

Newcastle's Outer West

Newburn, Lemington, Bell's Close and Sugley

*through the years
in Maps and Pictures*



Acknowledgments

This book is published by St James’ Heritage & Environment Group but it was only possible with the help of many organisations and individuals who generously and freely contributed images, information and advice. The book was produced during the Covid pandemic which meant that the usual sources of information such as libraries and archives were not accessible and meetings were not allowed, so opportunities for fact-checking were limited. Any errors are ours and most of the credit must go to others. It is not possible to name everyone, but special thanks must go to West Newcastle Picture History Collection and Newcastle Libraries Local Studies who as usual responded promptly and without complaint to incessant requests for photographs from their wonderful collections. Newcastle Libraries Service also funded the printing costs of the book. During this difficult period we made a number of new contacts among people with a detailed knowledge of the local history of this area, who were surprisingly tolerant of newcomers and polite about our mistakes. Special mention has to be made of Andy Curtis of Heddon Local History Group whose blog is a fund of fascinating information and Joe Loughran who has devoted years to compiling a unique collection of images and information about these communities.

Information on key sources is given below. There have been earlier pictorial histories of this area, which are well worth searching out although they are now out of print. They are:

- Bygone Newburn*, published by Newcastle City Libraries, 1990
- Bygone Bell’s Close & Lemington*, published by Newcastle City Libraries, 1991
- Lemington & Newburn Then and Now*, by George Nairn, published by Summerhill Books, 2011

West Newcastle Picture History Collection

West Newcastle Picture History Collection is an independent voluntary organisation that cares for an archive of about 20,000 images of West Newcastle from the city centre out to Newburn and Throckley. The collection is based at the West End Library on Condercum Road, and visitors are welcome on Mondays from 10am-4pm when circumstances allow. The group has recently launched a new website – newcastlephotoarchive – which has an online search facility enabling images to be located on a large-scale street map. At present only a proportion of the photographs have been uploaded, but the website has a link to the group’s original website and flickr site through which more images and publications can be accessed.

Newcastle City Library, Local Studies and Family History Centre

The City Library’s collection includes photographs, maps, parish registers, trade directories and a large reference collection as well as a significant collection of newspapers dating from 1711 to the present day. It is home to wonderful, rare and Special Collections, such as the work of Thomas Bewick and Charles Avison, which have been acquired since the first public library in Newcastle opened in the 1880s. A large photographic collection can be accessed via the library’s website. There are also local lending collections in all local libraries.

Heddon Local History Group

The Group’s website contains extensive information about the area, especially the River Tyne, the old waggonways and other aspects of local history and archaeology including Hadrian’s Wall.

Website: <http://heddonhistory.weebly.com>.

Images courtesy of: West Newcastle Picture History Collection (front cover and pages 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 19), Newcastle Libraries (7, 9, 18, 24), Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne (3), Joe Loughran (front cover and pages 11, 27), Les Turnbull (5, 20), Gateshead Libraries (10), Holy Saviour Church (25), David Cook (front cover), Moira Gray (26), the Wright family of Dumpling Hall (21), Andrew Curtis (28). Thanks are due to the copyright holders of the Ordnance Survey maps for permission to use extracts.

A Brief History of Newburn, Lemington, Sugley and Bell’s Close

For seventy years the western border of Newcastle was marked by the Denton Burn which runs down from the West Road to join the Tyne at Scotswood. After Scotswood and Benwell were absorbed into Newcastle in 1904 the new city boundary followed the line of the Dene, which had previously separated the Townships of Benwell and Newburn. It was not until 1974 that the outer west riverside villages of Newburn, Lemington, Sugley and Bell’s Close were incorporated into the City of Newcastle. This was no isolated rural backwater, however, but an area with a long and significant history.

Newburn was an ancient manor which, prior to the Norman Conquest, was considered more important than Newcastle. It had a strategic significance as the lowest fordable crossing point on the Tyne. Many marauding armies headed here on their way to attack other places. The most famous occasion was the Battle of Newburn in 1640 when a Scottish Army defeated an English one in what has been seen as a crucial turning point in the Civil War, leading ultimately to the execution of King Charles. Coal had been mined in this area since the 14th century at least. By the 18th century, Newburn’s location on the route of the Wylam Waggonway carrying coal to the staithes at Lemington put it at the heart of the story of Britain’s industrial development. This waggonway was one of the oldest in England and the site of important developments in steam locomotion. Yet for centuries Newburn remained a small rural settlement with thriving fisheries along the riverside. It was not until the 19th century that the expansion of industry and coalmining activities around the village began to transform its character and lead to a growth in its population. A key event was the founding of a small steelworks to the north of Newburn in 1811. This expanded into a huge concern, producing steel for the development of railways nationally as well as Tyneside’s growing shipbuilding and heavy engineering industries. By the beginning of the 20th century Newburn had become known as “New Sheffield” because of the importance of its steelworks. It occupied a 60 acre site and was the major local employer with almost 2,000 workers. The boom ended after the First World War and, after decades of decline, the steelworks finally closed altogether in the 1960s.

Lemington took its name from Lamedon Mill, a corn mill which dated from the 16th century or earlier. The village was located at the most western

navigable point of the Tyne. Here the river curved west in a meander before flowing east again towards the sea. It was a prime location until 1876 when major improvement works were carried out to alter the course of the river, cutting a new channel to bypass the loop and creating the backwater known as Lemington Gut. From the early 17th century there were coal staithes where coal was loaded onto keelboats to be taken downriver for export. By the 18th century three waggonways converged linking local pits to the staithes. A number of important industries, notably a glassworks and an iron works, had developed here. The area was also home to a community of families working in the adjacent industries. By the mid-20th century most of the housing had been cleared, leaving Low Lemington as a semi-derelict industrial area. Meanwhile extensive house-building took place further north. From the late 19th century onwards Lemington grew much more rapidly than the other villages, not only extending northwards to consume former farmland, but also pushing eastwards until it was unclear where Lemington ended and Sugley and Bell’s Close began.

Sugley lay to the east of Lemington. Several rows of cottages stood next to a large village pond, surrounded by fields. The centenary history of Holy Saviour Church described the “picturesque houses of Sugley Field....amid gardens, orchards and trees”. The original cottages were demolished in 1906 and the pond and surrounding trees and grassland cleared. Soon the land was covered with new houses, and the area had become part of Lemington.

Bell’s Close derived its name from a farm that once stood here. By the mid-19th century it was a significant industrial location with a variety of manufacturing activities including brick, tile, blacking and chemicals works. On the riverside was a jetty and a shipyard. The village, with its cluster of houses near the river, was a distinctly separate place from its neighbour Sugley on the other side of the dene. To the north lay farmland and mining activities. For a century from 1870 the Wylam to Scotswood railway line was effectively the northern boundary of the village. Coalmining continued to flourish nearby, but the population of the village declined as the older homes were demolished. After coalmining ceased, the land to the north was developed for new housing, and by the 1980s Bell’s Close, Lemington and Denton Burn formed a continuous urban area.



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The Outer West in 1864

In 1864 a considerable area of undeveloped land separates Newburn from Lemington, its nearest neighbour to the east. Beyond Lemington lie Sugley and Bell's Close. They hug the north bank of the river, and are quite close together but still at this stage distinct settlements. The dene is identified as Bell's Close "Dean" rather than the later name of Sugley Dene. The area is not well served by roads and there is not

as yet a passenger railway, but an extensive network of waggonways and railway lines can be seen. There is evidence of mining and industrial activity across the area. The riverside is prone to flooding, with large sandy and stony areas known as stanners, and several islands including Dent's Meadows south of Newburn Haugh. There is not yet a bridge at Newburn but the ford is clearly marked.



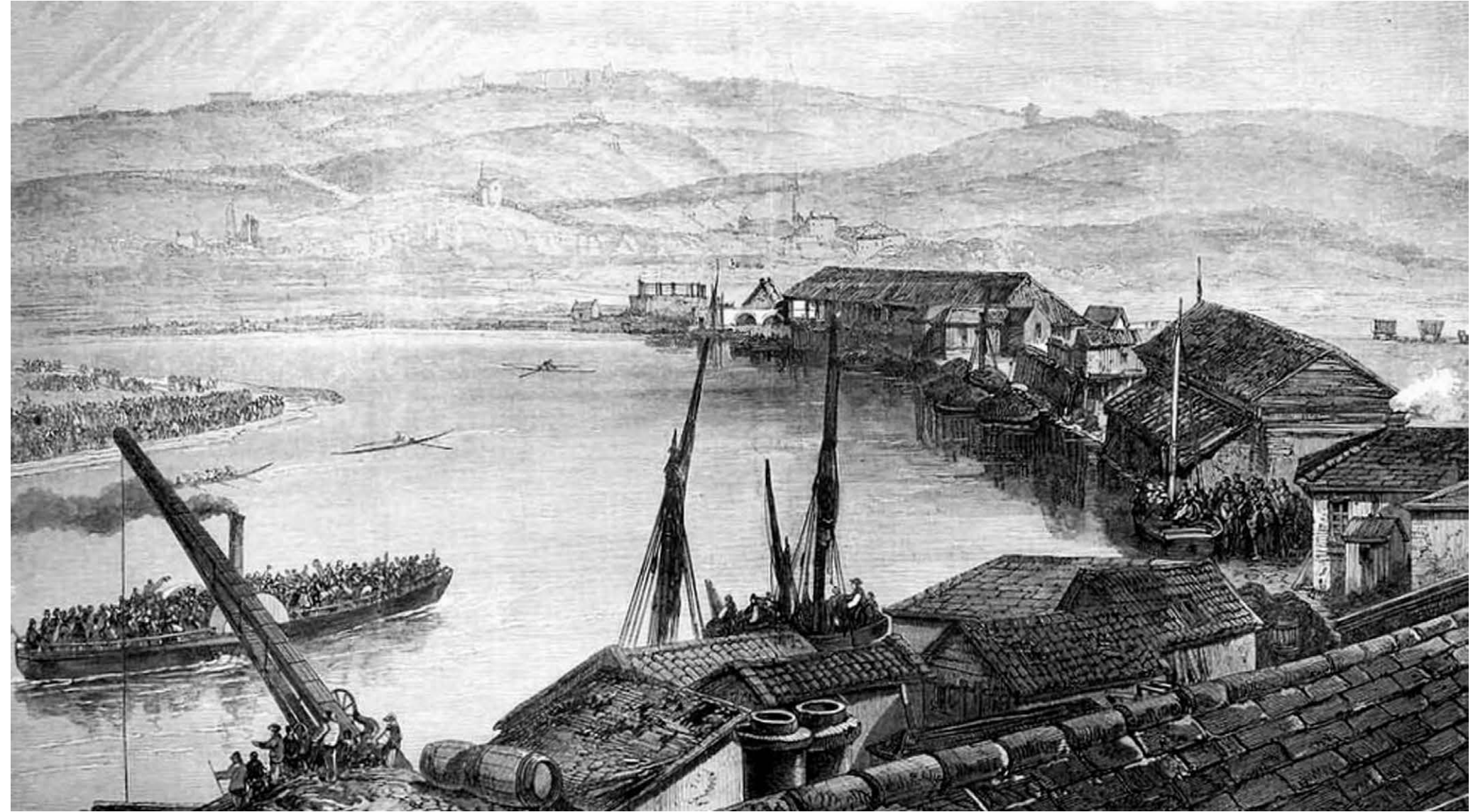
Newburn Hall: Newburn Hall stood between the village and the river. At its heart was a pele tower dating from the 15th century, probably constructed from stones taken from earlier Roman structures. A century later the building was extended to create the hall. By the beginning of the 19th century the hall comprised three sides of a square, open to the north. Much of the building was destroyed by fire in 1891 and it was partly demolished.

The 1864 Ordnance Survey map shows Newburn Hall just north of the Wylam wagonway, but by the end of the 19th century the remains had been swallowed up within the steelworks site. The building was used for storage for several years, before disappearing altogether when the site was redeveloped.



Newburn Manor House: The Manor House was situated just to the east of what became Station Road in Newburn. Dating from around 1600, it was demolished in 1909, a few years after this photograph was taken.

For a time it served as the vicarage before being replaced by the large house now known as the Old Vicarage, which stands a short distance to the north on the High Street.



Boat Race at Lemington Point: In 1867 a world championship boat race took place on the Tyne. The five mile course began at the High Level Bridge and finished here at Lemington Point as this illustration from the London Illustrated News depicts. Just a few years later this stretch of the river was bypassed to create Lemington Gut. As well as being an important manufacturing site, this area had played an important role in the export of raw materials from the surrounding areas for more than a century.

Coal, lead ore and bricks were shipped from these staithe. The small wagons that are visible on the right hand side of the picture indicate the location of the east terminus of the Wylam Waggonway.



Newburn Village from the south: The tower of St Michael and All Angels Church can be seen on the skyline of this photograph of Newburn Village in 1899. This tower dates back to the 12th century or even earlier. Peaceful as this scene appears, it has been the site of turbulent events. During the Battle of Newburn Ford in 1640, the Scottish army used the tower as a platform for their guns, firing at the opposing army camped across the river at Ryton.

Just visible on the right is Newburn Bridge, opened in 1893. Next to this is Water Row, site of an old pit where the railway pioneer George Stephenson worked as an engineer early in his career. Of the buildings along the riverside, only the Boathouse pub remains today.



Low Lemington: In the 19th century, as well as being a busy industrial area, Low Lemington was home to a thriving community with rows of stone-built homes and scattered cottages along with pubs and churches. This photograph depicts Low Row in 1890. At the end of the row, near the riverside, is a large building which housed the Dr Syntax pub, named after a famous racehorse based on an old cartoon

character of a schoolmaster. It was one of several pubs in this area catering for those working in the local industries. Later it was converted to tenements. Low Row and Syntax Square were declared unfit in the 1930s and demolished soon afterwards.



The Outer West in 1899

By 1899 Newburn Bridge (then a toll bridge) has been built and the steelworks have extended south towards the river. The ancient Newburn Hall can no longer be seen on the map. Newburn village has expanded to the west and north. There is also evidence of extensive new house-building at Lemington. The railway line linking Wylam and Scotswood now runs through the area and there are stations

at Newburn and Lemington. The big meander on the river at Lemington Point has been bypassed by the digging of a new channel, creating Lemington Gut. This has reduced the distance between Scotswood and Newburn, and allowed passage upriver for bigger boats.



Sugley Pond and Cottages: Sugley Pond was located north of Lemington railway station, near the east end of what became Tyne View. According to local tradition, it was an old pit working that had been flooded, but it served as a village pond for Sugley. Behind the pond were Sugley Field Cottages and Sugley House, home to Charles Bulmer, manager of the Tyne Ironworks.

In 1906 the cottages were demolished and the pond drained to accommodate the need for more housing in Lemington. Sugley Street, Montague Street and Rokeby Street occupy the site now. In 1936 more homes were added immediately to the north of Sugley Church, with the construction of Wedgwood Cottages for retired railway workers.



Blayney Row and Throckley Colliery: This photograph was taken around 1900 from the spire of Holy Cross Church in Ryton, looking out across the Tyne to the area just west of Newburn. A line of steam-powered dredgers can be seen at work deepening the channel of the river on behalf of the Tyne Improvement Commission. On the north bank is Blayney Row, built in 1889 for employees of Heddon Brickworks by its owner Cadwallader John Bates of Heddon Hall, and sold to the Throckley Coal

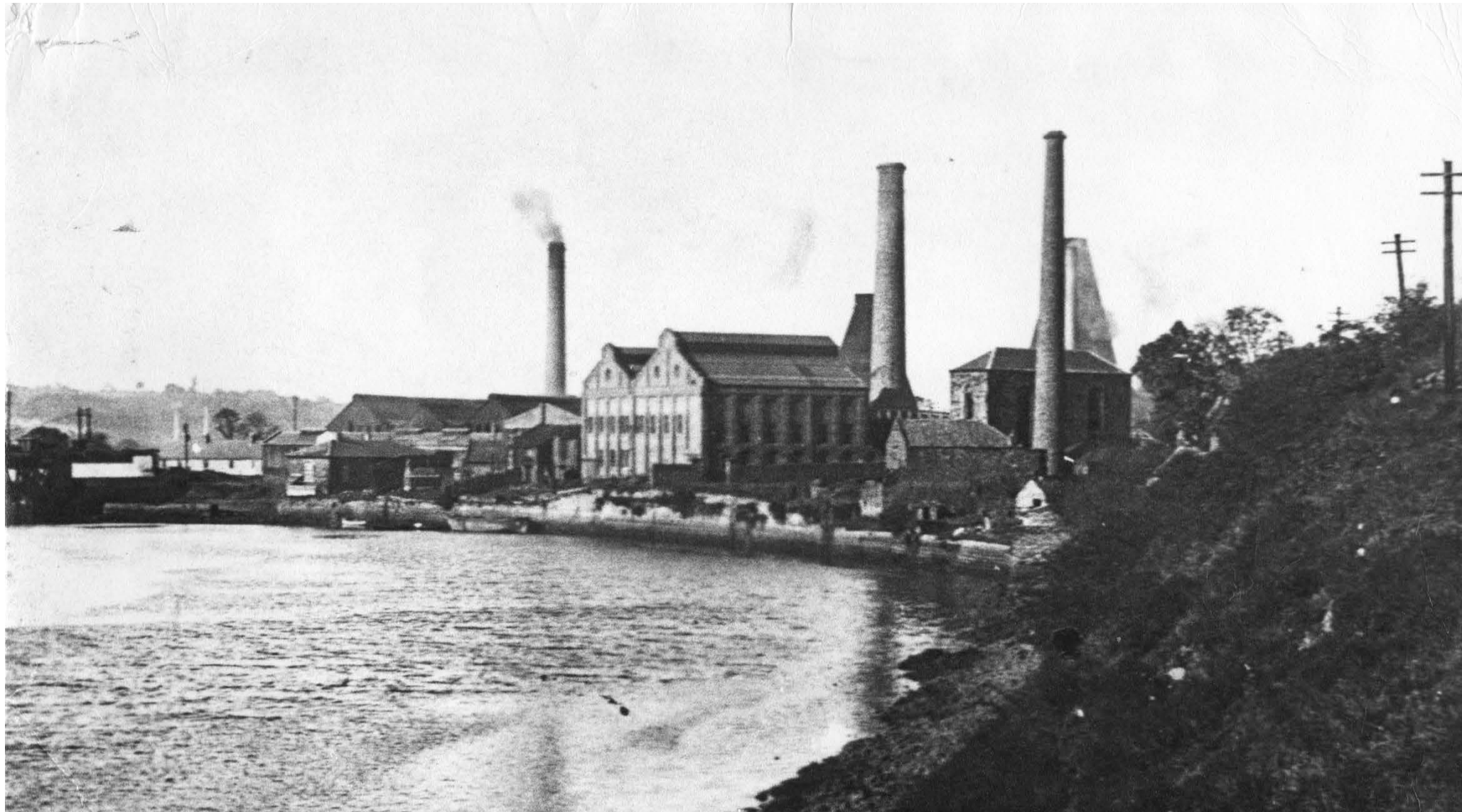
Company in 1895. The railway line, opened in 1876, is visible just in front of Blayney Row. Behind can be seen the buildings of Throckley Isabella Colliery, opened in 1867, flanked by two rows of terraced houses provided for miners' families. A small patch of steam on the right is from a steam engine pulling coal wagons along a colliery railway.



Holy City: Lemington and the adjacent communities were known locally as the Holy City because of the number of prominent churches. Holy Saviour Church in Sugley (top left) was the oldest, opening in 1837. It is now the Anglican parish church for Lemington. The small village of Bell's Close had two churches. The Wesleyan Methodist Church (top right), dating from 1839, no longer exists. St George's RC Church (bottom left), opened 30 years later to meet the needs of the many Irish

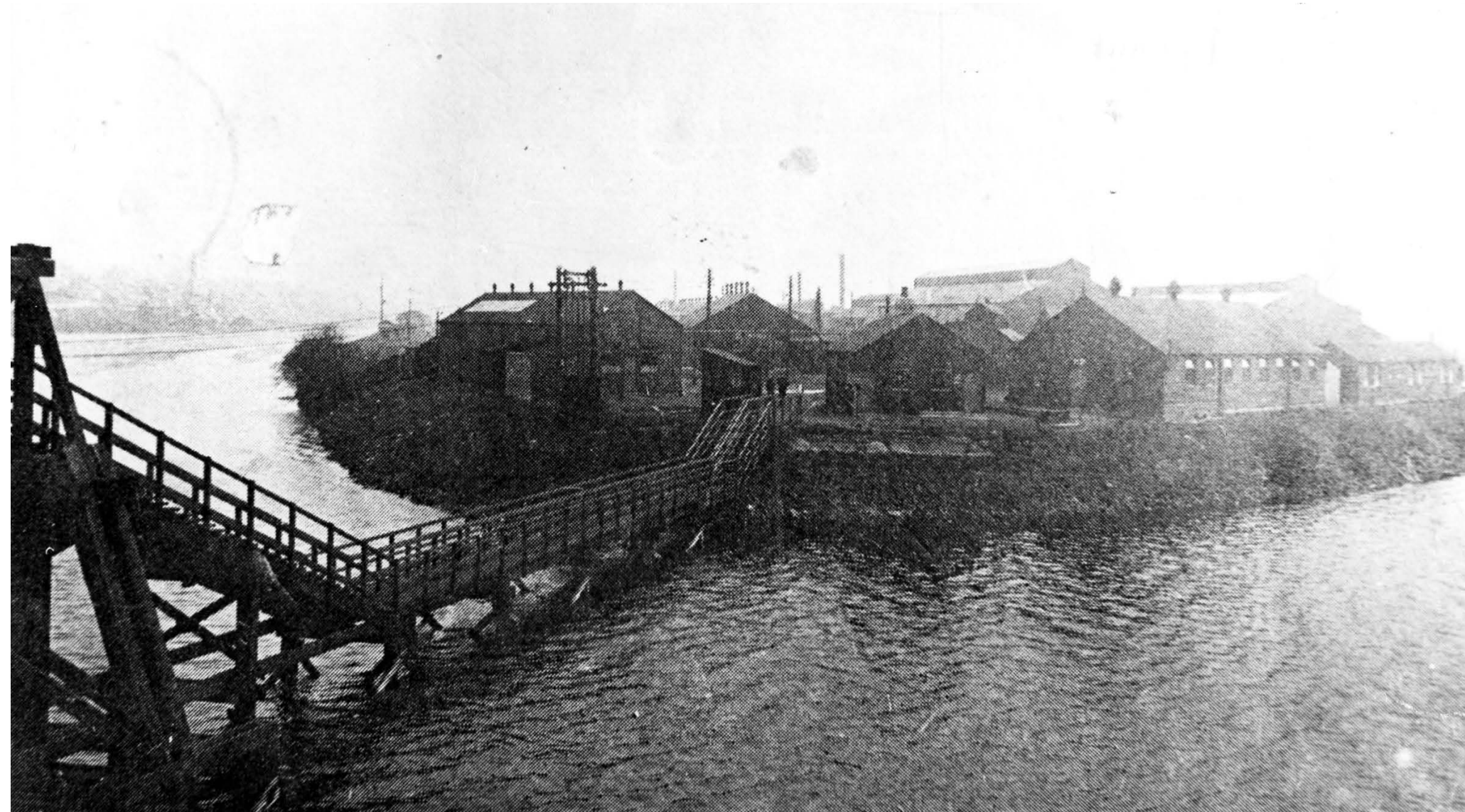


immigrant families attracted to the area to work in the riverside industries, still serves a wide area. Several Methodist churches opened in Lemington during the 19th century, including Low Lemington Methodist Mission, a United Methodist Church on Union Hall Road and a Primitive Methodist Church on Algernon Road (bottom right). These amalgamated in 1972 to become Lemington Methodist Church, Algernon Road.



Lemington Gut industries: By 1905 the Tyne had been re-routed, bypassing the Gut. This postcard shows that the Low Lemington riverside was still lined with industrial buildings. On the left are the coal staithes, next to the newly-built power station which provided a source of power for the trams. The tall chimneys just right of centre belonged to the Tyne Iron Works which had closed in 1876 after almost 200 years of operation.

Behind can be seen the cones of Lemington Glassworks. The glassworks operated from 1787 to 1987 under a succession of owners. Three of the four large cones were demolished in 1937, but the biggest one still stands today. It is over 120 feet high and made of more than a million bricks.

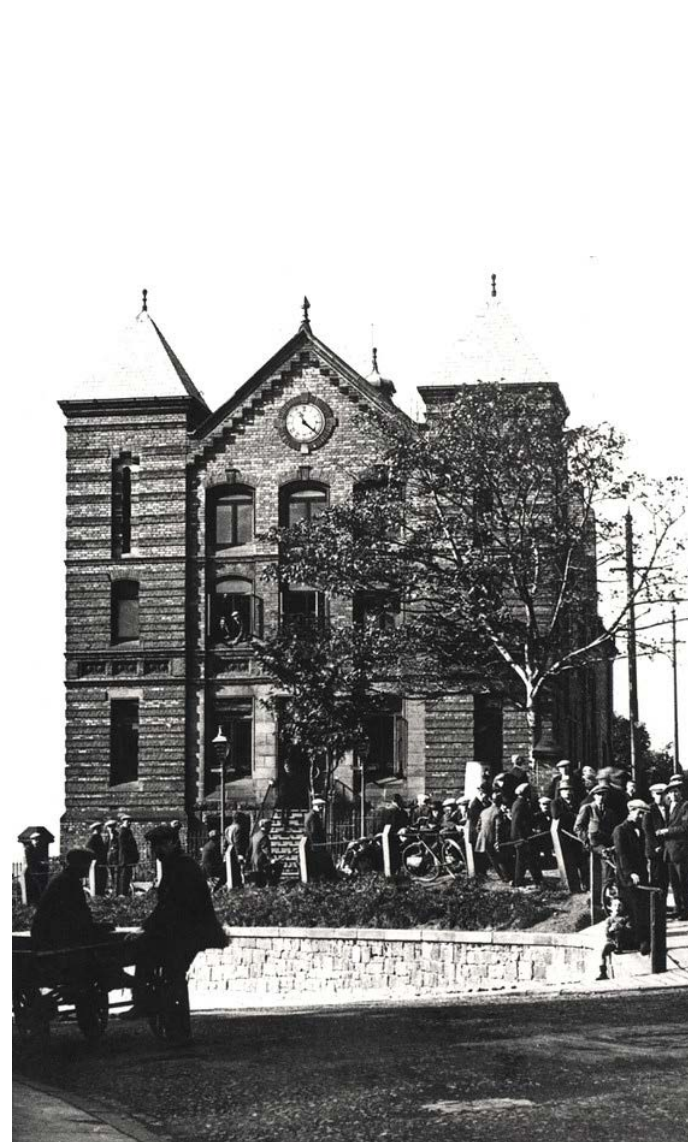


Canary Island: An island was created when the Tyne was dredged in the 1870s, cutting off Lemington Gut from the main river. During the First World War a munitions factory was built here, operated by Armstrong Whitworth. It acquired the name Canary Island because the toxic materials handled by the mainly female workforce caused their skin and hair to turn yellow, with the result that they were known locally as "canaries".

Access to the factory was by ferryboat from Bell's Close or by the wooden bridge depicted here. After the Second World War the land was reclaimed as the site for a graphite processing works called Anglo Great Lakes which in turn closed in the early 1990s.



Newburn High Street: This photograph of the east end of the High Street in 1909 shows the almshouses on the left. Built in 1870 to provide free accommodation for older residents from Newburn and the adjacent villages, they still stand today. On the opposite side of the road was the Cottage Hospital which had recently been established in a former Methodist Sunday School building. In the centre of the picture the buildings of Spencer's steelworks are just visible. By this date the works covered a 60 acre site stretching down to the river.

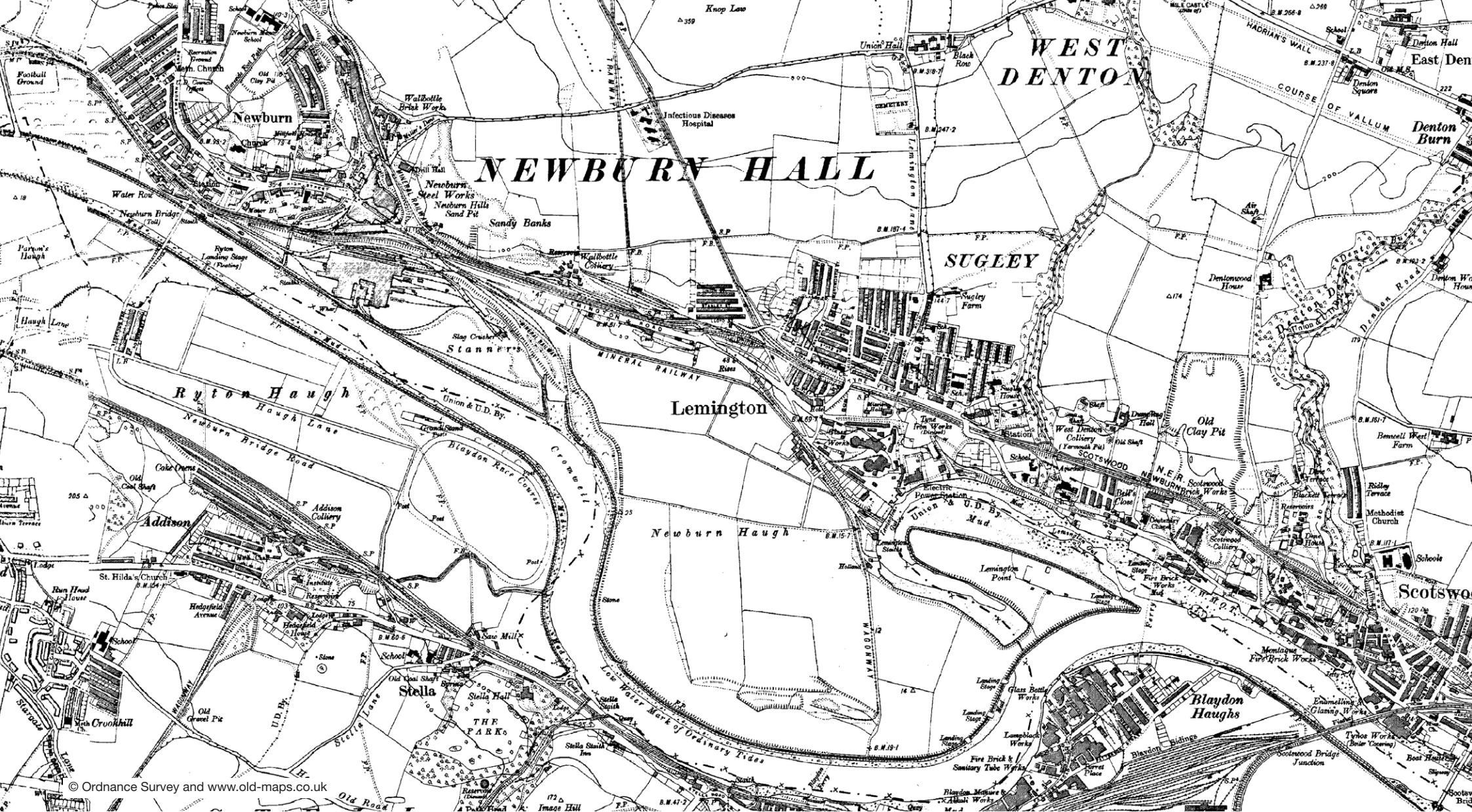


Further west along the High Street was the Working Men's Club and Institute, built in 1884 for the workers of Spencer's steelworks. It was equipped with baths, a library, reading rooms, recreation rooms and other facilities. The building still stands today.



Tyne View, Lemington: Lemington grew rapidly during the early years of the 20th century. Demand for new housing was prompted by the expansion of the steelworks and the nearby collieries. In the years before the First World War the village grew much faster than neighbouring Newburn, with more than 200 new homes. Tyne View became the main shopping street.

A tramline ran along it, and it was the main through road prior to the creation of Lemington Road in the 1970s which divided the village in two. The railway line ran immediately south and parallel to Tyne View, crossed by bridges at either end of the street.



The Outer West in 1921

More houses and shops have been added to Newburn village. Lemington has expanded to the north so that terraced houses now occupy the area north of Tyne View almost as far as Sugley Farm. The village has also extended westwards, but large tracts of land remain undeveloped between Newburn and Lemington. The riverside areas of Lemington and Bell's Close are densely packed with a mixture of

industry and housing. Around the Gut, the staithe, glassworks and power station are visible, as are the remains of the disused ironworks site. To the north, the importance of coalmining is evident with Walbottle Colliery's Percy Pit, West Denton Colliery's Yarmouth Pit, and the Scotswood Colliery drift mine all identified on the map.



Newburn Station: In 1871 the Scotswood, Newburn and Wylam Railway line opened. This connected Newburn with the main Newcastle and Carlisle line via a loop from Scotswood Bridge to Wylam, utilising the track-bed of the old Wylam Waggonway for most of its length. In 1875 a station was built to the south of the village. This closed in 1958 and there is no trace left now of the wooden station buildings, footbridge or the two-storey signal box.

The building that used to house the Newburn Hotel still stands at the bottom of Station Road. This was built in 1895 to provide accommodation for rail passengers and stabling facilities for horses.



Cross Row, Low Lemington: Most of the older dwellings in Low Lemington were built to accommodate the families drawn into the area to work on the coal staithes, down the pits, and in the factories along the riverside. Homes and workplaces were often barely yards apart. This photograph shows one of several rows of cottages in the shadow of the giant cones of Lemington Glassworks, subject to smoke and smells from the factory.

Although the local Medical Officer of Health reported in 1920 that hundreds of people were living in unhealthy and overcrowded conditions, the lack of suitable alternative accommodation meant that demolition was delayed. In the 1930s a wave of clearance removed these, together with hundreds of other substandard dwellings across the outer west.



Women's Temperance Association at Lemington: Here a large group from the British Women's Temperance Association is pictured in 1922 outside a building believed to be Lemington Hall. This 18th century building was situated at the west end of Lemington. The temperance movement had originated as a mass movement in the 19th century amid growing concern about the impact of drunkenness and excess alcohol consumption on families, society and industry.

The British Women's Temperance Association was an influential national organisation, founded in 1876 following a meeting in Newcastle featuring a well-known American temperance activist Eliza Stewart. At its peak the association had many thousands of members organised in local branches.



Trams: A single-line tram service from Scotswood Bridge to Newburn began in 1913. It provided access to the riverside industries as well as transport for residents. A path led from the tramline to the Lemington glassworks. This photograph from the 1940s shows a tram on the route between Bell's Close and Sugley Dene. Trams ran on a single line through Lemington village, crossing the railway line by two road bridges and going along Tyne View where there was a passing loop.

The tram service ceased in 1946, replaced by local bus services. The part of the tramway that crossed the former ironworks site at Lemington later became the route of the main road that bypassed the village.



Dumpling Hall Farm: Bell's Close in the 19th century was a small settlement of terraced houses and cottages hugging the riverside, surrounded by clay and coal mines, brickworks, copperas works and other factories. To the east was the Low Montagu Pit, infamous for the terrible disaster of 1925 which killed 38 miners. By the middle of the 20th century there were still open fields to the north of the village, though Lemington to the west and Denton Burn and Scotswood to the east were

now built up as far as the West Road. The old maps show Dumpling Hall lying to the north of Bell's Close. As this photograph shows, this was a farmhouse rather than a stately home.



The Outer West in 1951

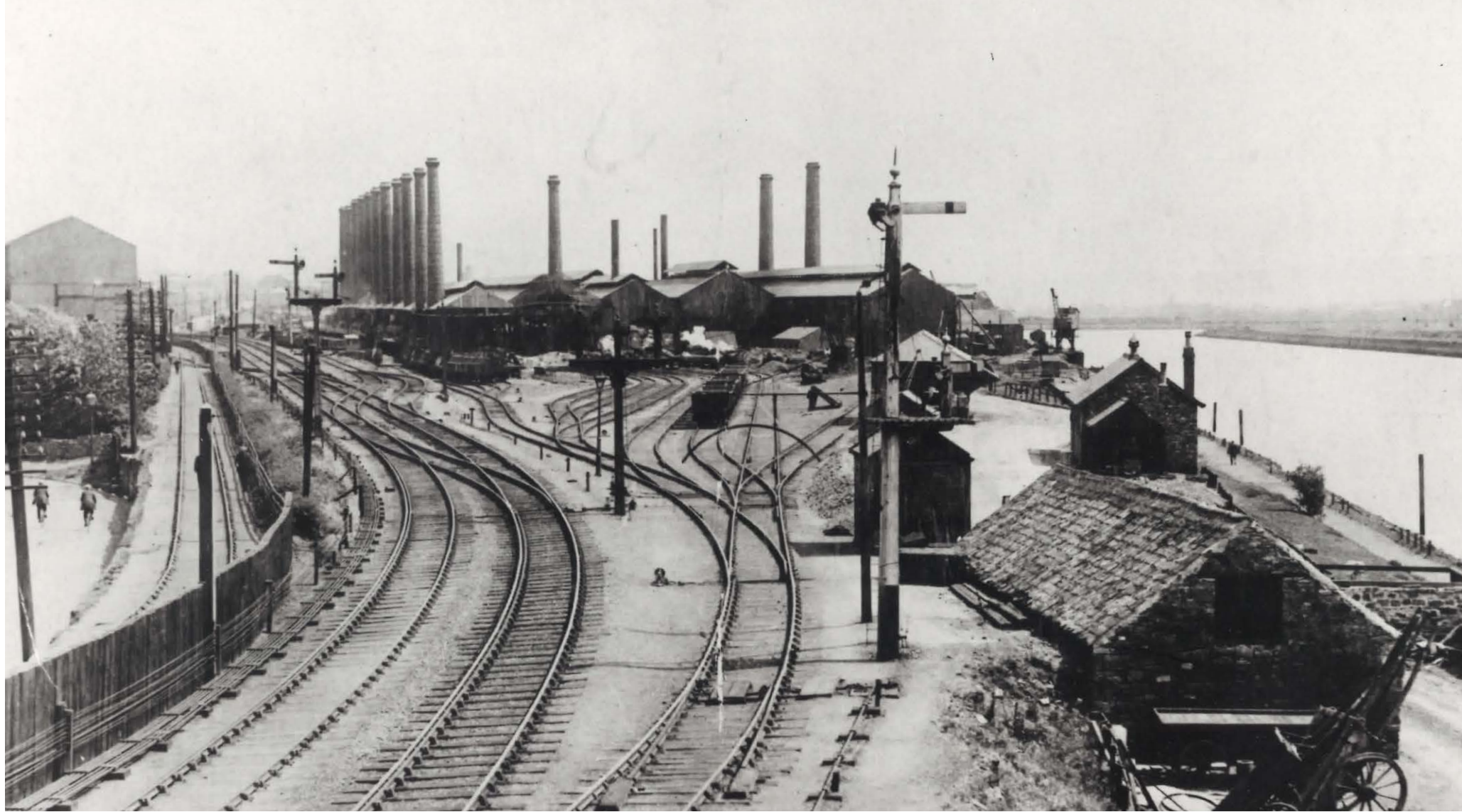
Lemington has more than doubled in size over the previous thirty years, as a result of major house-building schemes. To the north of Bell's Close, the land between Sugley Dene and Denton Dene is still predominantly rural, but further east the green fields of Scotswood and Denton Burn have given way to housing, bringing the suburbs of Newcastle ever closer.

On the east side of Newburn many of the buildings belonging to Spencer's steelworks have been swept away. Coalmining has diminished in importance across the area, although the huge slag heap of Percy Pit still dominates the scenery between Newburn and Lemington, and old shafts and clay pits still feature on the map.



Train passing Percy Pit Heap: This photograph taken in 1956 shows the morning train from North Wylam travelling between Newburn and Lemington on the Scotswood, Newburn and Wylam branch line. This had opened in the 1870s and followed the route of the former Wylam waggonway. Stations were built along the line at Newburn and Lemington.

The line closed in 1968, and today Hadrian's cycleway and footpath runs along the track-bed. In the background is the pit heap belonging to the Percy Pit, one of several pits belonging to Walbottle Colliery. During the 1970s the pit heap was cleared and the area landscaped.



Spencer's Steelworks: In 1811 John Spencer set up a steelworks in the dene to the north of Newburn. The 19th century was a period of rapid industrial development on Tyneside, and demand for the company's products boomed. Spencer's soon became one of the most advanced steel producers in the country. The works expanded until the site spread all the way south to the river. It had its own railway system, including a line to transport coke from Isabella Pit on the other side of Newburn.

The boom came to a sudden end after the First World War, and the works closed in the 1920s, later reopening as a much smaller enterprise. Most of the site was cleared in the 1930s, including a large 130 foot chimney. Spencer's finally closed in the 1960s.



Holy Saviour Church, Sugley: This photograph was taken in 1955 outside Holy Saviour Church. This is one of the oldest buildings in the area, dating from 1837. Unlike most churches, it had been built north-south instead of east-west. This was done to avoid a disused pit shaft on the east side of the site. Holy Saviour Church originally served as a chapel of ease from the parish church of St Michael and All Angels in Newburn, but later became a parish church in its own right.

The entrance to the church is on Scotswood Road which, contrary to common belief, does not end at the Scotswood Bridge but continues westwards beyond Bell's Close and the dene to turn north up the side of Sugley Church.



Avenue de Newburn: In 1963 Newburn twinned with Choisy-le-Roi, a suburb of Paris. These photographs come from the official brochure commemorating twenty years of the relationship. Left: the official opening of the “Avenue de Newburn” in Paris and the crowning of the “Queen”.



Top right: a group of young people from Newburn on a visit to Choisy in 1970. Bottom right: a friendly match between the two towns held in Newburn in 1981.



Bell's Close and Dumpling Hall: As late as the mid-1970s Bell's Close was a small village comprising a few streets, a church and a school. To the north lay old clay pits and open farmland belonging to Dumpling Hall farm. This would soon change when a large housing estate was built here. It extended from just above Bell's Close village as far as the West Road, and it was named Dumpling Hall.

This photograph predates the building of the new estate. In the centre is the Wesleyan “Centenary” Chapel behind the front street of the village. To the right of the picture stand the sheds of the former tile works. Below these, a bridge crosses Lemington Gut providing access for the works of Anglo Great Lakes opened in 1958 to make graphite for use in the nuclear industry.



Lemington Gut: Today little remains of the industries that once thrived at Lemington Gut or the homes that huddled in their shadow. The wooden structure in the forefront of this 2013 photograph was once part of the staithe. The brick building behind is the Lemington Power Station which was constructed in 1903-4 on part of the site of the former Tyne Iron Works.

The station ceased generating in 1919 but continued in use as a substation, supplying power for the local tramway route to Throckley. This building has since been demolished. The low building on the left is one of the few surviving buildings of the ironworks. It served as the manager's house and office.



The Outer West in 1974

Newburn, Lemington, Bell's Close and Sugley have now been incorporated into the City of Newcastle. There has been further housing development around Lemington. While the land immediately above Bell's Close is as yet undeveloped, the area north of that is now completely filled with housing as far as the West Road. The railway line is still marked, but trains no longer run on it and the track has recently been

removed. Stella North Power Station can be seen on Newburn Haugh, the former site of Lemington Hall which was demolished in 1953 to make way for it. Along with Stella South Power Station on the other side of the river, Stella North was demolished during the 1990s. The north site became a business and industrial park.

Newcastle's Outer West

*through the years
in Maps and Pictures*

Travelling west from the centre of Newcastle today you pass what may appear to be an endless succession of suburbs before you leave the city boundary. Before 1974, however, Newburn, Lemington, Bell's Close and Sugley were not part of Newcastle. Often described as the city's "Outer West", these distinctive communities have a long and fascinating history in their own right. Far from being a rural backwater, this area has played a significant role over the years in shaping wider economic and political developments.

This book uses maps to trace the development of the area from 1864 to the 1970s, while a selection of old photographs brings to life the story of the transformation of these communities over the years. Join us to explore the history of the Outer West in maps and pictures.

St James' Heritage & Environment Group

St James' Heritage & Environment Group is an independent voluntary organisation and registered charity dedicated to exploring the history of West Newcastle and preserving images and stories from its past. The Group provides activities and resources for people of all ages to explore and celebrate the area's history. Its local history books, heritage guides and films can be viewed on the website. The group also maintains the historic graveyard of St James' in Benwell.

Write: St James' Heritage & Environment Group, c/o Sunnybank Centre, 12/14 Sunnybank Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 6SD.

Email: stjamesbenwell@gmail.com

Website: <https://stjamesheritage.com>

Visit: The Group meets weekly at St James' Graveyard, Benwell Lane, when circumstances allow. Visitors are welcome, but it is advisable to contact the group in advance to make arrangements.

Front cover images:

Tyne Ironworks, 1835

Sugley Dene (undated)

St George's Church, c1908

Extract from 1899 Ordnance Survey Map

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