

The name Birtley means bright meadow (old English beorht leah). The name Birtley means bright meadow

Houses of Birtley

Some of the large houses in Birtley included Birtley Hall, the Grove and the oldest house of all, Birtley Old Hall.

On the eastern slope above Birtley lies one of the last big houses, Leaffield House, built c1870. The house was named after Leaffield Colliery both situated in the Vigo area. The house is now in a sad state of repair, belying its former glory as an important residence of mining engineers at the end of the 19th century, and in the 20th Century under Gateshead Council as a residential school for children with behavioural problems.

The first recorded residents were Mr Thomas Heppell, his wife Emily and son Thomas, who lived there until c1901

The next family to live at Leaffield house was the Kirkups - Phillip, his wife Mary and their children Ann, Constance, Ernest and Phillip. Phillip went on to have a distinguished military career being awarded the Military Cross in 1916 and the DSO in 1918. Birtley Hero Committee awarded him an inscribed gold watch, which is still in his family's possession. As Lieutenant Colonel Perkins he unveiled Birtley's War memorial in 1923.

The residents of the big houses have benefitted the people of Birtley in a number of ways. In 1911, to commemorate their 25th Wedding Anniversary, Philip Kirkup donated a peal of 6 bells to St John's Church

Talbot Cottages were built in 1873 by Birtley Iron Works, and have the initials AHH (Augustus Henry Hunt) on a plaque along with the talbot hunting dog, the Hunt family crest. It was thought that these cottages were built for the iron works tradesmen. Occupations in the 1881 census show head gardener, pattern maker, blacksmith and iron worker



Birtley

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(Old English beorht leah)

To discover more about the history
of Birtley contact:

Birtley Library,
Durham Road,
Birtley,

Chester le Street DH3 1LE
Tel: 0191 433 6101

email: birtleyheritagegroup@hotmail.co.uk

Gateshead Central Library contains a wealth of
local history information

Gateshead Central Library,
Prince Consort Road
Gateshead NE8 4LN

Tel: 0191 433 8420 Fax: 0191 477 7454

If you are interested in learning more about local
history you might consider joining a local history
society or group

Birtley Heritage group meets regularly at
Birtley Library – for further details please contact the
library on 0191 433 6101


www.gateshead.gov.uk



Cover photo: Miners on the steps of New Empire House, Birtley 1920's

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the changing face of
Birtley

the Gateshead Towns and Villages Series



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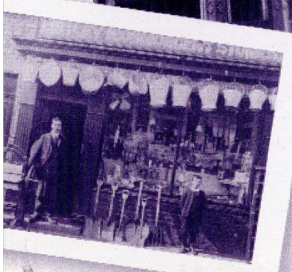
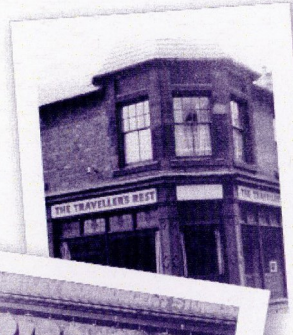
Old Birtley

This is how Birtley was described in the late nineteenth century:

"Anyone, whose business lies in Newcastle or Gateshead, in search of a rural retreat would hardly select Birtley. Snugly built on the slope of a hill, the north end has a pretty and picturesque appearance as seen from the railway train from the north, but this pleasing impression is rudely dispelled by the great heap of slag, the coal waggons, the ironworks, and the great piles of drain pipes which meet the eye on emerging from the station for Chester-le Street. There is evidently not much traffic of any kind to and from Birtley, and not much to interest the workmen in the neighbourhood"



During the First World War, Birtley was home to over 6000 Belgian refugees who were housed in a special area known as Elisabethville. This was a unique village named after Elisabeth, Queen of the Belgians. It was completely self contained and had its own church, school and shops. There are still descendants of some of these families living in Birtley today.



Birtley's public houses

By 1860 there were eight public houses on the main thoroughfare through the village of Birtley, The Coach & Horses, The Three Tuns, The Red Lion, The Hanlon, The Railway Hotel, The William IV, The Traveller's Rest and The Crown Inn.

The Crown and Traveller's Rest (demolished in the 1960's) were on the site of Birtley Medical Centre and Swimming Pool.

The Three Tuns was originally a 17th Century granary. In 1989 workmen discovered a piece of ancient history shrouded in cobwebs in the attic. This was a piece of farm machinery thought to be a milling machine dating back to the 1800's. It was left as found and the wall bricked up as it was too difficult to remove.

Assizes were often held in public houses and in 1824 Henry Curry was deported to Australia for the murder of Thomas Atkinson.

The inquest on Jane Beardmore (the victim of the supposed 'Birtley Ripper') was also held in The Three Tuns in 1888. William Waddle was eventually convicted and hanged for her murder.

The Hanlon Public House was named after Edward (Ned) Hanlon (1855-1908). Born in Canada and known as "the boy in blue" he was a brilliant oarsman, competing in various rowing events both in Canada and England. He was a noted hero on the River Tyne.

Industries of Birtley

Coal mining was first recorded in 1351 and John Wesley in 1743 described Birtley as, "surrounded by collieries on every side" This situation continued until the nineteen sixties when the trade declined.

The Iron Company originally started near the Mount at Eighton Banks towards the end of the eighteenth century but later moved to Birtley where by the late 1850's it was being run by Augustus Henry Hunt (1829 – 1877) and Edward Mosely Perkins (1821 -1871) You can still see Perkins statue today – it stands at the top of The Avenue. It was originally surrounded by railings made by the Birtley Iron Company but these were removed during World War 2.

Augustus' two brothers Henry (1808 -1851) and John (1818 – 1854) were owners of the Iron Works before him. It's probable that Augustus went into the company when Henry died. None of the brothers were married and the Hunt name died with Augustus. Henry Hunt (1808 – 1851) lived at Birtley Hall and in the 1851 census, he is listed as a coal owner and iron master. The Hunt family are remembered in St Johns Church by several windows and the clock in the tower was created in memory of John Hine Hunt.

Birtley Engineering was originally situated on Harras Bank in the area of the present 'green area' on the south side of the street above Harrison Court. Originally it was a subsidiary of BSA (remembered today mainly as a maker of motor cycles) - a large sprawling company with many subsidiary concerns all over the country.

Birtley Engineering's main products were the conveyer belts used for transporting particle materials i.e. coal, gravel, stones etc. Much used underground; the companies product was extensively used in the mining industry.

