

Blaydon

The earliest recorded evidence of human activity at Blaydon is a Neolithic polished stone axe (HER 598) found in the early 20th century. Finds and structures from later prehistoric periods include a bronze spearhead and log-boat, both recovered from the River Tyne in the 19th century (HER 596-7). A number of bronze age cists are recorded from Summerhill (HER 611, 614-5 and 618), and several others from Bewes Hill (HER 601-604). Little is recorded of medieval Blaydon, which appears to have been based upon the modern farm sites of High and Low Shibdon (HER 6123 and 6126). The Blaydon Burn Belts Corn Mill (HER 1641), part of a row of 5 or 6 water corn mills stretching from Brockwell Wood to the River Tyne (see also HER 1679 and 3421-3), is known to have been present by the early 17th century, suggesting a healthy population at that time. It is likely that, as well as farming, many industrial activities such as mining and quarrying had begun in the medieval and post-medieval periods, well before the industrial period of the 18th to 20th centuries when Blaydon became an important industrial centre. The stimulus for industry at Blaydon and Blaydon burn, as elsewhere in the region, was the growth in coal mining and the coal trade, particularly from the early 18th century, when the Hazard and Speculation pits (HER 6022) were established at Low Shibdon (HER 3457), linked to the Tyne by wagonways (e.g. HER 3459). The 18th century Blaydon Main Colliery was reopened in the mid-19th century (HER 3439) and worked until 1921. Other pits and associated features included Blaydon Burn Colliery (HER 3520), Freehold pit (HER 3429) and the Blaydonburn wagonway (HER 3424). Industries supported by the coal trade included chemical works (HER 3449), bottle works (HER 3448 and 3451), sanitary pipe works (HER 3452), lampblack works (HER 3453), an ironworks (HER 6030), a smithy (HER 1640) and brickworks - Cowen's Upper and Lower Brickworks (HER 1646 and 3434 were established in 1730 and were associated with a variety of features including a clay drift mine (HER 1650) and coal/clay drops (HER 1647). The Lower works remains in operation. Blaydon Burn Coke Ovens (HER 1026), also of 19th century origin, were replaced in the 1930s by Priestman Ottovale Coke and Tar Works (HER 1651) which was the first in the world to produce petrol from coal, known as Blaydon Benzole. In addition to the workers' housing developments associated with industrialisation, a number of grand residences were constructed for industrialists in the area, such as Blaydon Burn House (HER 1657), home of Joseph Cowen, owner of the brickworks. Ironically, the remains of Old Dockendale Hall, an earlier grand residence (or perhaps a superior farmhouse) of 17th century or earlier construction, was destroyed when the coke and tar works was built at Blaydon burn.