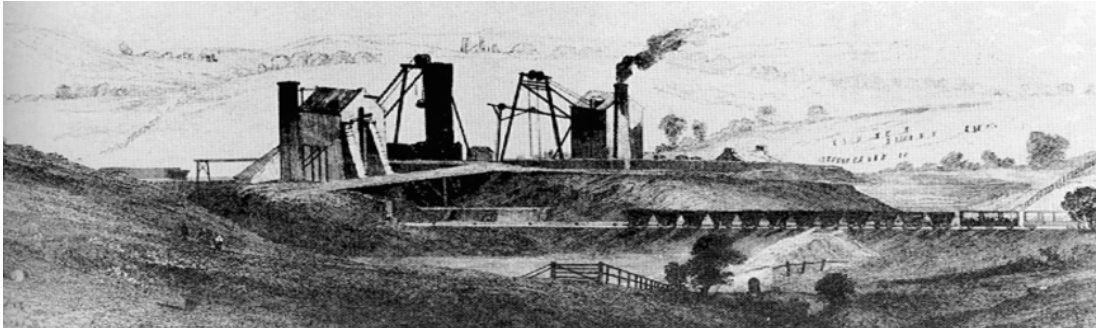
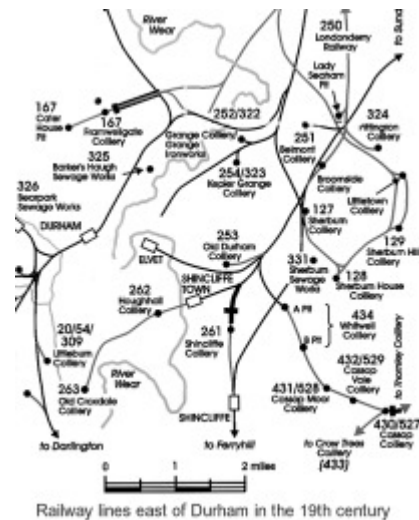
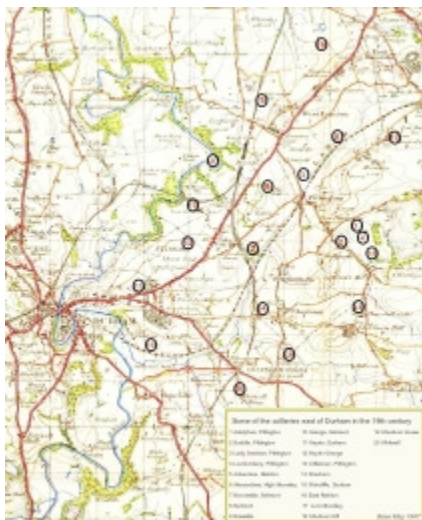


Collieries and railways east of Durham City



The collieries

County Durham is well known as a place where the extraction and transport of coal transformed a previously rural environment into one of the most intensely industrialised landscapes in the country. It is, perhaps, less well known that much of this landscape has returned to its former rural aspect and that it is increasingly difficult to find any evidence of those former industries. This study looks at the impact of the pits and their associated wagonways on a small part of the county to the east of Durham City. This entails locating collieries and railway lines, many of which were abandoned over a century ago, looking at the relationship between them and examining their impact on the local population.



Much of the information on these pages has been gathered from existing web-sites which are acknowledged below.

The maps on either side show the collieries and railway lines mentioned in the text. Click on either map to show full-size image.

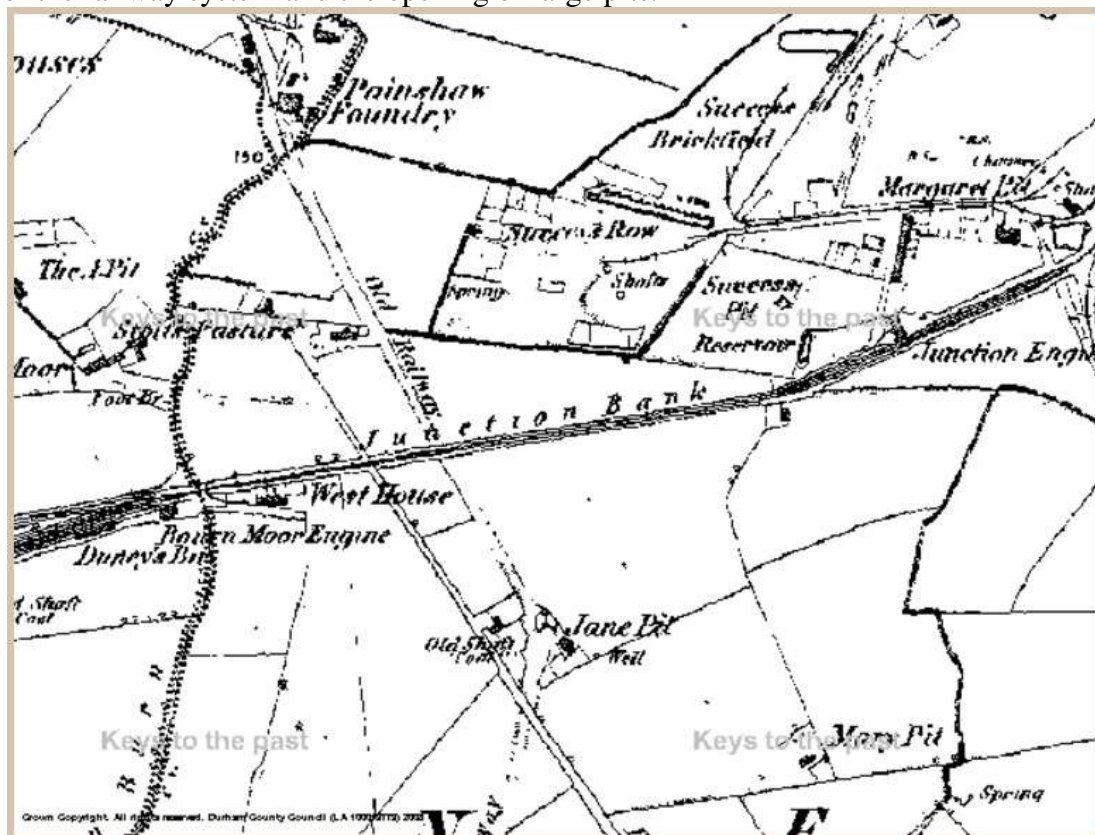
Durham before the 19th century

At the beginning of the nineteenth century much of lowland Durham was occupied by small hamlets and villages consisting of two, three or more farmsteads cultivating the surrounding land. Much of the area between the villages was unenclosed and referred to as "commons" or "moors".

While there had been, for centuries, small surface workings and deeper drift mines extracting coal for local use and for export, Durham's greatest contribution to the economy at the beginning of the nineteenth century was in agriculture rather than industry. This lay in the scientific development of the Durham Shorthorn cattle breed and its contribution towards feeding the new manufacturing classes created by the Industrial Revolution.

Small-scale coal workings - an example

The area around Painshaw in 1856 (modern Newbottle) is typical of the piecemeal coal mining which had existed for at least a century in Durham before the expansion of the railway system and the opening of large pits.



In an area of a dozen or so fields are five small pits without any ancillary structures, some old shafts, a foundry and a brickfield. The wagonway, along Junction Bank, has

two stationary engines and there is a disused railway. At Success Row there are houses for men working in the pits, the foundry and the railway.

It would be a busy scene with movement of coal, bricks, clay etc along the roads and railways. It was almost certainly noisy and smoky but, despite the industrial enterprises, the landscape would have retained a rural aspect with fields of grass, corn and animals.

There was a long tradition of giving pits female names but soon homely names like Jane, Margaret and Mary would be replaced by those such as Alexandrina, Lady Anne and Lady Seaham as the aristocratic landowners began to invest in deeper pits and better wagonways. The local aristocracy were keen to exploit their hidden resources and the fields of east Durham, in the first part of the 19th century, would have been alive with experimental borings to "prove" the existence of coal-bearing strata.

Industrial Growth and Decline

A combination of increasing demand for coal to fuel the newly invented steam engine, and improvements in the carriage of coal to the ports of North East England, caused a great rash of new collieries and a dense network of wagonways to spring up in Durham.

The nineteenth century development of coal mining in Durham brought about a tremendous increase in the population of the North East as many previously rural villages grew into small colliery towns almost overnight. This was particularly the case in County Durham, where villages seemed to spring up from virtually nowhere at all. In 1787 there were around 7000 colliers employed in the coal mines of North East England and by 1810 this number had only increased to 10,000. Just over a hundred years later, in 1919, there were 223,000 coal miners working in the region and 154,000 of these were in the county of Durham.



Among the most influential and powerful owners were John George Lambton, 1st Earl of Durham (1792-1840) and Charles William Vane-Stewart, 3rd Marquess of Londonderry (1778-1854). The Marquess, who founded Seaham Harbour, is

commemorated by a statue in Durham Marketplace. Their mining enterprises in our area included the following pits.

Earl of Durham

- Brasside
- Cocken, Durham
- Lady Durham, Sherburn
- Littletown, Pittington
- Sherburn Hill
- Sherburn House

Marquess of Londonderry

- Pittington
- Adventure Pit, Rainton
- High Moorsley
- Belmont
- Broomside
- Old Durham

Most of the collieries in the area under consideration were sunk in the years between 1820 and 1850. The career of George Stephenson can be seen as a microcosm of the great colliery boom of the early 19th century. His first employment was herding cows but, living in a cottage on the Wylam Wagonway, he developed an interest in railways. He worked in a number of pits on Tyneside maintaining stationary steam engines which were used to haul coal to the surface, pump water from the workings and carry the coals to market. The steam engine allowed mines to access deeper seams and thus produce a greater tonnage. In turn this created a need to improve the old wooden wagonways and the horse-drawn carts.

Stephenson's railway from [Hetton Pit](#) to Sunderland was the first to use steam locomotives for the carriage of coal, or indeed any commodity, from pit to port. He went on to build the Stockton to Darlington Railway, the line from Liverpool to Manchester, and win the Rainhill Trials with his locomotive 'Rocket'.



It would be wrong to believe that as soon as the steam locomotive appeared that it was instantly adopted for the carriage of coal. For many years the use of horses and stationary engines continued, especially on the steeper gradients, and replacement by

steam locomotives was by necessity slow as lines needed to be re-graded and widened. The following description of that part of the Londonderry Railway serving pits at Pittington and Broomside in 1839 is testament to the continuing use of the older forms of transport.

The first section, the 1007 yards from the colliery to the bank head of the first incline, was worked by horses; latterly they were replaced by the Pittington Engine, built at the colliery using parts of an old locomotive and working the colliery as well as the railway.... the incline itself was a self-acting bank 600 yards long on a gradient of 1 in 26 which took the the line down to the road through Pittington Village. Here there was a stationary engine called the Flatts Engine which worked the 1377 yard branch which trailed in from Broomside Colliery.

The account goes on to name four or five more engines and a number of self-acting planes which took the coal from the various Londonderry pits to the River Wear at Sunderland without any assistance from locomotives. It was not until 1860 that locomotive working superceded horse and rope haulage.

It is in the nature of mining that production may be interrupted by geological or economic factors. Many of the pits which opened in the early 19th century were abandoned well before the end of the century. When the sole reason for the existence of a mining settlement was removed the heart was torn out of the community which withered and died. In our area there are numerous places where economic activity rose out of a rural landscape, flourished for a time and then disappeared without a trace. One of these villages was Whitwell which saw the whole cycle completed within the century.

Whitwell Colliery



About 1738 a small "land-sale" colliery was opened here by Abraham Teasdale. This term described small enterprises satisfying local markets to distinguish them from "sea-coal" collieries which sent their output to London. A century later Whellan reported thus:-

This colliery is situated near the Durham and Sunderland Railway, about 2 1/2 miles southeast from the city of Durham, and commands a splendid view of the beautiful cathedral, the castle, and the surrounding scenery of that ancient city. It comprises the whole of the extra-parochial place or township of Whitwell House, the property of the Master and Brethren of Sherburn Hospital, and is held by lease for three lives by John Gregson, Esq., of Shotton Hall.

The colliery is carried on by the Messrs. Whites, Robson, and Ogden, under the firm of the Whitwell Coal Company, who lease it of Mr. Gregson for a term of years. The sinking of the A pit was commenced on May 2, 1836; and the Hutton seam was won on the 20th June, 1837, at the depth of 59 fathoms. The sinking of the B pit was completed to the Hutton seam, at the depth of 65 fathoms, in 1840. There are three workable seams in this royalty, all of which are of excellent quality.

The coals are called, in the market "Whitwell Wallsend," and are produced from the Low Main and Hutton Seams; the High Main having been worked to a very slight extent since the opening of the colliery in 1837. There are two engines on the A pit; one of 100 horse power for pumping water, and the other of 45 horse power for drawing the coals out of the mine. The engine used for drawing the coals from the B pit is of 36 horse power. The coals are transmitted by the Durham and Sunderland Railway, a distance of 14 miles, to drops at the latter place. The first were shipped on November 6, 1837.

The village which grew up near the mine consisted of about forty houses and a Primitive Methodist Chapel and in 1841 its population was recorded as 173. However mining operations ceased in 1875 and Whellan records that in 1894:-

<http://www.dmm.org.uk/colliery/w027.htm> The village of Whitwell Grange is now almost deserted, and the colliery plant and buildings have fallen into complete ruin. The few houses that are occupied are inhabited by the pitmen employed at Sherburn House Colliery.

Durham Mining Museum on-line tells the whole [story](#).

Series of five [maps](#) of Whitwell from 1865 to 2008

A colliery which lasted a few years longer than Whitwell was that of Houghall which closed in 1880. Today the old shafts and the village are almost completely hidden by trees near to Houghall Farm. Durham Mining Museum on-line tells the whole [story](#) of the colliery as well as that of the railway which served it. This includes reports of fatal accidents which were common in most of the mines.

Series of four [maps](#) of Houghall from 1865 to 2008

The railways



The story of the railways to the east of Durham is an interesting one both locally and nationally. In 1831 the Sunderland Dock Company built the line known as the Sunderland and Durham Railway which initially linked coal mines at Croxdale and Houghall, by way of Sherburn House, Pittington, Hetton, Murton and Ryhope, with staithes on the River Wear at Sunderland. Branches were also constructed on this line to mines at Whitwell, Old Durham and Shincliffe Collieries. This was only five years after the opening of the Stockton and Darlington Line and the carriage of passengers was always in the minds of the railway companies. Linking the county town with the most populous town, Sunderland, was an obvious aim and Durham's first station was at [Shincliffe Village](#), just south of the city, which opened in 1839. Locomotives operated some stretches of this line, while stationary engines, and even horses, operated other sections. [Self-acting inclines](#) were the method used when loaded wagons descending pulled up empty wagons.

Although the passenger service terminated at Shincliffe Station the [line](#) extended further west to Houghall Colliery before running south to Croxdale Colliery by a farm in Blades Wood between Farewell Hall and Sunderland Bridge. The bridge abutments survive in several places including the crossing of The River Wear at Shincliffe as does some of the embankment either side of the river. The line beyond Houghall Colliery was abandoned in the 1830's.

The railway entrepreneur George Hudson built the main line northwards from York from around 1841. His line was called the Newcastle and Durham Junction Railway and became part of the North Eastern Railway in the early 1850s. Known later as the Leamside line, it passed well to the east of the city and joined the Londonderry Railway which was originally built to take coal from Londonderry pits at Old Durham, Pittington, Rainton, Broomside and Belmont. A railway station was built at [Shincliffe Bank Top](#) on the Leamside line in 1844 though, at a couple of miles south of the city, it was not very convenient for Durham passengers. This station remains today as a private house after some years as a restaurant.

In the same year a branch line was constructed which left the Leamside line at [Belmont Junction](#), north east of Durham, and ended at [Gilesgate Station](#) close to the heart of the city. This became goods only in 1857 when the Leamside branch to Bishop Auckland, crossing the Wear by [Belmont Viaduct](#), gave Durham its present station, and from where a link with Sunderland was later established. When the A 690 road was built from the A1M junction at Carville, along the old railway track, the station became a hardware store and, most recently, a hotel and restaurant.

In 1893 the North Eastern Railway opened a station in [Elvet](#) in Durham City. This was served by a new line branching off the old Shincliffe line at [Sherburn House](#). From the 24th July 1893 the service to Shincliffe was withdrawn and the station closed. At the same time Sherburn House Station was resited from the junction onto the new branch. Elvet still opened for Durham Miners Gala each year to allow trains to bring the miners and their families to the racecourse in the city. In 1949 Elvet Station buildings were taken over by the County Council and used as office for the motor taxation department but the original buildings were demolished in 1964 and a new office block was built on the site. The front of the site is now occupied by Durham Magistrates Court while an NHS office block stands at the rear.

The course of the main line from Newcastle to York reflects its origins. Much of the route between Newcastle and Darlington is along the route of old colliery lines and, as such, takes a very indirect route. A traveller on the A1M or the A167, between Durham and Darlington, will see the railway line swing across the road at Nevilles Cross, Sunderland Bridge, Brafferton and Preston-le Skerne. In contrast, the next section south to York is arrow-straight as it passes through rural North Yorkshire where it was built specifically for passengers.

Pittington Colliery was linked to the Sunderland and Durham Railway as early as 1836. The 1865 map shows the [village](#) with farmhouses on either side of the High Street. This street appeared to be rather a cul-de sac as it petered out into a steep track climbing the scarp slope to the east. The through road was that to the south to what became known as High Pittington and Littleton.

Despite the Lady Seaham pit being situated two or three hundred yards from the old village there were comparatively few new buildings to house the miners who generally found their accommodation half a mile away in High Pittington. Even so the area to the north of the village was densely occupied by industrial structures such as the pit itself, Belmont Colliery, three different railways, a stationary engine and Pittington Station. Pittington remained open until 5th January 1953 and the branch from Hetton and Murton was retained until the late 1950's for wagon storage. Hetton to Sherburn closed to all traffic on 3rd April 1960 and to Murton on 11th November 1963. Today almost nothing survives except a mound in the corner of a field, bridge abutments south of the cross roads, and the isolated remnants of Pittington Station Houses along the old track to Hetton.

Series of four [maps](#) of Pittington from 1865 to 2008

The Earl of Durham's Railway, later called the Lambton Railway, linked Littleton Colliery to coal staithes at Peshaw and also served Sherburn and Sherburn House Collieries. [Sherburn Station](#) was just to the north of the bridge on the road to Durham.

The old colliery site is occupied by some ramshackle sheds and allotments and the track bed is still in evidence north to Broomside and Leamside.

