

Whitley Bay (including Marden)

There is no recorded evidence of prehistoric human activity in Whitley Bay and little archaeological field investigation has taken place there. However, the view that this resource-rich coastal environment would have been exploited from the earliest times is supported by discoveries of archaeological remains in similar contexts in the wider region. Mesolithic activity is attested by flints from the mainland opposite St Mary's Island and discoveries of Neolithic polished stone axes have been made at Earsdon and Marden (HER 728). In 1958 and 1962 George Jobey excavated a rectilinear enclosed settlement (HER 304) of late Iron Age date at Marden. The historic township of Whitley (HER 725) was first recorded in 1110 in a document of Henry I, but the name Whitley derives from the Anglian for white lea or pasture and may suggest Anglian origins. Between 1190 and 1393 there are many references to the family which took its name from the manor, suggesting that the family held considerable position in the district. In 1345 Edward III granted Gilbert de Whitley a licence to crenellate his manor house (HER 728). The 16th century saw the township divided into five tenements with 200 acres under arable cultivation. The Dove family came to prominence at this time – Robert Dove was a collector of tithes in 1539, and by 1663 John Dove was the principal tenant of the manor. In 1673 John Dove took out a 21 year lease on the coal-mines of Whitley and district. Shallow coal deposits in the area had been worked since at least the 13th century, and there is mention of coalmines in the ownership of the priory at Marden in 1316 (HER 735). Much of this coal probably serviced salt pans at Shields and Cullercoats; later documentary evidence records the introduction of salt pans at Cullercoats in the 1660's fired by coal from Whitley, and John Dove's coalmines certainly supplied coal for this purpose in 1677. The dawn of the modern period is marked first by the enclosure, then by increasing industrialisation of the rural landscape. While small-scale fishing continued along the coast, industrial enterprises such as coalmines, quarries and waggonways encroached upon farmland, and encouraged the expansion of rural settlement. In the latter part of the 17th century the collieries in the district of Whitley were expanded and connected to the coast by wooden wagon ways, or 'Newcastle roads', which came into general use around 1670. The decline of the salt trade in the 1720s led to the decline of the coal field, which was rejuvenated only in the 19th century (HER 1192 and 2152), with Whitley Colliery re-opening in 1810. The decline in coal mining was to some extent offset by the exploitation of ironstone, which was worked in galleries from shafts on Whitley Links, some of which still survive (HER 1045-6). Quarrying and lime-burning were also important - Whitley Quarry (HER 1193) began its working life in 1663 and by 1825 had an internal wagon way, smithy, twelve limekilns and a reservoir, to which were added in 1875 a brickworks (HER 5876), although this was short-lived and circa 1924 the quarry was infilled and landscaped to become West Park cricket field. The wealth derived from industrial concerns such as the quarries and mines enabled the construction of grand residences such as Whitley Hall (HER 1882) (built between 1757 and 1769), Whitley Park (HER 1883) and Whitley House. The latter was erected in 1803 on ground formally owned by John Dove whose former 'Head House' (HER 5479) was on the site of the present Belvedere shop, with the attached malt kiln and byre on the Whitley House site. Early maps of the area give an indication of the lay-out of the village along the north and south sides of a wide street, the present Whitley Road, with St Paul's Church (built 1864) constructed a short distance from the grand houses in the centre of the village. The 3rd Edition Ordnance Survey Map of 1919 shows the spread of built structures from a cluster around Whitley Hall and St Paul's Church into areas previously occupied by gardens and fields. In the later 19th and 20th centuries the adverse effects of the collapse of mining and dependent industries in the area were ameliorated by the emergence of mass-tourism. Subsequently,

Whitley Bay grew as a residential area serving the urban conurbation of Tyne and Wear centred on Newcastle, leading to the replacement of grand residences and farm buildings by housing estates and associated structures and services – typically, Whitley Park, built by Edward Hall in 1789 was demolished in 1939 and replaced by a library and small park. Road and rail links also developed in the 19th century (HER 1038, 1044, 1940 and 2153). Survivals from this period include the railway line and station (HER 2153), 17 Webb Gas Lamps (HER 1604/6/8/9 and 1611-12), designed to purify sewer smells and gases while providing street lighting, a K4 red telephone box (HER 4634), Spanish City (HER 2216) and a number of military sites, including World War Two pillboxes (HER 1790, 1831, 1844, 4669 5345-6 and 5358), an anti-aircraft battery (HER 5508), road block sites (HER 5822-3) and a Spigot Mortar Emplacement (HER 5419). The maritime traditions of Whitley Bay continued in the form of St Mary's Lighthouse (HER 1037), built in 1897 but decommissioned in 1984, since then it has been used as a visitor centre.