

HISTORY – a written timeline

Teachers' Notes

Until the Romans came, there was no written evidence for the Gaunless Valley and only a little under the Romans. More became available after the Battle of Hastings in 1066 (the Norman invasion) and increased once Parish Records began in the 16th century. It is only with mass literacy that much of the story of ordinary people really entered the written record.

Our island story is one of repeated invasion – with many of the invaders becoming assimilated but also making their mark on our culture and language.

PRE-HISTORY

As the last Ice Age came to an end, hunter-gatherers entered the area, moving around in search of food and leaving stone tools behind. They hunted the herds that occupied the area. As the climate improved they began to settle down and began to farm. The coastline was further out to sea than it is today.

C 4000 BCE People began to domesticate animals – they tended flocks in the Upper Gaunless

C 2000 BCE Current evidence suggests that people began to settle down – evidence of their habitations found. They used metals.

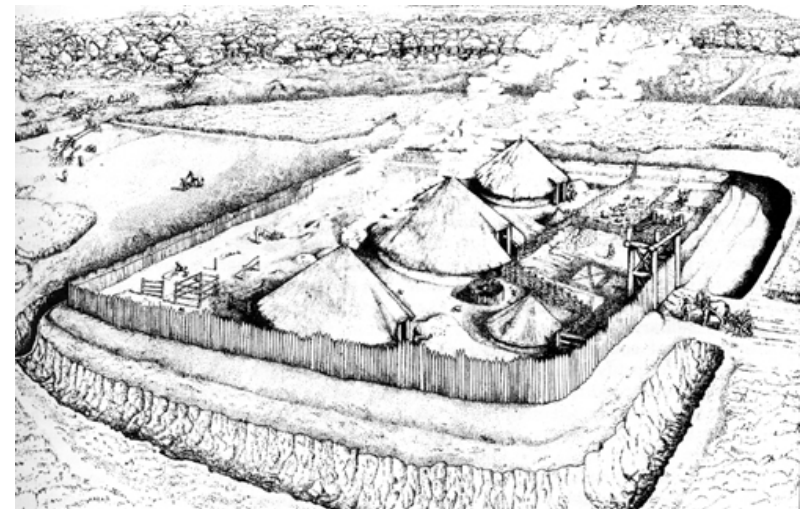
THE ROMANS AND FARMERS

The people living in our area, at the time the Romans invaded for the second time, under Claudius were an Iron Age tribe called the Brigantes. They were Celts, a people who invaded Britain from Northern Europe. They were settled farmers. Books like 'A Street Through Time' give a really good impression of what their villages looked like.

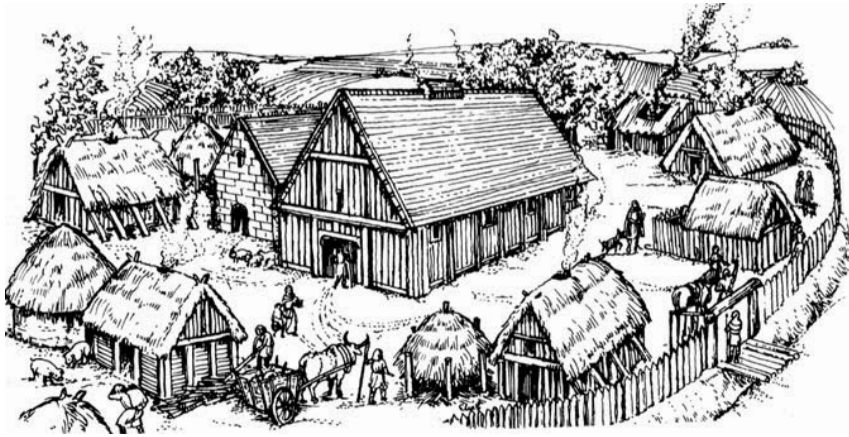
43 CE Romans invaded and stayed and gradually moved northwards into the North East. They created a network of roads and forts of various sizes e.g., Dere Street, which linked the major Roman fortress at York to Piercebridge and Binchester. Some Roman soldiers came from places such as North Africa and some of the soldiers married and settled here.

410 CE The Roman legions departed, leaving behind a great deal of evidence of their occupation, although gradually Roman civilisation disintegrated. There's evidence that some Celtic people may have adopted Christianity from this period, giving up their pagan ways.

Reconstruction of a farmstead dated to the time of the Roman conquest (AD43)



THE 'DARK AGES' – THE ANGLO-SAXONS ARRIVE



Anglo-Saxon homestead

After the Roman legions left life went on as normal for many people – how quickly it changed depended on where you lived and who you were. For the two centuries after the Romans left there was little written evidence to rely on. We call this period the 'Dark Ages' because of the lack of written evidence and the end of Roman civilisation.

The next set of invaders were the Anglo-Saxons from Northern Europe and Germany. They too intermarried with the Celtic tribes and their culture had a significant impact. The foundations of what we recognise as England and our language were laid down at this time. Anglo-Saxons were mainly farmers, traders and craftsmen.

FROM PAGANS TO CHRISTIANS

'Pagan' is the name we give to people who worship many gods rather than one god – as did the early Anglo-Saxons and the next set of invaders, the Vikings from Scandinavia. However, all of this began to change when in the 7th century Christian missionaries began to arrive from both Rome and Ireland. The kingdom of Northumbria became a great seat of learning.

The Anglo-Saxons left much material evidence of the increasingly dominant religion behind them, including wonderful art works such as stone crosses. In South-west Durham there is a very small Anglo-Saxon stone church in the village of Escomb. Anglo-Saxons built monasteries such as the one on the island of Lindisfarne, off the coast of Northumberland. The most famous Anglo-Saxon saint is Saint Cuthbert who is buried in Durham Cathedral.

7th Century: Christian missionaries began to arrive from both Rome and Ireland.

9th Century: Viking raids began. They affected the Tees Valley more than the Wear Valley.

10th Century: Viking raids continued – again affecting the Tees Valley more than our area.

Studying place names can give clues to where the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings settled. For example in the Tees Valley there is Raby Castle and the Raby estate. There is a small village called Killerby. Some people probably practiced both forms of religion – Paganism and Christianity – and many pagan beliefs and practices were assimilated by the new faith.



Escomb Church – Anglo-Saxon Architecture

THE NORMAN CONQUEST

The Normans were originally Viking warriors exiled from their homelands (the land we now call France) and in 1066 one of them, the Duke William of Normandy, claimed the throne when King Edward the Confessor died. He defeated the Anglo-Saxon King Harold in battle at the Battle of Senlac Hill (or Hastings) in Sussex.

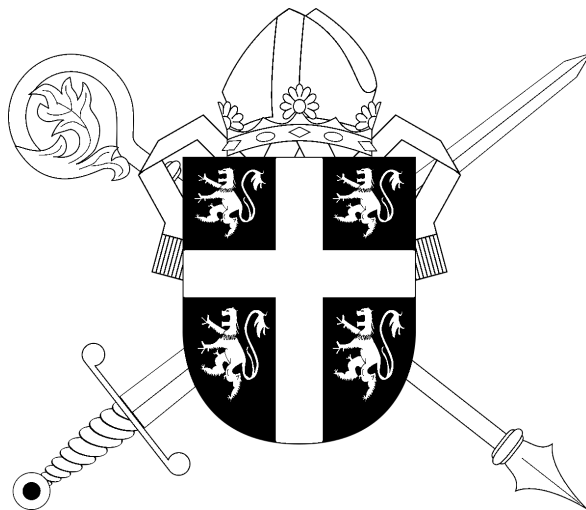
A rebellion in the north against William's rule was harshly defeated and a Norman army laid waste to much of the north to curb rebelliousness. We think many people died of starvation and disease and significant areas of land were laid waste.

William also created the post of Prince Bishop of Durham – a bishopric that was much bigger than it is today. The Prince Bishop's role was to defend the area from the Scots north of the border and also keep order within his lands. As a churchman, William hoped the Prince Bishop would not be personally ambitious and want to replace him.

William introduced the feudal system to our country – it impacted in different parts of the country to different extents. He also ordered the collection of information to enable him to decide how much to tax his new subjects. This information is recorded in what we now call the 'Domesday Book'. However, the information collectors did not cross the River Tees so it is not available for us to use for the Gaunless Valley.



THE MIDDLE AGES TO THE 17TH CENTURY



Coat of Arms of the Bishop of Durham

Under the Feudal System, loyal followers of the king received land in return for services and this included military service. Most people still earned their living as farmers, traders and craftsmen and during this period towns began to grow – the biggest being London with perhaps 50,000 people in 1485. As a mighty landowner, the Prince Bishop of Durham had great influence in the Gaunless Valley – indeed, Richard Poore, Bishop of Durham, gave land to a certain Robert de Cockfield, who gave his name to the village of Cockfield, granting him the land between 1220 and 1226. One Prince Bishop gathered information in the manner of William the Conqueror – which is now contained in the Bolden Book.

Wealth was based on land and land ownership or which family you were born into – with trade becoming increasingly important as time passed. One way to improve your life chances was to join the Church – as a monk or a priest. A famous example of this is Henry VIII's Cardinal Wolsey.

During this period transport systems from inland to the coast were generally poor – no more Roman roads!

14th Century Coal mining started on Cockfield Fell – the remains of bell pits are scattered over the Fell.

16th Century Conflict over religion – Henry VIII needed to annul his marriage to Catherine of Aragon to marry Anne Boleyn to secure a legitimate male heir. Gradually Roman Catholicism gave way to a version of Protestantism we now know as the Anglican Church. Not attending the church became punishable by fines and Roman Catholic priests were arrested, tried for treason and executed under Elizabeth I. Roman Catholicism survived underground to re-emerge once again when religious freedom was granted much later. It probably survived longer in the north than in the south.

17th Century By this time many of our great cities were established and growing. Trade in coal, wood, iron, woollen cloth and other goods were well established. Lead was also being mined. The mid-17th century however saw the conflict of the Civil War – which had its effects up here too to varying degrees.

Importantly, however, a man with a sharp mind and a will to succeed could raise himself to a position of wealth and influence, without being born into it.

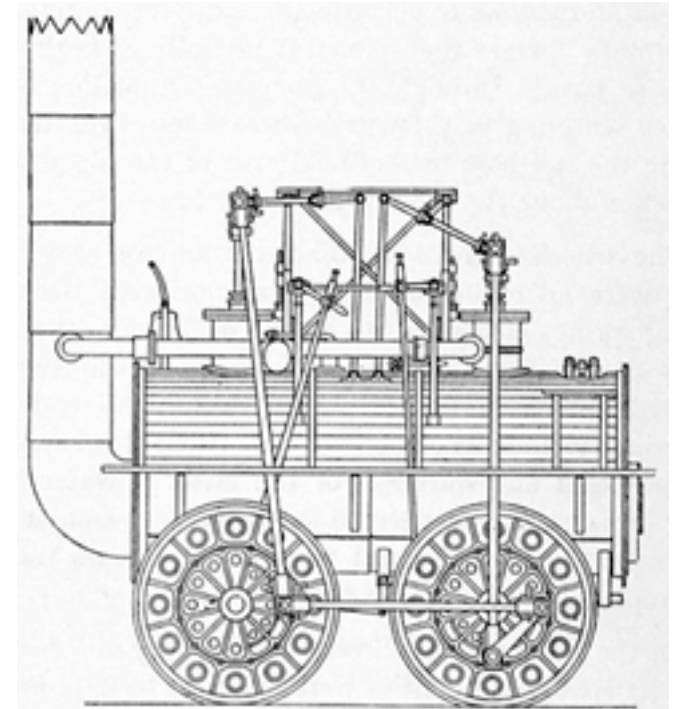
THE 18TH – 19TH CENTURIES

This is the time that was known as the Agricultural, Transport and Industrial Revolutions, during which England was a world leader in innovation and excellence, influencing the development of the world. The Slave Trade was still operational, with a great deal of money being made by this country by exploiting the misery of our fellow human beings. It was the time of the developing British Empire.

During the 19th century rapid urbanisation took place and we changed from being a largely rural to a predominantly urban society. Population grew rapidly and many people moved from villages to towns.

Roads were improved first (Turnpike toll roads), then canals were built and finally the steam railway superseded both. Gangs of 'navvies', who wandered the country from job to job, were the 'back-bone' builders of our canals and railways.

Money was pouring in from the Empire, especially the Americas, even after the American Revolution (1765-1785), and entrepreneurs were looking for new ways to invest it.



Locomotion No 1: Stockton & Darlington Railway, Designer – George Stephenson



The opening of the Stockton-Darlington railway line, 1825

18th/19th Century Towns were growing, boosting the demand for coal. New ways of making steel were developed, boosting the demand for coal. New cotton and wool factories were using steam power, increasing the demand for coal. Steam engines and locomotives were invented, boosting the demand for coal. King Coal was born. The impact on the Gaunless Valley was huge.

1825 KEY DATE The Stockton & Darlington Railway, linking businesses, along the route from Witton Park to Stockton was opened, ushering in the modern railway age of not only the distribution of goods but travelling passengers too.

Other industries were hugely stimulated e.g., the brick industry and the slate industry.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

At the start of the century, mining was the biggest employer in the country and railways were everywhere. However, by the end of the century most coalmines had closed, and Mr Beeching closed down many passenger branch lines in the 1960's. Our own 'High Line' closed during this time. All of this hugely impacted on the Gaunless Valley, with many jobs disappearing. People continued to farm and had to find other ways to make a living.

THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

- We are trying hard in our area to make the most of what we have that is so special to stimulate regeneration and make sure that people know and are inspired by it.
- Historic England has awarded our area two Heritage Action Zones (HAZ), one for the historic centre of Bishop Auckland and the other for the length of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
- In Bishop Auckland the Auckland Project is trying to use the history associated with the Prince Bishops to do this. A new Faith Gallery and a rejuvenated walled garden in the Prince Bishop's former castle, a Mining Art Gallery and a new Spanish Art gallery will all contribute to this.
- Cockfield Fell, an ancient scheduled monument, encapsulates much of our history and the Stockton & Darlington Railway will be enjoying its 200th anniversary in 2025, amidst great celebrations, which we hope you will all join in.