

# Walk Route

This is a circular walk starting and finishing at St James’ Church on Benwell Lane, following a route along the north side of Adelaide Terrace to the point where it becomes Elswick Road, before returning along the south side of the Terrace.

Use the map to help you uncover the history behind the places you pass. There are photographs and information about each of the points of interest marked on the map.

- Begin your walk at St James’ Church and the adjacent graveyard.
- As you leave here, pause outside the gates to look across Benwell Lane and consider how the immediate area has changed over the past century.
- Turn right towards the junction with Atkinson Road.
- Use the lights to cross Atkinson Road and then Adelaide Terrace.
- Follow the route along the north side of Adelaide Terrace to the far end of the new shopping centre.
- Cross the road at the shopping centre and walk back along the south side of the Terrace to return to the church.



### START AT ST JAMES’ CHURCH

This is a good place to start your heritage walk as the parish church stands at the junction of four roads telling different stories about the history of Benwell.

- Condercum Road leads up to the site of the Roman fort of Condercum, one of the major forts on Hadrian’s Wall.
- Benwell Lane ran through a cluster of grand houses and mansions, reflecting the area’s past wealth and status.
- Atkinson Road was the route of a waggonway bringing coal from local collieries down to the river.
- Adelaide Terrace was the main shopping street of “New Benwell”.

# St James’ Church



### 1. St James’ Church

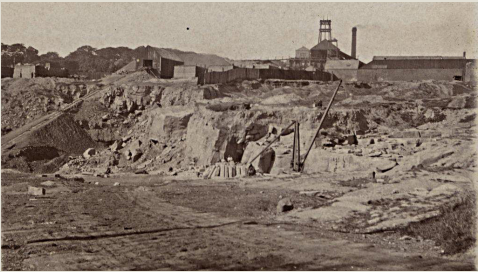
St James’ is one of Newcastle’s oldest churches. It was not always the grand stone building you see now. It opened in 1833 as a small chapel connected to St John’s Church in Grainger Street. At that time just over a thousand people lived in Benwell. Over the years the population grew rapidly as people were drawn into the area to work in the riverside industries, and the church expanded to about three times its original size in order to accommodate the growing community. The original chapel was designed by the famous architect John Dobson. It had a square tower, instead of the tall spire visible today.



### 2. St James’ Graveyard

The former parish graveyard was the burial place of more than 12,000 local residents. When it opened in the 1830s, this was a highly desirable residential area, and many of Tyneside’s wealthiest families lived here in large houses

and mansions set in extensive landscaped grounds. Notable people buried here include the internationally renowned mining engineer John Buddle, Bishop Arthur Thomas Lloyd, and the developer Richard Grainger (pictured here).



### 3. Quarry and Coalmine

There used to be a quarry on the opposite side of Benwell Lane from St James’ Church. Behind the quarry can be seen the Charlotte Pit, the last coal mine to close in Benwell. It stood where the council depot is now on the west side of Condercum Road which was formerly called Charlotte Pit Lane. A waggonway used to run down from the pit, crossing Benwell Lane then passing through the fields where the graveyard is now and continuing downhill to reach the coal staithes on the river.



### 4. The Grand and the Majestic

The site where the West End Library and Customer Service Centre now stands used to be occupied by a cinema called the Majestic which could accommodate an audience of about 1400. Hundreds of children packed the cinema for the popular Saturday matinees. On the opposite corner there was a smaller cinema called the Grand which in later years had something of a reputation as a fleapit.

## Adelaide Terrace: a heritage walk

Adelaide Terrace, Benwell’s main shopping street, began more than a century ago. From the late 19th century Benwell’s green fields were progressively covered with dense terraced housing to meet the needs of the booming riverside industries. The earliest housing development took place immediately north of Scotswood Road, but was soon followed by a further wave of house-building higher up the banks. The area known as New Benwell was born, and Adelaide Terrace was at its heart.

The earliest buildings on the Terrace were houses, but it soon grew rapidly as a shopping street serving the new community. By 1900, 40 companies had set up shop here, and by 1914 almost the whole length of the street was filled with shops, pubs, banks and other businesses.

This circular walk takes you along Adelaide Terrace, following clues to the hidden history of people and places lying behind the facades of the buildings you can see today. It starts and ends at St James’ Church on Benwell Lane.

This heritage walk was devised by St James’ Heritage & Environment Group in partnership with Newcastle Photo Archive. It was commissioned by Search as part of their contribution to the Newcastle High Streets Project funded by the UK Government through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund with the North East Combined Authority as the lead authority.

### Do you have memories of Adelaide Terrace?

We are interested to hear from people who remember the Terrace in the past. Please get in touch if you have information, photographs or memories you would like to share with us.

Contact: St James’ Heritage & Environment Group, c/o 12 Sunnybank Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 6SD or email [stjamesbenwell@gmail.com](mailto:stjamesbenwell@gmail.com).

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Cover photograph: Adelaide Terrace looking west to tram terminus

# Adelaide Terrace A Heritage Walk



## On the trail of the hidden history of Benwell’s shopping street

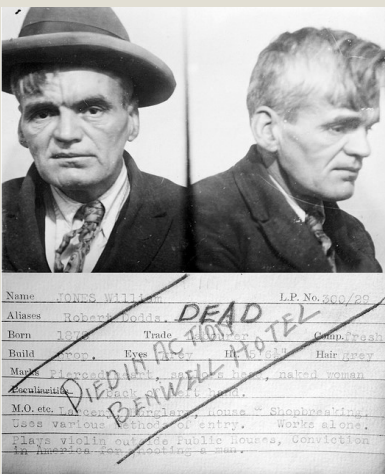


# The Hidden History of Adelaide Terrace



## 5. The first houses

The history of Adelaide Terrace begins in the 1880s as part of the development of what was known as New Benwell. Before then it was no more than a dirt track. The first row of buildings you pass were the first to be built at that time. These were originally houses, remaining residential almost up to the First World War. They were built using distinctive chequerboard bricks which you can see clearly on the side wall at the end of the block. It is interesting to note the varied types of bricks used for buildings on the street, indicating that they were the work of different builders.



## 8. Benwell Hotel

The big white building on the corner of Cochran Street is identifiable as the former Benwell Hotel from the decorative sign on the side wall. This building gained notoriety in 1932 when a burglar called William Jones fell to his death from the roof as the police were waiting below to arrest him. This was the end of a lifetime of crime for Jones. He had previously been imprisoned for 14 years in Chicago's Sing Sing prison for a street shooting.



## 6. The Bond Church

There are only two buildings remaining of the once monumental Bond Memorial Church, now separated by an empty site labelled 'Benwell and Elswick Community Meadow' where the main church building once stood. The first stone building you pass was opened in 1893 as a Sunday School, as the sign above the door still states. As well as classrooms it contained a large hall which functioned as a worship area until the new church building opened in 1899 with the capacity for 800 worshippers. It was demolished in 2017.



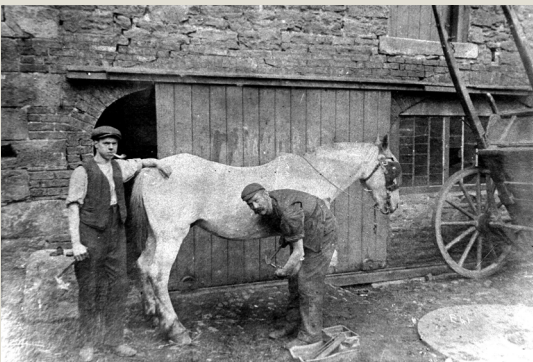
## 9. The White Elephant

The old shops between Cochran Street and Beech Street were demolished as a result of the slum clearance programme of the 1960s. An initial plan had envisaged the creation of a dual carriageway along the Terrace, effectively cutting Benwell in two and involving the demolition of more than 30 shops on the south side. Fortunately that never happened. In 1973 a large, two-storey, concrete shopping centre was built in the space where the old shops had been. Seen as a monstrosity from the outset, it was never popular with shoppers. Most of the units remained empty. It was replaced in 1996 by the present day shopping centre.



## 7. Bakers at work

In the past there were several bakers on the Terrace, making bread on site in big coke ovens. Each shop employed as many as three bakers plus assistants. They would start work in the early hours of the morning, preparing the dough and baking bread. In the past, the bakers were often known as confectioners because they also made cakes. One of the longest-lasting was Campbell's which occupied at least two different premises on the Terrace over the years.



## 10. The Blacksmith

The blacksmith's shop pictured here was one of the businesses that stood on the site now occupied by the shopping centre. This photograph dates from about 1910 – a time when horses were an important mode of transport for people and goods. Some nearby businesses such as Jennings bakery on Beech Street had their own stables, as did St James' Church. There were also many farms in Benwell and surrounding areas which would rely on horses to carry out their work.



## 11. The Boundary

Beech Street marks the end of Adelaide Terrace and the boundary of Benwell. Benwell was not part of Newcastle until 1904. Prior to that it belonged to the Benwell and Fenham Urban District whose offices were on the east side of Atkinson Road. This photograph dating from 1900 shows the a house called Boundary Cottage at the bottom of Beech Street. It was sometimes given the name of the Toll House, although it was not responsible for collecting tolls as neither Adelaide Terrace nor Elswick Road were turnpike roads which travellers had to pay to use.



## 14. The Benwell Spy

If you watched the 2015 film *Bridge of Spies*, you will be familiar with Rudolf Abel, the high ranking Soviet spy. Abel was captured while working in the USA and convicted of passing military secrets to the Russians, but later returned to Russia where he was seen as a hero. What the film doesn't tell you is that Rudolf Abel was born in Benwell at 140 Clara Street, Benwell. The lower part of Clara Street where the family lived no longer exists. This view down the steep terraced street towards the power station on the far side of the river is a distant memory.



## 12. The Adelaide Cinema

The Adelaide Picture Hall was Benwell's first cinema, opened in 1910. It was the third cinema in Newcastle to introduce sound. This photograph dates from the 1930s. The poster on the wall advertises a film called *King of the Pecos* starring John Wayne. The cinema had closed by the end of the Second World War. For many decades the building housed a Woolworth's store, and it has since undergone several changes of use. The building still stands today.



## 15. The Brambles of Benwell

William Bramble owned three shops on the Terrace, starting as a boot and shoe manufacturer in the 1880s. He soon expanded his range to include drapery, clothing, hardware, glass, china and other provisions. This photograph shows Bramble's drapers shop in 1910. It stood at 71 Adelaide Terrace near the junction with Ethel Street. The family initially lived on the Terrace, later moving to Benwell Hall, a large house set in its own grounds. Bramble's wealth came mainly from property. He was a major landlord in Benwell, owning many of the buildings on the Terrace.



## 13. Sutton's Dwellings

Opposite the shopping centre is the site of the original Suttons Dwellings, replaced in the late 1990s by a modern housing complex including sheltered accommodation. The original Suttons Dwellings estate was built in the 1930s by the Sutton Trust, a charity which built low-cost model homes for the poor. This was the area's first housing association estate, comprising eight four-storey blocks of flats with walkways connecting them. The estate was built on the site of a nursery, which probably explains the name of the adjacent Hugh Gardens.



## 16. High Cross

The area still known today as High Cross took its name from an actual cross erected in the 16th or 17th century during a cholera outbreak in Newcastle. It marked the spot three miles from the town where local farmers could leave produce to be collected by townsfolk. The cross is thought to have stood just east of the junction with Atkinson Road. This photograph from the 1880s shows High Cross cottages, which housed miners from the nearby pits. They were demolished in the 1890s to make way for the new housing being built on and around Adelaide Terrace. In the background you can see St James' Church with the short spire that predated the spire you can see today.