

HISTORY and the GAUNLESS VALLEY

Teachers' Notes

TEACHERS' BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The information provided in this history section of your Teachers' Pack is designed to allow you to develop a local history study for your students. Your focus could:

- Look at your surrounding community and how it has changed over the centuries.
- Incorporate a visit to Cockfield Fell or the Stockton & Darlington Railway or local museums
 - Locomotion, Shildon
 - Head of Steam, Darlington
 - The Mining Art Gallery, Bishop Auckland
 - The Faith Gallery, Bishop Auckland (shortly to be opened by The Auckland Project)
- Open up the potential for inter-generational work with older people within your community – invite them to come into school to talk about their childhood
- Involve your students in archaeology

Within this section of the pack we have also acknowledged the huge part that the development of the railway has played within our area and it's vital importance to the world as a whole. 2025 will be the 200th anniversary of the Stockton & Darlington Railway and international celebrations are currently under development. It is our hope that your students will be in a position to understand the reasons for these celebrations and the enormously important role our area played in world history from the 19th century onwards.

SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

The valley has been inhabited for thousands of years. However, the early nomadic hunter/gatherers and first settled farmers did not leave written records behind. There is also little written evidence for the Roman period.

In early Norman days, William the Conqueror ordered the collection of information that is written in what we now call the 'Domesday Book'. However, this did not cover our area as we are north of the River Tees. Later the Prince Bishops collected information for what is now known as the Bolden Book. Ecclesiastical records can be a useful source of information generally. A big step forward in terms of written evidence came with the start of Parish records in the second half of the 16th century. The bulk of the population remained functionally illiterate for much of our history, although their stories can be traced in other ways e.g. through their songs and folk music.

By the 19th century we have maps, pictures, detailed and accurate written records and photographs (once this had been invented) and accurate history books. We are also starting to get some ordinary people's writings to draw upon. So, when studying the Gaunless Valley, we have to use the landscape and physical remains, including buildings: however, in more recent times, we can add memories to our list. Aerial footage and more recently drone footage are other sources of information.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC HISTORY: 19TH CENTURY ONWARDS

MINING

The communities at Woodland, Copley, Lynesack, Butterknowle, South Side and Wham, along with Cockfield and Evenwood and West Auckland, to different degrees owe their existence to the presence of easily extractable coal. This was due to the Butterknowle Fault, which made accessible the coal seams and strata of the carboniferous coal measures.

Two places lay claim to being the first to record coal extraction:

1. Cockfield Fell: Henry Vasavour's inland mine in 1375
2. Lynesack: records show coal being mined at Grewburn in 1362.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries probably the two most important collieries were at Woodland and Butterknowle. In 1891 these directly employed 900 men and indirectly gave employment to numerous other men, women and children. There were also many smaller collieries, some of which provided jobs for only a few men and were often family run. What helped to stimulate the development of the scale of coal mining was in the way in which coal obviously needed to be transported, to ports like the Tees for instance and developing a rail link through rail became invaluable.

In 1906, Woodland Colliery was producing enough coal to operate 196 coke ovens – to turn the coal into coke to be used e.g. in the iron and steel industries which were flourishing in Middlesbrough. These coke ovens were located at Woodland Back Pit and Crake Scar. Butterknowle Colliery was operating 120 coke ovens. Walk along the old Haggerleases branch line below Cockfield Fell and you can see the remains of the 'Bee Hive' coke ovens. Others can be seen alongside Crow Howle Beck.

A walk on Cockfield Fell will reveal the cup shaped depressions created by the many very early bell pits that were created on the Fell.

RAILWAYS

A key reason why the Stockton & Darlington Railway and its branch line, the Haggerleases line, were built, was because local entrepreneurs (many of them Quakers) could see how valuable their coal interests would become if they could find an easy (and cheaper) way to get their coal from inland County Durham to the sea, at Stockton and later Middlesbrough. A great example of this is the Pease family who were key to the building of the railway. They were based in Darlington but had interests in coalmines deeper into County Durham. Coal could also be turned into coke and then sold to the new iron and steel industries that were also developing there.

However, the Stockton & Darlington Railway marks the start of the railway era because it was about much more than just coal. The 1825 Act of Parliament that allowed the line to be built makes it clear that, from day one, it was going to carry lots of different kinds of goods and raw materials, as well as passengers. This is what happened on opening day, 27th September 1825. It also made clear that, wherever possible, steam locomotives were going to be used.

The main line started near Witton Park, crossing the Gaunless River at St Helens Auckland before passing over the Brusselton Incline, and travelling on to what became New Sildon, Heighington, Darlington and Stockton. The Haggerleases branch line from West Auckland to Cockfield opened before 1830, at the insistence of an investor who owned coal concessions in the Cockfield area. The main S&DR line had to traverse some quite hilly ground, so two inclines were built – one at Etherley and one at Brusselton (near Old Sildon) and a stationary steam engine was built at the top of each incline. Horses pulled the waggons of coal (and other goods) to the bottom of each incline and then ropes were used to allow the stationary engines to pull the waggons up the inclines to the top and then gain used to lower the waggons down the other side. Locomotive steam engines were not used until the waggons reached the flatter ground beyond the Brusselton Incline – depending on the availability of the steam locomotives at the time.

Brusselton is also home to a significant reservoir of the S&DR – a great deal of water was needed for the steam engines. The engineman's house and some early S&DR buildings remain in place, as does one of the many accommodation bridges built to allow farmers access to their fields if the railway ran through their land.

When the Haggerleases branch line opened, a goods station was built and the local tramways funnelled the coal and increasingly coke down to the goods station where it was sent to join the main S&DR line. Cockfield Fell and the surrounding area were criss-crossed by networks of tramways. By 1842 12 collieries were using the Haggerleases line. Industry was expanding all the time – including brick works, coke works and nearby a lead smelting works.

Two of the most important bridges of the S&DR are to be found over the Gaunless – one in St Helens Auckland and one by Cockfield Fell (the Skew Bridge). Another lies on a tributary of the Gaunless – the Hummerbeck Bridge on the Hummerbeck. The Gaunless Bridge is important as it is probably the first iron railway bridge in the world – at least the first of its type. The ironwork is at the NRM (National Railway Museum) at York and we hope will be returning to Locomotion (NRM Sildon) in the not too distant future. The abutments remain at St Helens Auckland. The 'Skew' bridge in the Slack is virtually unique as it was built at a skew angle of 63 degrees over the river and does not have a 'keystone'.

A further railway line was built over Cockfield Fell to join Bishop Auckland to Barnard Castle and opened in 1863 – the 'High Line'. This included a single-track viaduct to take the line high over the Gaunless, which opened in 1863. It was expanded, by adding a second track in 1905. The viaduct was demolished after the line was closed in 1962. Cockfield railway station closed in 1953 and the 'Low line' closed in the early 1960's.

The Brusselton Incline itself largely fell into disuse when the Sildon Tunnel was opened in 1842, providing a direct link to Bishop Auckland.

STEEL AND IRON

Iron has been produced from prehistoric times onwards from iron ore. The produce is called wrought iron. This contains 98.82 – 100 per cent Fe (iron). Steel is an alloy composed of between 0.2 and 2.0% carbon, with the rest made up of iron. The first steel was made by adding carbon to iron, usually in a forge or via the cementation process, but it was rather haphazard and the quality of the outcome could vary.

The problem was solved by the invention of the blast furnace. The blast furnace creates something called pig iron – an alloy of approximately 90% iron and 10% carbon. The steel maker has to remove carbon from the pig iron to arrive at the required content of 0.2 – 2% to create the finished product – steel. A great deal of coke (therefore coal) is used in the process. Middlesbrough became one of the two key centres of steelmaking in Britain.

In 1875, Britain accounted for 47% of world production of pig iron, a third of which came from Middlesbrough, and almost 40% of steel. At the time, 40% of our output was being exported to the USA, which was rapidly building its railway network. By the end of the century we were being caught up and overtaken by Germany and also by the USA, which had become more or less self-sufficient.

OTHER INDUSTRIES:

Brickworks – were common throughout our area, as building railways increased demand for bricks enormously e.g. to build tunnels and viaducts. Brickworks were built close to collieries and the lead smelting mill. Tile works were built in Woodland. The shot factory at Woodland operated for a short time at the start of the 19th century but disappeared by 1856.

Lead Ore – The London Lead Company operated the Gaunless Smelt Mill a quarter of a mile from Copley Village. It was built in the late 18th century by the Earl of Darlington, and it operated until the late 19th century. The ore came from Wiregill and other mines and was carried overland to the mill by packhorses, which carried coal back to Blackton Smelt Mill at Eggleston. The large chimney still stands and there are useful interpretation boards to read.

Agriculture – For a long time farming was handicapped by the poor quality of much of the land. Two things helped in the 20th century. Agricultural land was de-rated in the early 1920's and the Agricultural Support Bill 1947 also made things easier. There were a large number of small farms owned privately and also tenanted by smallholders who also worked in another occupation. Many worked in the mines for example but have had to seek other occupations due to their closure.

Local Businesses – People working in the mines and other industries supported a range of local businesses, in particular shops. Some were co-operatively owned e.g. the Co-op shop in Cockfield. Families or individuals owned others privately. Some of these shops continue to survive but many have closed down.

Village Life – For a long time the collieries were the centre of the communities that they provided employment for. The colliery owners often provided cheap housing but continued occupation depended on having someone working down the mine. Some of these rows of mainly terraced houses still survive today e.g. in Butterknowle. Parish records from the first half of the twentieth century show that many houses and other property in villages e.g. in both Butterknowle and Woodland, were owned by collieries. This gave the colliery owners quite a lot of power over their employees who often came from quite far away.

Woodland School was built by the colliery in 1877 and the miners themselves paid for local amenities through their Miners Welfare Scheme e.g. for halls and playing fields. The churches and chapels were often at the heart of village life and played an important part in people's lives.

Schools – During the 19th century as the vote was slowly extended to more and more men, it became clear that to use the vote properly people needed some form of education beyond what was available in Sunday schools and to better off people in the community. Attitudes also changed towards children working e.g. women and girls and young boys were banned from working underground in collieries. It was also realised that many new jobs required an education to be able to do them.

Education therefore entered a growth period from 1870 onwards, with free primary education provided from 1880. The colliery owners themselves built some of the schools as mentioned above, but local school boards and the church built others.

After the 1944 Education Act, all children over the age of 11 received their education at larger secondary schools in Bishop Auckland and latterly at Barnard Castle and Staindrop, with some of them attending grammar schools.

Leisure – Work in mines and lead-smelting works was hard work so there was a need for relaxation and for many men the public house was the answer. Many of these are now private houses. Not everyone approved of the level of alcohol consumption so the Temperance Movement took hold in some areas but this did not stop many people from continuing to enjoy their alcohol.

All sorts of sports clubs flourished: cricket, football, boxing, tennis to name but a few. Snooker and billiards were also popular. Pigeon fancying and racing was very popular and the pigeon lofts can still be seen on Cockfield Fell. These pursuits were very much male oriented but in the 20th century women had organisations like the Women's Institute to turn to.

Youngsters had the scouts and guides in the 20th century as well as organisations directly run by their churches.

Religious Life: Churches and Chapels – When the Anglican (Protestant) church became the established church the Catholic Mass became illegal under Queen Elizabeth I's Act of Uniformity in 1559. Roman Catholicism went underground until freedom of worship was re-established in the Second Catholic Relief Act of 1791. In the meantime, others broke away from the Anglican Church to form new religious movements such as the Methodists, Baptists and Quakers with their own forms of worship in chapels and in the case of the Quakers, in meetinghouses. The Toleration Act of 1689 granted freedom of worship to these Nonconformists.

Religion partly flourished because certain movements helped people who often experienced hardship, giving support in times of tragedy e.g. pit disasters or outbreaks of disease. School logs show how often children died from outbreaks of disease such as diphtheria, whooping cough and measles. Collieries were often intimately tied up with the churches and chapels.

The first open-air Methodist camp meeting was held outdoors on Cockfield Fell in 1821 and the last one was held in the 1970's. The singing could be heard over a mile away.

Many chapels have now been closed and sold to become housing or turned to other uses but religious life continues to cement village life together for many people.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Landscape, Documents and Maps: Villages in Northern England and Beyond AD 900 – 1250
Brian K Roberts
Oxbow Books: 978-1-84217-237-7

West Durham: The Archaeology of Industry
Andy Guy and Frank Atkinson
Phillimore: 978-1-86077-447-8

Discover Cockfield Fell
Leaflet
www.gaunlessvalleyhistorytrust.org
Sometimes available in local shops in Cockfield

First Encyclopaedia of History
Fiona Chandler
Usborne

A Street Through Time
A 12,000-Year Walk Through History
Illustrated by Steve Noon
Dorland Kindersley Limited: 978-1-4093-7644-6

An Historical Atlas of County Durham
Durham County Local History Society
0 902958 14 3

The Celts
Leonie Pratt
Usborne Beginners: 978-1-4095-9337-9

The Iron Age
Emily Bone
Usborne Beginners: 978-1-4095-8642-5

A Guide to the Gaunless Valley
Tony Hopkins
Contact: Trish Pemberton

The Story of the Gaunless Valley
Niall Hammond
(Probably out of print)
Contact: Trish Pemberton

Railway Heritage Education Resource Pack
C/o Railway Heritage Project
(Probably out of print)
Contact: Trish Pemberton