

Houghton-le-Spring

Houghton-le-Spring and the surrounding area is steeped in history dating back to the later stone age. The Copt Hill burial mound (HER 100) indicates a potential ritual importance of the area during the later Neolithic and Early Bronze Age.

The earliest documentary evidence for the village is 1112 AD. The name derives from Hoctona, the name of the settlement in the Boldon Book of 1183. The 'Hough' part of the name comes from the Anglo-Saxon word meaning 'a point of land projecting into a plain'. The addition of 'le-Spring' could have been added from two possibilities: a Lord of the Manor by that name or due to the numerous limestone springs in the area.

In the 14th Century the village is listed as having 27 tenants, a watermill, brew house, oven and forge (HER 280). It still shows as a prosperous village on 17th and 18th Century maps.

St. Michael's and All Angels Church (HER 263) has many noteworthy people interred inside the church, including Rector Bernard Gilpin (1557-1583). Gilpin was known as the 'Apostle of the North' and went on to become Archdeacon of Durham in 1557. The village has other buildings that featured prominently during the medieval period. Much of the medieval Rectory (HER 264) was demolished, yet it is thought some of the original features may still exist in the present day building. The archway entrance into the rectory was re-built as the entrance to St. Michael's Church.

The late-medieval building of Houghton Hall (HER 1858) still stands. Built by Rector Robert Hutton, he was a noted Puritan and when he died he was buried alongside his horse and dog in the grounds of the Hall. The Industrial Revolution led to an expansion of the settlement with the opening of the Houghton Colliery (HER 3166) in 1829 and the formation of the Union workhouse in 1864.

A World War II Home Guard bunker (HER 5504), located not far from Copt Hill provides the area with the most recent of records. The walls of the bunker still remain, but the roof has collapsed due to landslip from the hillside into which it is built.