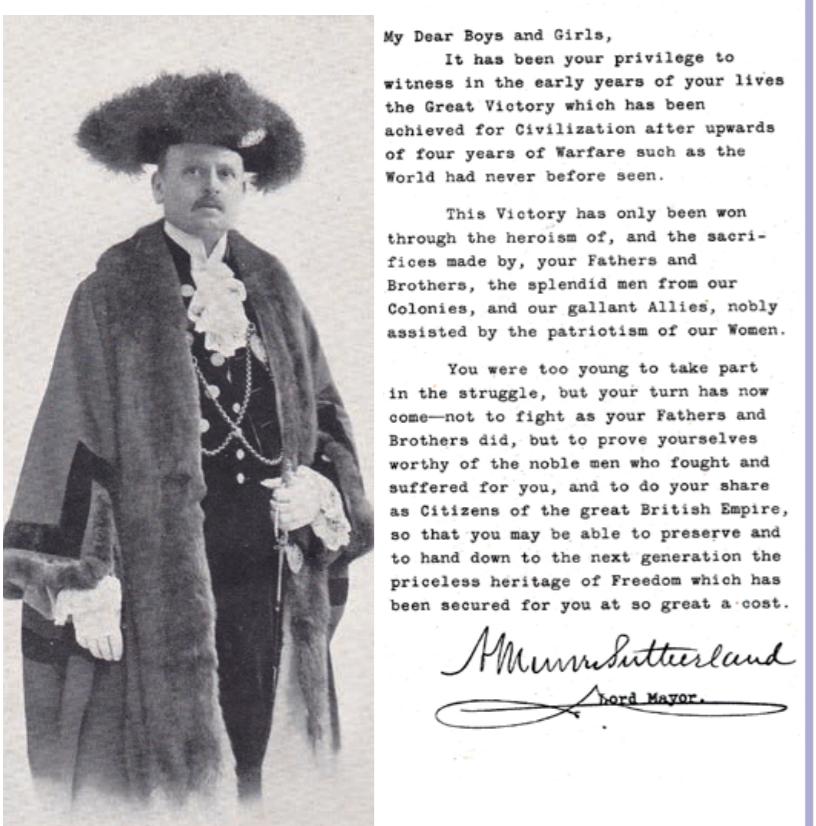
The primary targets of this popular anger were two grocery stores whose owners were accused of deliberately inflating the price of sugar and flour. One of the store owners, John Miller, denied that he had sold flour at an inflated price, saying that he had made just one penny profit from the price he paid to his supplier. These riots were widely reported in newspapers outside Newcastle, including London's Daily Herald and the Birmingham Daily Post, and must have tarnished Benwell's reputation for respectability.



BETWEEN THE WARS



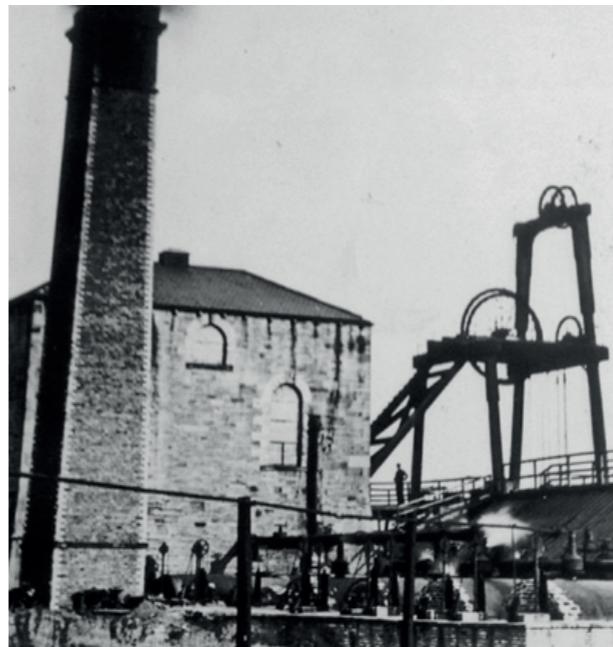
This Victory Party in Colston Street in 1919 was one of hundreds of street parties held across the area to celebrate the Peace.



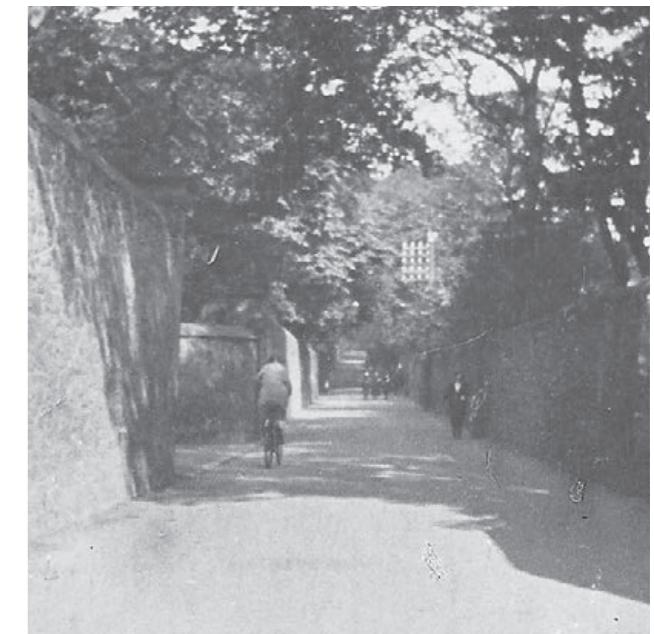
Part of a special Peace Souvenir booklet given to every school child in Newcastle at the end of the war. They also had an extra week of summer holiday.

Economic decline and unemployment

One of the casualties of the economic slump was Spencer's in Newburn. This had been one of the region's most important steelworks, employing almost 2,000 people by the time of this 1910 photograph. Thousands were thrown out of work during the interwar years as the riverside industries contracted. It was not until the approach of the Second World War that production and employment rose again. Armstrong's (now Vickers-Armstrong following a merger in 1927) was a particular beneficiary of war as a result of the demand for tanks, shells and guns. Employment rose to 18,500, but never again reached the peak seen in the First World War.



Coal mining which had once been one of the main occupations in this area was also in decline. Benwell's last coalmine, the Charlotte Pit, and Scotwood's Low Montagu Pit both closed in the 1930s. This photograph of the Low Montagu Pit was taken in 1925, the year of the terrible disaster when the mine flooded, killing 38 men and boys, most of whom lived within the immediate neighbourhoods of old Scotswood and Bells Close.



Before the First World War Benwell Lane was a narrow country lane, lined with grand houses standing in landscaped grounds. During the winter of 1922-23 a project was carried out to widen the road between Atkinson Road and Benwell Towers in order to enable an extension of the tramway and accommodate the development of the Pendower Estate. The work was carried out as part of a national government scheme to provide work for unemployed men, many of whom had served in the war.

Council housing

The period following the First World War saw a massive growth of council housing in Newcastle. Between 1920 and 1940 more than 13,000 council houses were built. The problem of obtaining suitable sites in Benwell and Scotswood was overcome as landowners began to release more land for sale. Most of the sites that became available were either farmland belonging to large estates that had been hoarded by astute investors until rising demand made it profitable to sell, or the gardens of the big houses and mansions that were being sold by their wealthy owners as the character of the area changed.

The Pendower Estate, pictured below, was one of the first council estates to be built, prompted by the movement to provide "homes fit for heroes to live in" at the end of the war. The estate was designed on a garden village model, and the houses were built to a high standard, with generous room sizes and gardens. During the 1930s several more council estates were built in Benwell and Scotswood, as the need for new housing was greatly increased by the mass demolition of older dwellings across the city including parts of Elswick

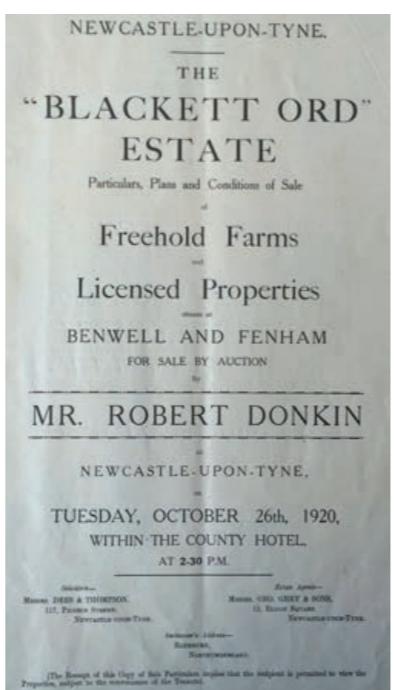


In 1919 the council paid £37,500 to buy the land to build the Pendower Estate from J.W Pease, a banker who later became chairman of Lloyds Bank. This 60 acre site had been the grounds of the Pease family home of Pendower Hall. The original asking price was £1,000 per acre, but this was reduced to £625 per acre on condition that it was used for housing the "working classes". The first houses were completed in 1922 and, by the end of the 1920s, almost 600 houses had been built on the site. The Hall itself was converted into an Open Air School where city children with a history of poor health, such as rickets, pneumonia or tuberculosis, could benefit from the fresh air provided by Pendower's elevated situation. New open-air classrooms literally open to the elements were built in the grounds, whilst the house provided additional classrooms and accommodation for staff and pupils.

such as Rye Hill and the Buckingham Street area. New council estates such as Low Delaval, Ferguson's Lane and Scotswood sprang up to the west of Benwell on land that had mainly been green fields.

Benwell Lane was extended to form Whickham View, which marked the northern boundary of the new Ferguson's Lane Estate. Scotswood Estate was built to the south of Ferguson's Lane Estate, on the opposite side of Armstrong Road. Munition Cottages had previously occupied part of this site. In 1932-33 the council purchased land in the area east of the Scotswood Estate boundary in order to build the housing estates that would later be known as Low and Upper Delaval.

As a result of these housing schemes, the character and appearance of Benwell and Scotswood was transformed, whilst the quality of life for people living in the area, or moved into the area, was massively improved thanks to new, spacious accommodation with indoor plumbing, electricity and, in many cases, a garden.

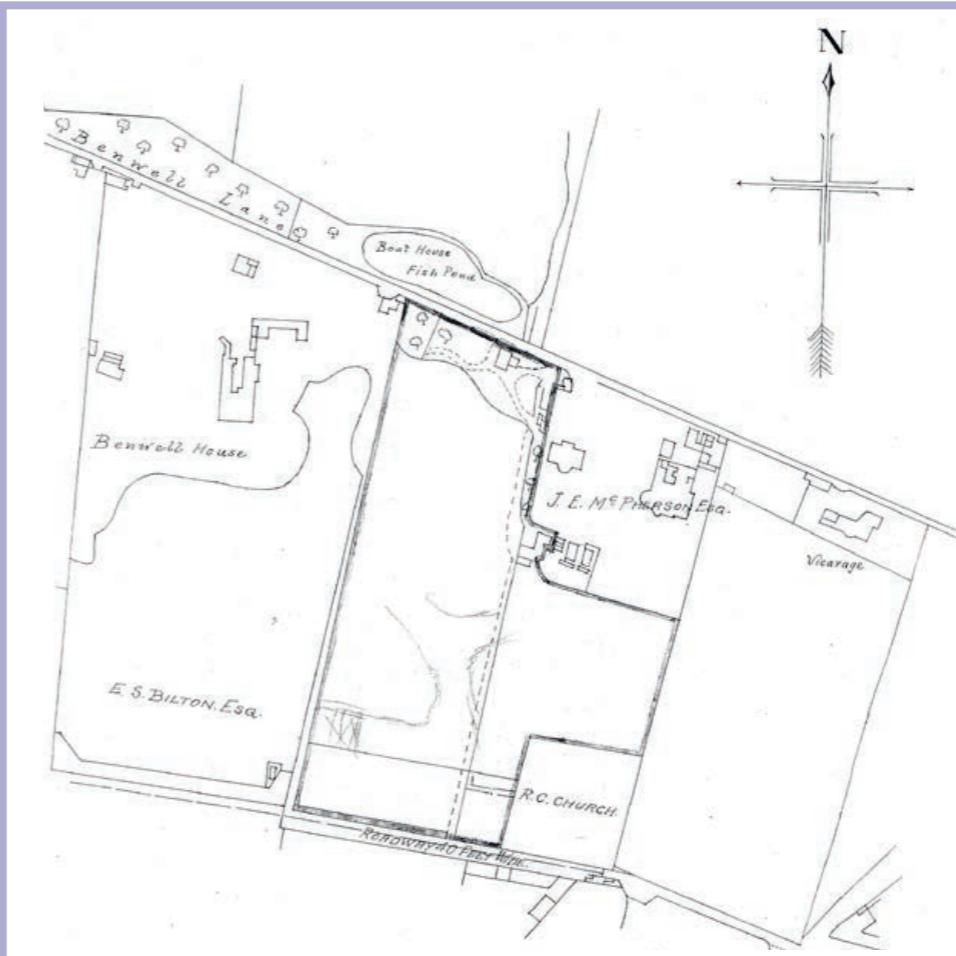


The Ord family of Fenham had long been the biggest single landowner in Benwell and Scotswood. The estate was put up for sale in 1920. Ferguson's Lane Estate, which became one of Newcastle's biggest council estates with 1,347 homes, was built on land purchased from the Blackett-Ord estate.

The growth of owner-occupation

The growth of council housing in Newcastle between the wars was exceeded by the rate of development of new private housing. Almost 17,000 new homes were built during this time by private developers. Before the First World War, most private housing had been built for rent. It was not until the interwar period that owner-occupation became widespread in Benwell and Scotswood. In the years immediately following the end

of the war, there was very little private house-building as building costs were still high. Then a fall in the cost of building new houses caused by the Depression led to a boom. Several new private estates for owner-occupiers sprang up across the area during the 1920s and 1930s, including the Hodgkin Park, Condercum Park and Grainger Park estates. There were also a few new developments of homes for private renting, such as the Bilbrough Gardens and Axbridge Gardens areas.



Hodgkin Park Estate, comprising Hodgkin Park Road, Benwell Grange Road and Benwell Grange Terrace, was built in the 1920s. The first resident of Benwell Grange Terrace moved here in 1927. This plan shows the area of land purchased for building the estate. The site is bounded on three sides by three of the big houses which had formerly been private homes for wealthy families. Since the start of the 20th century, Benwell House had become a hotel, Benwell Grange housed a girls' hostel and training centre run by the Royal Victoria School for the Blind, whilst the grounds of Pendower Hall had been sold to the council to build the Pendower Estate and the Hall itself had become a school.



The Grainger Park Estate is named after the 19th century developer Richard Grainger who is widely seen as the man responsible for the transformation of Newcastle's town centre from a hotch-potch of medieval streets and unplanned additions into a modern Victorian city. By the time Grainger Park Estate was built in the 1920s on land which had previously been part of Grainger's Elswick estate, the development of the area was no longer in the hands of the Grainger family. Prior to this, Grainger Park Road contained only a few large detached houses, such as the vicarage for St Aidan's Church.



The sale of the Condercum estate by the Crawhall family in the 1930s released land for the development of what became Denhill Park, Weidner Road, Westholme Gardens, Broomridge Avenue and Springhill Gardens. Weidner Road was named after Alderman John Frederick Weidner, the last occupant of Condercum House, who was a businessman with interests in shipping and tobacco. This housing estate lies just south of the line of Hadrian's Wall, and has the remains of a Roman temple in the midst of the houses.



Sutton's Dwellings, the area's first housing association estate, was built in the mid-1930s on the site of the former High Cross nursery on the south side of Adelaide Terrace. It comprised a number of large four-storey blocks of flats with walkways connecting them.



In the interwar years, the older terraced housing, mainly for rent, still accounted for a large proportion of the available accommodation in Benwell and Scotswood. This included homes of the poorest quality such as these in South Benwell Road and Norwich Street (known locally as the Tanyard because there had been a tannery on the site in the past) and Chapel Terrace and other streets around the original village of Scotswood.



One of the largest plots used for the development of new housing was the 144 acres of arable and grass land that made up Benwell West Farm, which was part of the Blackett-Ord estate. Benwell West Farm, which lay at what later became the junction of Norland Road and Yewcroft Avenue, had been farmed by the Ferguson family for 24 years. It was a large farm with byres for forty cattle plus stables for horses. The farmer John Ferguson served as Chairman of the Newcastle Committee of the Northumberland and Durham Dairy and Tenant Farmers' Association. Pictured here is Ferguson's dairy delivering milk in Old Benwell Village in 1900.



Elsewhere in the area 72 acres of arable land from Thorn Tree Farm provided the site for a private housing development at Denton Burn that included Thorntree Drive and the adjacent streets. This photograph shows Thorn Tree Farm in the 1930s, with new houses recently built in Denton Road and Countess Drive in the background. A few small farms survived into the 1950s and 1960s, such as Delaval Farm to the east of Delaval Road.

Benwell & Scotswood in the early 20th century

The early years of the 20th century saw the completion of the transformation of Benwell and Scotswood from rural areas of green fields, country lanes and mansions in landscaped grounds into densely populated suburbs of the urban area of Newcastle upon Tyne.

This book describes the development of the area during the years from 1900 until the outbreak of the Second World War, including the impact of the Great War of 1914-18 which led to the deaths of many local residents, disrupted the lives of many more, and prompted important changes in land use and housing conditions.



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ST JAMES' HERITAGE & ENVIRONMENT GROUP

St James' Heritage & Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation committed to maintaining and improving the historic graveyard of St James' in Benwell and encouraging people of all ages to explore and celebrate the history of the west end of Newcastle through a programme of events, projects, exhibitions and publications.

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