

Washington

Prehistoric finds from Washington include a flint dagger and microlith (HER 329 and 330) of probably Mesolithic origin, and Neolithic polished stone axes (HER 342, 345 and 355). It has been suggested that the unusual round churchyard associated with Washington church may have originated as a late prehistoric enclosure, but supporting evidence is lacking. A hoard of 60 4th century coins (HER 341) is the only substantial evidence for the Roman period, when the area was probably farmed but does not appear to have supported major military or civilian centres of population. The first documentary references to Washington village (HER 352) date from 1183 in the Boldon Book, although the name itself suggests Anglo-Saxon origins as the place 'where Wassas's people live'. In the 14th century William off Washington, knight, held the manor and vill, in the 15th century the owners were the Blaykeston family, and in the 18th century, the Brack family. There is no evidence for the size of the village in the medieval period, but it is likely that by the 12th century the church and Hall sat within a moat which defined the limits of the village. Early maps seem to show two scattered rows of buildings separated by a wide street of green, with the church occupying a central position. The few upstanding monuments survive from the medieval period other than parts of the church and the Old Hall (HER 353-4), both of which retain 12th century masonry, but a tower is also shown on early maps west of the church. Mining is recorded at Washington from at least as early as 1702, but did not develop on an industrial scale until the mid-18th century when wagonways (e.g. HER 2616, 2624 and 3815) facilitated the transport of coal, notably the Washington Wagonway from 1764. Coal workings represent the most numerous class of sites in the Washington area (e.g. HER 2611-2, 2615, 2617, 2621, 2623, 3003 and 3029-30), and, although many have been covered by housing or otherwise removed, underground workings remain. Other industrial developments included brickworks (HER 1720, 2618 and 3064), nailer's shops (HER 2619), a blast furnace (HER 3175), chemical works (HER 3056) and iron works (HER 3050) - Washington Iron Works at Usworth were established by 1858 and linked by rail to the nearby coke ovens (HER 3052). By the end of 19th century the works had expanded but the coke ovens had closed, the site being used for the construction of the Chemical Works school. Shipbuilding was also practiced on the River Wear (HER 3059), to which the collieries were linked by wagonway. Industrial development led to the spread of workers' housing (e.g. HER 2620) around the main colliery sites, along with churches and chapels, schools and other public buildings. Some grand residences for industrialists were also erected outside the main centres of population, notably Dame Margaret's Hall (HER 5667), built in the 19th century for the industrialist Issac Bell. Modern sites of local cultural heritage importance include Second World War pillboxes (HER 5348, 5388 and 5392-6) and an Observation Post (HER 5385). After last colliery closed in 1968, Washington was redeveloped as a New Town.