

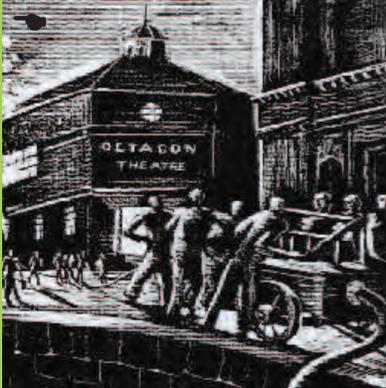
1. Wesleyan Methodist Church

The foundation stone of this church was laid by Rev R Haworth, of Gateshead, in 1867, as a new building was necessary to accommodate the growing congregation of the old church on Ballast Hill. It opened for worship in February, 1869. They continued to use the old building as a Sunday School until a new one was added to the church in 1885. During the First World War the new schoolroom was used by the military as an army billet. In 1945, major repairs were necessary as the church suffered bomb damage during the Second World War. Keel Row shopping centre now replaces it.



2. Dicky Fynes

Richard Fynes, more commonly known as Dicky, was born in Newcastle but made his home in Blyth. Originally a miner, he helped found the Miners' Union and building society. As a result, he became a 'marked man' and could not work in any pit in Northumberland, so turned his hand to auctioneering and general dealing in Blyth. He eventually bought Octagon Chapel, near Waterloo Bridge, and turned it into a theatre. After modernising it, the theatre was burnt out in 1888. He never recovered from the loss and despite a re-build, he died in 1892. He was known as the 'Father of Drama' in Blyth.



3. Bus Station

Blyth was always known as an industrial town and one of the earliest industries was the timber trade. It is said to have started on the site of the bus station by a man called Saunders, but later it was known as Wright's Timber Yard until they moved to the dock by 1907. The local council purchased the land, intending to build a new Town Hall. In the early 1920s, buses used the roads around the sides, but the centre was left derelict until the council landscaped it into a proper square with seating surrounding a gas lamp. By 1962, the bus station was again altered to provide shelter for passengers.



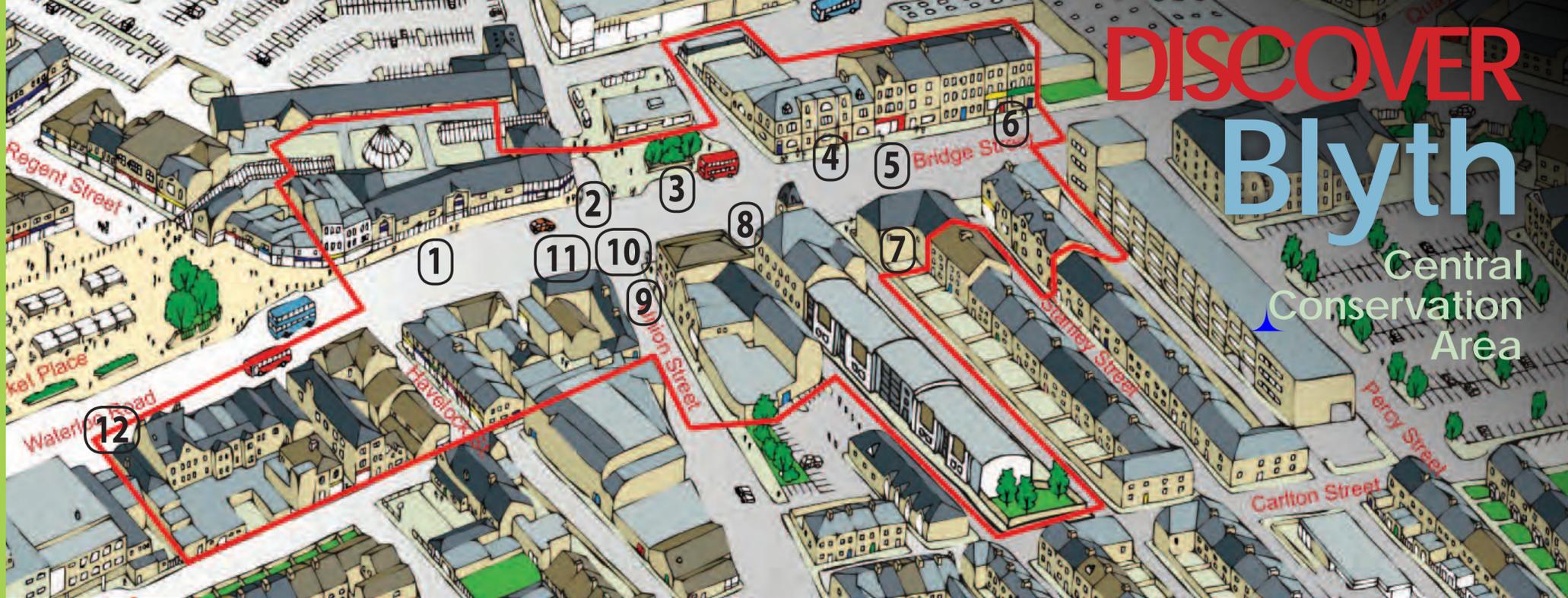
4. Post Office

The first post office in Freehold Street had proved inadequate by the early part of the 20th century and a new one was built in Bridge Street, where it remains today. It was opened on 8 December 1913, just in time for the Christmas rush. The first post-master at this office was Mr J Ince. There was a telephone exchange upstairs and a sorting room and telegraph facilities downstairs. Although the building is no longer used by the public, it is still used by the Post Office.



12. 43 Waterloo Road

This ornate two storey building managed to escape fire damage in the fire of 1904 which destroyed shops along the street. The building housed Newcastle Trustees Savings Bank at the time, but had previously been the Robson Brothers shoe shop and Strother's Ironmongers. People helped the police to salvage goods from the shops by removing them to the back lane but unfortunately some of the goods were never seen again. One shop sold musical instruments and folks who had never shown any musical inclination suddenly developed an interest in playing the trumpet or banjo!



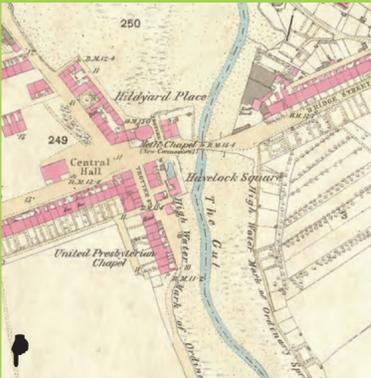
DISCOVER Blyth

Central Conservation Area

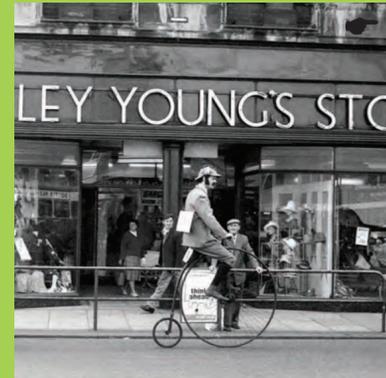


5. Bridge Street Floods

The morning of 27 October 1900, after 18 hours of continuous rain and sleet, the people of Blyth woke up to find the streets flooded. Walking was almost impossible with the water knee deep. The Blyth News described it: "Pedestrianism was impossible, except to those daring spirits, and they included both sexes, who found it more expedient to plunge through it, regardless of consequences, than stand still. There was an awkward perversion of the proverb, that 'time and tide wait for no man,' in that the tide waited long enough on Saturday for every man, and woman too."



Take a stroll around town to discover the scenes of some of Blyth's interesting past tales...



9. Hedley & Young's

John Hedley was the owner of a large drapery, tailoring and furniture shop in Blagdon Street. After the Gut (or Slake) was filled in with thousands of tons of excavation from the docks and mines, he bought the land and erected a magnificent store on the site. It opened in February 1897 as New Albion House. John died in 1907 and in 1911 his son went into partnership with S K Young, becoming Hedley, Young & Company Ltd. In 1929, additional window space was created on the Beaconsfield Street side of the building, and in 1934 the front was changed to an arcade.



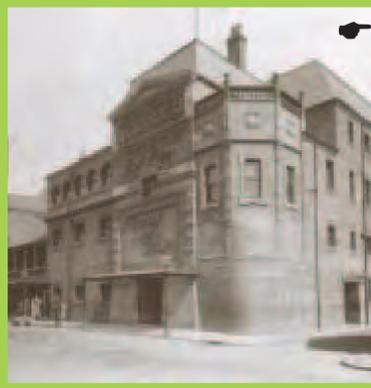
7. Barclays Bank

Originally Woods & Co. bank, it was taken over by Barclays in 1897. Built in 1889 at a cost of £1,210 14s 10d (about £132,500 at today's values), it is a fine example of Dutch influenced architecture. There was always a trade between the Netherlands and Blyth, and at one time Dutch bricks were brought here as ballast in ships. Examples of these bricks can be seen in the older buildings in Blyth such as the central part of Bath Terrace, and two houses on Wensleydale Terrace next to the park. The bank can still be seen as an architecturally prominent building today, and is still in operation.



11. The Gut

The area we now know as Blyth's town centre was, in the mid-19th century, little more than a few terraces of housing with gardens wrapped around the gut. At this time, 'the Gut', also known as 'the Slake', divided Blyth town in two, with the only connection being Waterloo Bridge. With a rapid increase in industry and, therefore, population, the town began to develop. 'The Gut' was reclaimed as dry land and saw the beginning of a new commercial and retail centre for Blyth, in addition to the port related industries. The old line of 'the Gut' can be seen by following the rough line of Union Street.



10. Jefferson & Laurel

After the death of Dicky Fynes (see 3 above), the theatre on Waterloo Road was leased to Arthur Jefferson who, in 1900, built the new Theatre Royal just a few hundred yards away in Trotter Street, at a cost of £13,000. In 1908, Jefferson's son, Arthur Stanley Jefferson, better known as the famous Stan Laurel of Laurel & Hardy, appeared in the theatre's pantomime. Many great stars played in the theatre including Gracie Fields and Charlie Chaplin. An adjoining street to the theatre was named Jefferson Street to commemorate the link with the pair.



8. Blyth Library

Originally the Mechanics' Institute, dances were held upstairs as there were few dance halls in the town for many years. It was also home to the Masons before their hall was built in Beaconsfield Street. At a ball for St Mary's Parish Church in the Institute, tragedy struck when Hans Jessen, manager of Breyen, Richardson & Co., ship chandlers and ship brokers, died of a heart attack whilst dancing a schottische. The Library was officially taken over by the Council in April 1930.



6. Dr Gilbert Ward

Dr Gilbert Ward came to Blyth from Newcastle in 1832 and settled here. He helped at the Hartley Pit Disaster in 1862. Dr Ward was prominent in the affairs of Blyth, being the French consul, chairman of Blyth Local Board, and registrar for births etc. Hospitals in Blyth were created at his instigation and he was involved in many other good works. In 1881 he entertained Prince Alfred the Duke of Edinburgh at this house when the Duke inspected the port as an Admiral in the Royal Navy. The house was later occupied by doctors for many years.

Blyth

Central Conservation Area



Images of some of the buildings in the Central Conservation Area restored through the Townscape Heritage Initiative between 2012 and 2016:
 Here: 33-39 Bridge Street
 Bottom: 24 Bridge Street
 Front cover: Blyth Library and 18 Bridge Street



At the heart of the North East's port industries with links around the world, the Central Conservation Area in Blyth is testament to the historic wealth of the town.

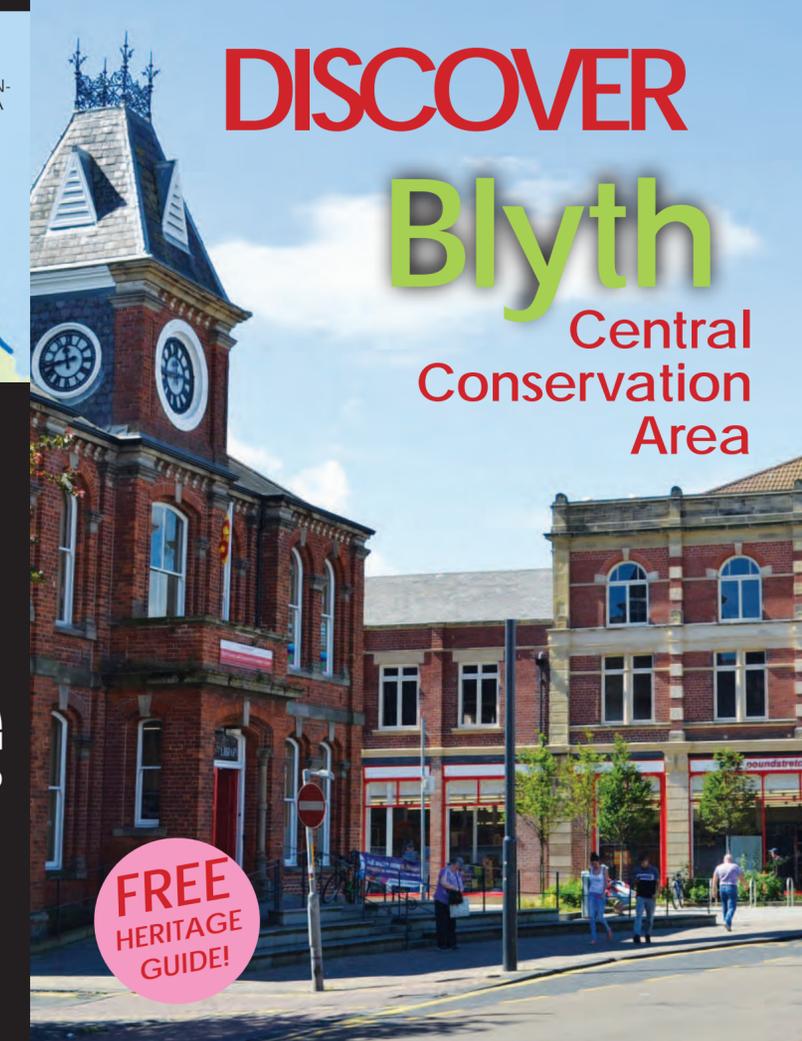
Today, with new uses in these fine old buildings, the area is busy with shoppers, workers and visitors, all of whom can enjoy the attractive period architecture in these historic streets.



Spend a while in the conservation area with our guide and discover more than meets the eye...



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DISCOVER Blyth

Central Conservation Area

The growth of the commercial and retail heart to Blyth's town centre led to the prosperous development of many of the buildings we see today. The impressive architectural features come from the economic wealth of Blyth during the 19th and 20th centuries.

A Conservation Area is a neighbourhood that has special historic character in its buildings, streets and spaces. The idea is that it protects and enhances what makes it special but still allows change and new development.

The pattern of development
 Blyth's industry played an important role in the area's development. The streets and spaces developed around the industry, providing homes for workers and links for transporting goods. As the wealth of the town grew, new commercial buildings, grand shops, offices and public houses were built. It is many of those buildings that can still be seen lining the streets today.

Architectural Qualities
 Blyth Central Conservation Area has a range of late nineteenth and early twentieth century buildings which contribute to its special interest, and which are a reminder of the town's growth as an industrial centre.

Most are three storey commercial buildings, each with its own detailing to set it apart from the next and to create attractive variety. Their scale gives impressive views of historic buildings, and views along the main roads contain smaller, more modest buildings as you move away from Bridge Street and Waterloo Road.

Warm yellow sandstone, quarried locally, is an important building material here, used for construction and decoration. Many of the architectural features – such as doorways, window openings, chimneys, etc – are individual to that particular building and, in some cases, have elaborate decorative features showing the grandeur portrayed at Blyth's time of development.

Built as a commercial centre for Blyth, shopfronts are an important part of the area's appearance. Shopfronts would originally have been made from timber and some still survive today; others have also recently been restored.

Contribution of spaces
 The conservation area has very few open spaces as the area was always characterised by the town's tight development pattern. The area developed a street layout based on the growth of the commercial centre in Blyth, so the main open space is the highway of Bridge Street and Waterloo Road itself. This is a busy thoroughfare.

The only formal space is around the bus station although the Market Place, just outside the conservation area, has been landscaped and benefits from planting and trees.

Loss, intrusion and restoration
 The main loss to the character of Blyth Central Conservation Area is the gradual modernisation of many historic buildings, and loss of some special area features. There is still great integrity to the historic environment, and much can be rescued through restoration and enhancement of what exists.

Townscape Heritage Initiative
 From 2012 to 2016, a grant scheme called a Townscape Heritage Initiative, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Northumberland County Council, helped to restore some of the prominent historic buildings and spaces, bringing back some of the town's distinctive character.



Industrial ventures to commercial wealth and beyond



Above: Blyth Docks, 1850
 Below: Blyth port and harbour, c.1860

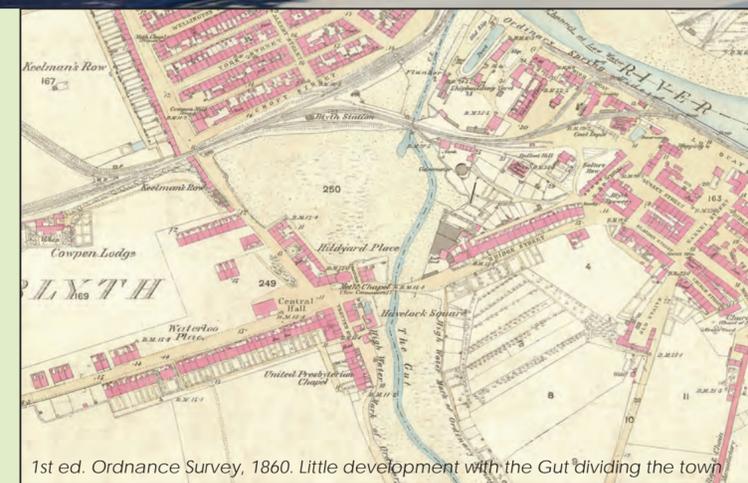


There's some evidence that Blyth is older than many think, with objects found dating back to the early Bronze Age. But, it is in the 1200s that Blyth first appears in records as a settlement with an already established saltworks and mill – the first of Blyth's industrious ventures.

Blyth is one of the oldest ports in Northumberland and from the Middle Ages has been associated with the export of salt, coal and corn. By 18th century, Blyth was the centre for industry. Its first shipyard opened followed by a dry dock, signalling yet more industry. By the mid-19th century, the port was booming and the town tended to cluster around the harbour side and its market place along a north-south axis.

At this time, the area we now know as Blyth Central Conservation Area was little more than a few terraces of housing with gardens, wrapped around the Gut. The Gut, also known as the Slake, divided the town in two, with the only connection being Waterloo Bridge.

By the early 20th century the port continued to flourish as the largest coal port in Northumberland, and was the centre for shipbuilding



1st ed. Ordnance Survey, 1860. Little development with the Gut dividing the town

and repair as well as other heavy and maritime industries. It was Bridge Street and Waterloo Street, however, that boasted the grand developments only possible due to the wealth from these industries and after the Gut was reclaimed as dry land and developed. New developments including banks, a post office, picture theatres, public houses and shops. This was the beginning of a new commercial and retail centre for Blyth, in addition to the port related industries nearby.

Commercial development on Waterloo Road & Bridge Street

