



On the trail of a Legacy in Brick and Stone

Houghton-le-Spring A Heritage Walk

This walk was developed with the support of Sunderland City Council through its Strategic Initiatives Budget.

The walk starts at the junction of Halliwell Street and Station Road. From its junction with Station Road, the main shopping area of Newbottle Street leads to Houghton's two Conservation Areas of St Michael's and Nesham Place.

This heritage walk was devised by the Friends of Rectory Park with information from "Time's Winged Chariot" - A Brief History of Houghton-le-Spring by John and Sheila Ellis.

To contact us:

The Friends meet at 7pm on the Second Tuesday of every month in the Community Room, Kepier Hall, at the rear of St Michael's Church.

www.houghtonlespringrectorypark.org.uk
info@houghtonlespringrectorypark.org.uk

LIVING STREETS
PUTTING PEOPLE FIRST

Sunderland
City Council

The national charity working to create safe, attractive, enjoyable streets where people want to walk.

www.livingstreets.org.uk

Registered Charity No. 1108448 (England and Wales)
Copyright. The authors' intellectual rights are asserted.



1 Halliwell Street/ Station Road

Named after the Holy Well where monks are thought to have rested with the body of St Cuthbert on their way to Durham. Or the Venerable Bede may have rested here. The Archway is evidence of an older building on this site. The nearby Miners' Welfare Hall (1931) was provided by Union Subscription to promote welfare and recreation.



1A



2 Newbottle Street

This fine large red-brick building was once the home of the Co-operative Society, serving a population which grew from 1,000 in 1800 to 7,000 by 1900.

Newbottle Street also used to boast Gammie's Department Store and a number of theatres including the Gaiety in 1911 (later the Grand), the Essoldo and the Classic. The Empire Theatre opened in 1912 and the Coliseum in 1921.

Newbottle Street is now the main shopping street, although Sunderland Street used to be more prominent. Most of the old family businesses, including the Ice Cream Parlours, have been lost.



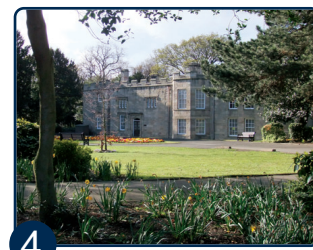
3 The Broadway

Newbottle Street opens out onto The Broadway with its historic buildings.

The 300 year-old public house the Golden Lion stands at the junction with Sunderland Street.

Some others were lost following redevelopment in the 1970s including the original ancient Coaching Inn, the White Lion, along with the London Lending Library, the Snooker and Market Halls and Houghton's third "Lion" tavern, the Black Lion, in Sunderland Street.

Vine Place next to the "Britannia" is an early place name from grape-growing when the climate was milder.



4

4 Rectory Park and the Old Rectory

Since 1949 this has been a public park. One of the oldest gardens in the UK, dating from the C12th, this was once the grounds of the Old Rectory (Listed Grade 2).

With a Pele (defensive) Tower at its mediaeval heart, this building was re-furnished in the C18th.

Its most famous Rector, the Apostle of the North, Bernard Gilpin, lived here in Tudor times. His cutting from the Glastonbury Thorn flourished here for 400 years.

The Park also contains the remains of a Tudor Knot Garden and an unusual fountain.



5

5 The Tithe Barn

The Park contains a Tithe Barn which is probably mediaeval. The fine early oak beams in the archway are now covered, but the massive thickness of its walls are still in evidence.

A careful look at the walls reveals early features, such as the former long-slit ventilation holes, now filled-in. The most intact remaining such barn in the North East, it was used by the Church for storing "tithes", being a tenth of crops collected as a tax. Continuous with the Barn is the former Glebe (Church) Farm (Listed Grade 2), now a dental surgery.



6

6 Imperial Buildings

On the corner of Imperial Buildings with Church Street, stood the fourth "Lion" tavern: the Red Lion (now solicitors' offices). Pre-Royal Mail, post was collected from here.

Most of Imperial Buildings were the former Robertson's Brewery complex. The main building, "Kings Hall", was formerly four storeys in height, with out-buildings and stables behind.

The complex was connected with narrow-gauge rails to aid the production line.

The imposing former Malting House has been sensitively converted to Apartments.



7

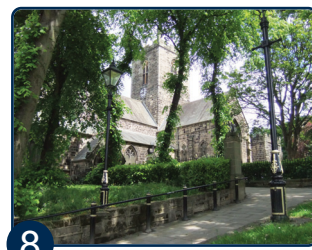
7 The Archway

Access to the Church of St Michael and All Angels (Listed Grade 1) is through an interesting Archway on the Broadway.

This used to be located immediately opposite, as the entrance to the grounds of the Old Rectory.

When the Rectory grounds became a public park, buildings and the high wall surrounding it were demolished, but the Archway was saved.

To celebrate the Coronation of HM Queen Elizabeth II, four Coats of Arms were affixed, being those of three famous Rectors and that of the See of Durham. (L to R Sancroft, Durham, Gilpin and Davenport).



8

8 St Michael and All Angels Church

The Church (Listed Grade 1) and Churchyard are sited on the remains of a Mesolithic Stone Circle. Beneath the Church lie massive Roman stones, possibly the remains of a Temple.

The present Church is mostly Norman but substantial parts of the Saxon building remain, as can be seen through the glass floor section. A fine early doorway with entwined Wyverns (two-legged dragons) can be seen.

The Church contains the imposing tomb of Bernard Gilpin (1517-1583) and that of Margery Bellasis, who also gave generously to the poor.



9

9 Kepier Hall and Almshouses

Behind the Church lies Kepier Hall (Listed Grade 2), built of the local Magnesian Limestone prevalent in the old buildings of Houghton.

Gilpin established the Kepier Grammar School with the help of generous endowments by his friend John Heath in 1574.

It continued as a school until 1933. Adjacent to the Hall are the Lilburn and Davenport Almshouses (Listed Grade 2), both endowed by famous Rectors. Kepier Cottage was the school laundry, and Gilpin House, Church Street was, from 1800, the Headmaster's house.



10

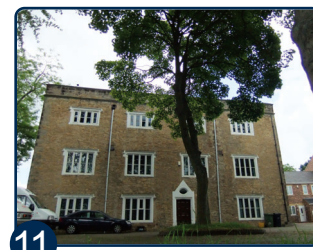
10 Church Street

Possibly the oldest street in Houghton, it contains some interesting houses named after famous rectors: Gilpin, Lilburn (Listed Grade 2) and Sancroft.

Whilst some buildings now have commercial use, most remain as private homes.

Sancroft House, like the Old Rectory, is built around the remains of a mediaeval Pele Tower and four later cottages joined with a unifying frontage in the 1840s.

The eastern part of Church St is accessed via a footbridge. Many interesting buildings once stood here, including the C18th Mechanics Institute.



11

11 Nesham Place

Once known as "Quality Hill" because of its fine houses. C16th Houghton Hall (Listed Grade 2*) lies at the junction with Hall Lane. It was built by Matthew Hutton, Bishop of Durham.

Among a succession of interesting C17th to C19th houses are:

- Houghton House late C18th/early C19th.
- The Old Academy (formerly Nesham Hall) C17th. The original Nesham Hall (now demolished) lay behind Nesham Place.
- The Old Manor House, 1790, built by Mr Robinson whose son George later built the Brewery.



12

12 Market Place and The Lake

Beyond Nesham Place lies the Market Place, once the site of a mediaeval two-row village (largely replaced with municipal housing in 1955). To the right lies Kirk Lea Field, the site of an ancient religious settlement.

The Lake Road is a reminder of the Victorian Boating Lake. It was short-lived and filled in because it was depriving farmers of their water-supply.

This area was used by the Fairground for the famous Houghton Feast, one of the oldest annual festivals in the country (probable pagan origins). The Fairground later moved to the Rectory Field.

Houghton-le-Spring

People have been living and worshipping in Houghton-le-Spring for some 7,000 years.

Evidence of the activities of our Mesolithic ancestors can be seen in the burial mounds on the hill and scarp above Houghton. Knapped flint tools lie waiting in the landscape for the sharp-eyed to spot.

The record of the early development of the mediaeval settlement can be found in the Boldon Beuk and Church Surveys. Rapid growth came with the development of deep coal-mining in the C19th and the consequent immigration.

Much of Houghton's history has left a legacy in stone. See what you can discover.

On the Trail of the Romans

(a) Where can you find these arched stones? What were they used for?



(b) What is this rock used for? Where do you think it came from?



(c) Where is this ancient sarcophagus (stone burial casket)?



Walk directions

Start at Halliwell Street 1. The stone arch is at the side of the late C19th brick-built Halliwell House. There is no public evidence of the famous Holy Well. The short streets are typical miners' cottages. The Miners' Welfare Hall 1A, Station Road.

Walk back up Station Road to its junction with Newbottle Street and turn right. Walk past the Library towards the south. The left hand side development of the street is older than the right. The building now used by "Domino's" dates

from 1814, whereas Empire House, now a carpet shop (originally a cinema) was built 100 years later. The now-busy Newbottle Street was, for much of the C19th, a single row of shops looking out towards fields. Continue to the end of the street and you will see on your right the old Co-operative Store 2 - an excellent example of how to "discover" buildings in commercial centres: Look Up!

Ahead of you are the leafy environs of the Broadway 3. To the left are the remains of once-thriving Sunderland Street, much of which was lost following 1970s development. To the

right is the narrow ancient lane, Vine Place. The right hand side of the Broadway is bounded by Rectory Park, containing the Old Rectory 4. Take the second entrance into the Park. To your left is an unusual fountain and to the right, the Old Rectory. It is worth walking around this building to see surviving early architecture. Take a walk around the Park and you will see features of interest in the ancient walls.

Returning towards the Rectory, you will see the Tith Barn 5 and Glebe Farm. Turn right and exit the Park through a gateway with stone

pillars. Turn left and ahead you will see the short commercial row of Imperial Buildings 6 with the former Malting House to the right. Note the jumble of different stages of building, with Glebe Land to the front.

Across the Broadway you will see the Archway 7. Access to the Church of St Michael and All Angels 8 is through the Archway. The ancient Church is well-worth exploring, both inside and out. It is open most days from 11am to 1pm.

When you exit the Church, turn left and walk up the pathway. You will see the Kepier Hall and

Almshouses 9. Returning past the Almshouses, at the corner of the Churchyard you will find steps leading down into Church Street 10. The footbridge at the eastern end crosses the A690. The far side leads to Nesham Place 11. A short walk down the hill brings you to the Market Place 12. Turn left into Lake Road. After the Business Centre turn left up the footpath to rejoin the Church Street footbridge. This is the conclusion of the Walk.

Answers to Roman Trail:
(a) These may be re-used Roman stones - but no-one knows just what they were used for!
(b) It is a fountain. The rock is travertine (or tufa) brought back from the Tiber Valley near Rome after WWII.
(c) To the rear of the east end of the Church of St Michael and All Angels.



Key

- 1 Point of interest
- Walking route - road
- Walking route - footpath

Walk takes approx. 1 hour 15 minutes
 Allow 20 mins extra to tour church (open most days 11am to 1pm)

Approximately ¼ mile in 5 mins