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Derwenthaugh Park and Land of Oak & Iron



Until 1986, Derwenthaugh Park was the site of the Derwenthaugh Coke Works. Opened in 1928 it took coal from the Chopwell colliery and the resulting coke was shipped from the staithes on the River Tyne at Derwenthaugh. (The Derwenthaugh Staithes are still visible over the railway track behind the Skiff Inn) In the 18th and 19th centuries Crowley's Ironworks dominated the site. These were the largest ironworks in Europe at the time. The workers lived in old Winlaton Mill which was situated along the lane beside the Golden Lion Inn (now the Red Kite). The village was demolished and re-built on its present site in 1937.

Clockburn Lonnen

Although it is difficult to imagine now, Clockburn Lonnen was once the main highway from the north to Durham. It crossed the River Tyne at Newburn then passed to Winlaton via Blaydon Burn and from there to old Winlaton Mill, crossing the Derwent and following Clockburn Lonnen to Durham. Those on our other ambles learned the River Tyne was wider but much shallower than now, and there were several crossings points up river from Newcastle.



Cromwell's army of 16,000 men passed this way on the 15th July 1650 on their way to the Battle of Dunbar. (Picture from Sunnyside History Society).

The Damhead or Lady Steps

This structure, built in 1691, marks the tidal limit of the Derwent. Another weir exists near the A1 Bridge a mile downstream, but the tide flows over this at high tide. The Damhead, a milldam, was built in the early 18th century to provide water via a millrace for the former Crowley Iron Works at Swalwell, once, together with workshops in other local villages, supposedly the largest in Europe. Sometimes called The Lady's Steps, The Damhead has a steep slope of considerable length and often traps tree trunks brought down river after heavy rains when the river foams quite noisily at its foot. It used to be a popular bathing spot and attracted people from further afield than just the nearby villages.

The footpath to the Derwent Park, made on land reclaimed from the former coke works near Winlaton Mill, runs alongside the Damhead. Nearby are tennis courts and the Swalwell Juniors Football Clubhouse at a spot once alive with industrial activity, dirt and noise, now peaceful and sylvan again after the coke work's brief 56 years of existence from 1929.

The contrast between the normal peaceful river and dam and conditions on Monday September 8 2008 after continuous rain created flooding on many of the North East's rivers can be seen in the pictures below. A fish pass was built in 2012 to allow fish to once again pass up river.

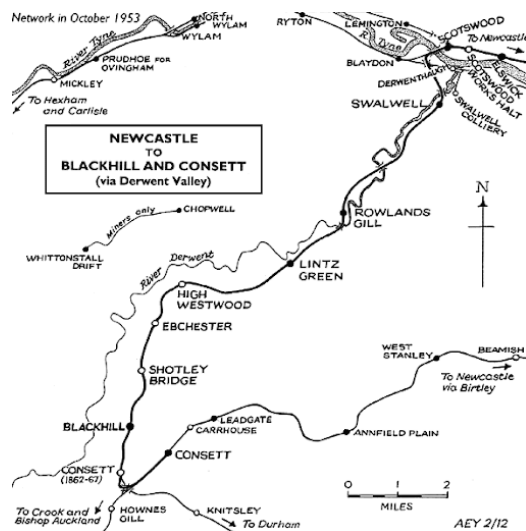


Derwent Valley Railway

The Derwent Valley Railway was opened in 1867 after three years hard building work. Four viaducts were constructed and a deep, 800 metres long cutting was dug near Rowlands Gill. Stations were built at Shotley Bridge, Ebchester, High Westwood, Lintz Green, Rowlands Gill and Swalwell.

At its peak the railway was carrying over half a million passengers a year with regular goods traffic of timber, bricks and coal to Newcastle and iron ore to Consett. As road traffic became more efficient the service declined until the line finally closed in 1962.

The railway is commemorated in the Geordie folk song about an ill-fated train journey from Rowlands Gill, 'Wor Nanny's a Mazer'.



The Butterfly Bridge

The previous bridge was a reconstruction of one originally built in 1842 by local strongman and stonemason Jack English, popularly known as 'Lang Jack'. His bridge was destroyed by flood in 1902. On old maps the place is marked as Eel's Haugh. The name Butterfly Bridge supposedly comes from the fact that the Derwent Valley was a butterfly collector's paradise and enthusiasts began their expeditions from the bridge. The previous bridge dated from 1950.

The river is quite accessible here and there is a small sandy beach in the thickly wooded area of the bridge. The land on the south side slopes down very steeply to the river and steps up give access to the railway path built on a ledge constructed along the side of the hill. A part of the Crowley Iron Works was situated near here in the 18th century and there was also a flour mill, a fulling (wool) mill and a drift mine from which coal was extracted. The village of Winlaton Mill was originally situated here but was demolished in 1937 and re-built at its present location.

Report of flood damage to previous bridge. "On Saturday 6 September 2008 North East England experienced two days of almost continuous rain and this, combined with ground already saturated by a very wet summer, caused river levels to rise alarmingly. The Derwent soon became a raging torrent and many large tree trunks were swept down river and the force of several of these hitting the bridge eventually dislodged it from its supports and it was carried away". The bridge was replaced in June 2011. The new bridge is of more solid construction and at a higher level than the former structure and is wider. Horse riders can cross at the ford just upstream of the footbridge.



Original Butterfly Bridge (1842) & Old Winlaton Mill Village



The 1950 bridge



The current bridge.

Derwent Walk - Land Of Oak And Iron

