

## Ryton

The earliest recorded evidence of human activity at or near Ryton is a large collection of prehistoric artefacts including Mesolithic and Neolithic flints (HER 529, 537, 540, 543-5, etc.), Neolithic polished stone axes (HER 548, 562 and 576), jet disks (HER 567, 570 and 580), cup-marked stones (HER 568-9 and 584-5) and other material, found in the 1940s and 1950s during fieldwalking at Bar Moor and Clara Vale. Finds and structures from later periods include a Bronze Age socketed axe and spearhead (HER 4607 and 512), a cist burial (HER 611), an Iron Age wooden wheel and log boat found in the River Tyne near Clara Vale (HER 508-9), a late Iron Age beehive quern (HER 589) and Roman coins (HER 622). The first documentary references to Ryton medieval village (HER 629) date from 1183 in the Boldon Buke, where there is specific reference to a mill. Hatfield's Survey records some 36 messuages, plus a water mill and a communal forge. This was one of the largest and most important of the bishop of Durham's villages, and the centre of a parish. The layout of the medieval and later village, a regular 2-row plan with a green, is still apparent, with the east-west long axis widening into a triangle at the west end, giving access to the rectory, church and motte north-west. The village core is now largely 18th and 19th century, however. In addition to mills (HER 625 and 630), other sites associated with medieval Ryton include an aqueduct (HER 592) and leper hospital, both known only from documents, and a possible motte and bailey castle (HER 141) which is protected as a Scheduled Ancient Monument.

It is also possible that there was a market cross on Ryton village green before the erection of one in 1795, and a pinfold also survives as a reminder of the rural origins of the village, although its date of construction is unknown. Ryton Church is thought to date to the 16th century but was heavily restored in the 19th century (HER 628). A number of 17th century grand residences were built at Ryton (HER 1807 and 1812) before a period of modest industrial development in the late 18th and 19th centuries. Coal was probably worked from an early date, but mining and coal transport became much more important in the 19th century (HER 3307-8, 3314-5, 3319 and 1905). Also linked to the coal trade and heavy industry was the opening of the Newcastle to Carlisle Railway in the mid-19th century. Other industries included quarrying (HER 3309-10 and 3312) and brick-making (HER 3298 and 3311). Ryton has at various times been touched by war and conflict: there are suspected Civil War earthworks near the village (HER 624 – these are now thought more likely to be the remains of a 17th century wagonway, however); more recently it was the site of a Second World War searchlight battery (HER 5530) and anti-aircraft pits (HER 1904) still survive at Ryton Willows.