

Birtley

The earliest recorded evidence of human activity at Birtley is a collection of early prehistoric flint artefacts including knives, scrapers and cores (HER 650-653) found in 1932-33 at Birtley Brickworks. Various bronze-age artefacts, including a perforated stone hammer found with a bronze axe in 1931 (HER 654-5), and a bronze spearhead (HER 656) were also found in brickyards around the same date. The first documentary reference to the village of Birtley (HER 670) are in the Boldon Buke of 1183, "Birtley and Tribley render 20s, and attend the great chase with 2 greyhounds". The Birtleys held the manor of Birtley for several generations, but by the time of Hatfield's Survey the vill was held by Lord Nevill, and Gilbert Eglyne, who had married a Birtley heiress. It was not, at that time, an important centre and was listed under Kibblesworth. The village lay close to and parallel with the east side of the old Great North Road, and is thought to have had an irregular two-row plan with a green. During the 15th century a deer park (HER 4621) owned by the Bishop of Durham existed on what is now a golf course. The site of Birtley Old Hall, shown on early Ordnance Survey maps, lies in the centre of the village and may have formed the nucleus of the medieval settlement. Long Acre Farm (HER 1672) which dates from the 18th or early 19th century, shows adaptations to accommodate changing agricultural technology. Other farms well-established by the 19th century include Birtley Springs Farm, named after a salt spring on the site. Birtley in the industrial age included coal pits such as South Birtley Colliery, Wash House pit (HER 3916) and the Vale pit in Mount Moor Colliery (HER 3896), as well as related wagonways such as the Pelaw Main Wagonway (HER 4122), an iron works and various brickyards (HER 3919 and 3921). Brickmaking has continued to the present day. The development of Birtley as a settlement for workers during the industrial age also led to the construction of public buildings such as schools and chapels. Later structures of cultural heritage value include a 2-storey pill box (HER 5374) constructed for use in the Second World War.