

Whickham

The earliest evidence of human activity at Whickham are the recorded discoveries of a polished axe in Beech Grove (HER 675), and a perforated stone axe-hammer (HER 673), both probably Neolithic in date. A cremation burial in a cist containing a 'food vessel' has also been recorded near Washing Well Farm (HER 681), where cropmark features of possible prehistoric (or early industrial) origin are known from aerial photographs (HER 685-7). Finds from later periods include a possible late prehistoric or Roman quern (HER 674), and a possible Roman coin hoard (HER 1506). The Roman military site at Washingwells farm was identified from aerial photographs in 1971 and an associated, possible Roman road (HER 5096) has since been suggested. The first documentary references to Whickham medieval village (HER 694) date from 1183 in the Boldon Buke, when it was apparently a large and important village, with 35 villeins each with 15 acres, a manor, a mill, and three fisheries on the Tyne. In 1382 there were four free tenants, and about 50 other tenants inhabiting upwards of 50 houses. There was also a common oven, a kiln, a forge, together with the fisheries. Whickham was a large village or small town at the centre of a large parish which lay between the rivers Derwent and the Team. The present main street is of medieval origin, as is St. Mary's Church (HER 693), a heavily restored and rebuilt church of 12th century origin (there is also an 18th century rectory in the village, HER 4849, the site of a possible Quaker burial ground, HER 677).

Hollinside Manor House (HER 107) dates originally to the 13th century when it was an oblong structure with walls 0.90m thick and consisted of two rooms (a hall and chamber) on two floors. Although there are various other references to medieval structures at Whickham, notably mills (e.g. HER 680), few structural traces survive – the surviving remains of a windmill (HER 679) are probably no earlier than early 18th century). Coal working probably began in Whickham parish from an early period – there was almost certainly Roman and early medieval extraction there – but did not begin on a commercial or organised industrial basis until the 13th century, when the shipment of coal to the London market began in earnest. In Hatfield's Survey of 1382 there are four references to coal pits (HER 695): Robert Hawyk had pits on 10 acres once held by Simon de Bassyngham; Cristiana Nikson pits on 11 acres once held by William Hering; Adam Punder pits on 8 acres called Collierland; and Crossmoor was listed as waste because of coal pits. This trade made Whickham parish one of the largest and economically most important coal producing regions in the world, a status it held until the end of the 18th century. Later evidence of mining can be found under the Whickham Hill plantation, which now covers some of the Grand Lease Pits of the early 17th century (HER 1664). The scale of the industry can be gauged from the great number of pits recorded on 19th century maps in the vicinity of Whickham (e.g. HER 3648-50 and 3658-62). Coal mining in the area continued through the 19th into the second half of the 20th century, when Byermoor Colliery closed, although episodes of open-casting have continued. As a result of the coal trade, a number of smaller settlements grew or sprung up in the area, notably Byermoor, Marley Hill and Winlaton, with dwellings for workers and, eventually, an associated infrastructure of schools and churches. Large country houses such as the 17th century Dunston Hill House and Park (HER 5226-8) were also built for coal owners. The neighbouring Gibside estate (HER 4986, 4987, 4988 and 5124-5126), based on Gibside Hall (HER 4985) - built by William Blakiston between 1603 and 1620 at the start of the 'coal boom' – was landscaped and developed by Sir George Bowes (1701 - 1760), a founder of the Grand Allies of Durham Coal owners. The position of Whickham meant that the various industries reliant on coal did not flourish there, choosing Tyneside locations instead. Quarrying was important, however (e.g. HER 3654-7, 3666-9 and 3719-21), and a forge (HER 3640), mills (HER 679 and 3642) and limekilns (HER 3670) served local demand. Later

sites of local cultural heritage value include Second World War roadblock sites (HER 5829 and 5841-5) and an unusual loopholed wall at Washingwells – this comprises a series of machine gun rests placed behind a pre-existing stone wall next to a public footpath, and was apparently put there when Whickham was identified as an area where an air-borne invasion might take place.