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CHESTER-LE-STREET RIVERSIDE PARK AND LUMLEY CASTLE

The Chester-le-Street bypass is primarily routed via the A1(M) to the east of the town. Originally opened in 1931 as the first dual carriageway bypass in the UK, traffic is now diverted even further away from the town centre via Junction 63 (Picktree) and Junction 62 (Carrville/Durham).

The original A1 bypass road was constructed between 1932 and 1934 to route traffic around Front Street. This road, which is known as the A167 today, was built slightly before or concurrently with the park's initial establishment. Between 1903 and 1930, there was a national speed limit of 20 mph. The 1930 Road Traffic Act completely abolished the 20 mph limit. For a few years, light vehicles and cars had no legally defined speed limits, and this dual carriageway was a magnet for some. This freedom directly contributed to a massive surge in traffic fatalities. The 1934 Road Traffic Act reintroduced limits, establishing a 30 mph cap in "built-up areas" (defined by the presence of street lighting with lamps no more than 200 yards apart). This is still in use today

Durham County Constabulary's mobile response units were the bobby on the beat, sometime riding a bicycle, and then to keep up with then speeding modern vehicles there was a least one Darlington based Alvis Silver Eagle (0 to 60 mph took 28 seconds!). The regular small fleet comprised standard Ford and Morris models as sold generally, but most motorised units were motorbikes with sidecars.

The park sits along the River Wear in the historic market town of Chester-le-Street. Known originally for its green spaces, the park underwent significant modern renovations in the 1990's. Artists Roger Dickinson and Isabella Lockett were commissioned in 1996 to design ornamental gardens inspired by notable historical landscape architects and includes artist-designed ornamental gardens, a splash pad, and a wooden play castle inspired by the nearby medieval Lumley Castle.



The Splash Pad



Play Castle

In the 2000s, the surrounding area was boosted by the opening of the neighbouring Riverside Cricket Ground (home of Durham County Cricket Club) and enhanced family attractions, including a popular water splash pad.

Our walk takes us around the outskirts of the park, dropping down to a path along the river leading to where the Ha'penny Bridge (official name was The Wear & Lumley Bridge) used to cross the River Wear. This was a cast-iron pedestrian bridge built in 1898 to replace a rope ferry connecting the town to the village of Lumley. It was demolished in the 1960s. Some of the hardy local youths used to jump into the river from the span.



The path takes us on to Ropery Lane where the route leads across New Lumley Bridge. There seems to be little known of the history of rope making in Chester-le-Street, but it didn't exist in the 19th century, and lives on in name only. The original course of Ropery Lane can be seen on the (old) Lumley Bridge abutments on both sides of the river. The old bridge was demolished in 1997 because of a change in the road alignment.

On crossing the bridge, we take a sharp left and follow the course of the River Wear in a northerly direction, following the perimeter of Chester-le-Street Golf Club. At this point the group came across some golfers who disputed that the path was a public right of way and insisted the path was private golf club property. Not needing to be confrontational, the route was amended to lead us into the grounds of Lumley Castle.



Lumley Castle is named after its original creator, Sir Ralph Lumley, who converted his family manor house into a castle in 1389 after returning from wars in Scotland. In 1400 Sir Ralph was beheaded for his role in the Epiphany Rising—a failed plot to overthrow King Henry IV. The castle was temporarily

confiscated before legally returning to his grandson in 1421. By the nineteenth century, the castle had become the residence of the Bishop of Durham, after Bishop Van Mildert gave his residence of Durham Castle to the newly founded University of Durham. The castle thus became a hall of residence for University College, Durham. Lumley Castle was sold in the 1960s by University College to fund the building of the 'Moat side' residential halls in central Durham, in order to keep all students on the same site.

In 1976, management of the castle was handed over to No Ordinary Hotels, which had the castle turned into the 73-bedroomed hotel it is today, but it is still in the possession of the present Richard Osbert Lumley, 13th Earl of Scarbrough.

There's no map associated with this amble due to the disputed access. If we decide to plan another excursion in the area there will be a different route!