Benwell

The earliest recorded evidence of human activity at Benwell is a Neolithic stone axe (HER 1376) found in 1853 at the Roman fort. The most important early archaeological remains surviving at Benwell are associated with the Roman Wall and Fort (HER 5262-5266). Attached to or associated with the fort are the site of a bath house (HER 5263) circa 274 metres south-west of the fort, and the temple of Antenociticus (HER 5265) along with associated burials circa 90 metres east. There may have been another temple in the vicinity of Condercum House, where a column shaft and 3 pieces of sculpture were found. A Roman civilian settlement, or vicus lay to the south and south-west of the fort. The precise extent of the vicus is not known, but excavations in the 1930s showed that it appears to have been a very large settlement, with buildings including a mansio (HER 5264), gathered around the road leading south from the fort. Following the abandonment of the Roman Wall and fort, Anglo-Saxon settlement is attested by finds of brooches (HER 1498). The earliest reference to the modern name, Benwell, or Bynnewalle, was circa 1050, when it was a member of the barony of Bolbec. In the mid-15th century Robert Rodes gave the manor to Tynemouth Priory, and at the Dissolution it passed to the Crown. It was originally a two-row village, the rows being separated by a wide street or green running west from the manor house. The original streets are represented by Benwell Village, Benwell Lane, Ferguson's Lane and Fox and Hounds Lane, but there are no buildings earlier than the 19th century. Benwell remained a small, rural settlement in the post-medieval period, but was briefly important when a civil war camp was established there and used during the siege of Newcastle in 1644 (HER 1369). It began to grow following a surge in coal-mining from the early 18th century, which in turn stimulated the development of the industrial age. It is likely that coal had been exploited in the area for many centuries, probably since at least the Roman period, but the first documented coal-mining in the area dates from between the 14th and 16th centuries (HER 1355) and in the 19th century larger collieries such as the Delaval Colliery were opened (HER 4071). Along with industry came the spread of housing, much of it terraced housing for the workers, but with a smattering of stately residences for industrialists, such as Benwell House (HER 1862), Benwell Hall (HER 1863), Pendower Hall (HER 5329), Condercum House (HER 6351) and Benwell Park (HER 1878). The new urban infrastructure included transport systems and waterworks (HER 4069 and 4077), public buildings such as St James' church (HER 6311), the Royal Victoria blind asylum (HER 6361) and Edward VII fountain (HER 5210), as well as recreational facilities.