

Monkwearmouth

The earliest evidence of human activity at Monkwearmouth are the recorded discoveries of Mesolithic flints and a tranchet axe during excavations at St. Peters Church in the 1960s (HER 49 and 50). A late Roman coin (HER 61) was also found at the church in 1898. The most important archaeological remains surviving at Monkwearmouth are associated with the Anglo-Saxon monastery of St. Peter (HER 87), founded by Benedict Biscop in 674 A.D. Having been abandoned in the mid 9th century after Viking raids, it later became a cell of Durham in 1083 and continued as a priory (HER 421) until 1536. The current church (HER 422) contains some Saxon and medieval remains but was much rebuilt in the 19th century. Other remains from the Saxon period include many stone fragments associated with the monastery (HER 88-99 and 401-413) and the site of glass working (HER 417). The first documentary references to the village of Monkwearmouth date from 1075 (HER 51), when the vill of Wearmouth was granted to Aldwin at Wearmouth. In 1345 18 tenants held 17 tofts and one cottage there; but by 1539 there were only four named tenants. Known medieval industries included a sawmill and monastic metal works (HER 4477-8), as well as coal mining. The modern colliery (HER 2743), linked to a staith (HER 4760) and wagonways was in operation between 1835-1985, and in the 1830s was the deepest mine in the world. Coal production supported a number of other industries, notably including lime burning (HER 2753 and 3626) - the Wear Lime Works (HER 2679) was linked to its quarry (HER 2675) via a wagonway (HER 2676) and contained a battery of kilns. Other 19th century industrial concerns included brickworks (HER 2794-5), an ironworks (HER 4878), pottery and bottle works (HER 2752, 2792 and 2796), a chemicals plant and shipbuilding yards (HER 2720, 2722, 2733 and 2754). The industrial development of the area led to its increasing urbanisation, and a number of important residences (e.g. HER 4784-8) and churches (e.g. 4458, 4460, 4463, 4466 and 4789) survive from this period. Later sites of cultural heritage importance include Second World War defensive sites and structures (e.g. HER 4664 and 5775-6).