



Tynemouth and South Shields (Mill Dam)

Another fine day greeted us as we met up at Tynemouth Metro Station at the start of our walk. Originally opened in 1882 by North Eastern Railway, the coast line was electrified in the early 1900's but due to operating costs converted to diesel multiple units in the 1960's. British Rail were still operating services until the day before the station was connected to the Metro network in 1980! The station itself is a grade 2 listed building and hosts markets on Saturdays and Sundays.



Opposite the station exit is Kings Priory School which takes its name from the three kings buried at Tynemouth priory (Oswin, Osred the Second and Malcolm the Third of Scotland. King Malcolm's body was later disinterred and taken to Scotland). The school's crest, as well as North Tyneside Council's coat of arms, display three crowns in recognition. "Old boys" include Stan Laurel and Ridley Scott. Although brother Tony was born here, their parents (father was in the Royal Engineers) were posted to Hartlepool. Both of the Scott brothers studied at West Hartlepool College of Art.



For those that remember our walk near Clifford's Fort near the Fish Quay, we are reminded of the relocation of that unit to near to what was then Tynemouth railway station.



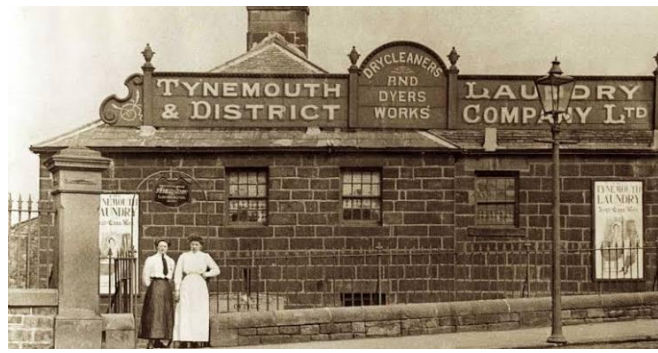
Progressing along Tynemouth Road, and on the corner of Oxford Street, there is a blue plaque indicating Tynemouth's first railway station opened in 1847. It was replaced in 1882 by the current station. Today, the old stone building is a Grade II listed property called Mariners Point.



A little further along, on the opposite side of the road is the rather imposing Master Mariners Homes, Built 1837-40 by North Shields Master Mariners Asylum for 32 aged mariners and their dependants. The land was donated by 3rd Duke of Northumberland and his statue stands in the gardens.



A few more steps along Tynemouth Road and an indication that this was the site of the **Governor's Tree**, where important visitors to Tynemouth were met as they disembarked in Pow Burn. These visitors included King Charles I in 1633 and King Henry VIII's commissioners, when they came to dispossess the monks of Tynemouth Priory in 1539. The source of the Pow Burn was near Preston Village, and it flowed down the valley in the centre of the present Northumberland Park. It ran parallel to Tanner's Bank and exited at the eastern end of what is now the Fish Quay, and was navigable for about 400 metres from its meeting with the Tyne. Extensive culverting means there is little left to see!



Before turning off Tynemouth Road down Tanner's Bank towards the river, the Tynemouth Lodge Hotel stands almost at the road junction, adjacent to where the Old Correction House used to stand. The Old Correction House was a prison for "for minor miscreants, such as prostitutes and petty thieves". It was later converted to a workhouse, then a laundry. More serious offenders were sent to the county goal at Morpeth as North Shields was part of Northumberland at the time. The Tynemouth Lodge Hotel, a few yards up the hill, housed visiting judges. There used to be a locked tunnel between the hotel and Correction House through which meals were taken into the prison.



At the bottom of Tanner's Bank, the route becomes Union Road, then Union Quay and it's noticeable how many of the older buildings have found new purpose as bars, restaurants and take-aways, with some of the newer ones seemingly built for purpose! Property developers have also had a hand in new build apartment blocks as well as some repurposed older buildings. There are several shops selling fresh fish and shellfish, some of them housed in the ex military buildings of Cliffords Fort. Completed in 1672 and named after Lord Clifford of Cabal and commanded by the Governor of Tynemouth Castle until 1839. Headquarters of Tyne Division Royal Engineers (Volunteers) Submarine Miners 1888 – 1928.



A series of steps leads up to Tyne Street, then on to Dockwray Square and Laurel Park, which of course, has a statue of one half of the Laurel and Hardy duo so famous in their black and white films. Stan Laurel lived in North Shields

from 1895 until 1905, between the ages of 5 and 15 at No. 8 Dockwray Square. While the original buildings were demolished in the 1930s, the location is marked with a plaque on nearby number. From there, it's back down to Union Quay and street name changes to Bell Street.



Before descending the steps back down to the quay, the stone building at the end of the road is the Stag Line building and was originally built to house the Tynemouth Literary and Philosophical Society back in 1806. Stag Line was a family owned business originating in 1846, operating deep sea tramp ships and bulk carriers. Operations were wound up in 1981, and the building is now North Tyneside's Register Office.



At the bottom of the flight of steps leading down from Tyne Street, on the other side of the road, is a monument to commemorate the importance of the role Herring Girls played in the bustling Fish Quay industry has been installed on the Western Fish Quay. Actress and television personality, Brenda Blethyn unveiled the sculpture, on 22nd September 2023. Herring girls were a migratory workforce of thousands of Scottish women who travelled along the UK coast from the 19th to the mid-20th century. Starting in the spring, the women would leave their hometowns in the poorest areas of northern Scotland—such as Shetland, Orkney, the Hebrides, and the Northwest Highlands. They travelled south by boat or special "herring trains" following the fish down the east coast of England to ports like Great Yarmouth and Lowestoft, often staying away from home for months. Their backbreaking labour sustained Britain's booming seafood export industry. Working in teams of three or four, they stood at wooden troughs called "farlins". Two women gutted the herring with lightning-fast cutag (proper name futtle) knives, while the third packed the fish into barrels with layers of salt. A highly skilled crew could gut and pack between 40 to 80 fish per minute.



The Prince of Wales Tavern (previously known as The Feathers and also The Old Wooden Dolly) sounds very much as if it was old school, which a reputation for good value food and drink, complete with a mobile phone ban! It incorporates the lintel of a doorway of the Press Gang Headquarters, bearing the date 1674. Since about 1814 there has been a 'Wooden Dolly' outside this public house. The current pub was rebuilt in 1927, and the Prince of Wales referred to became Edward VIII whose picture was on the pub sign. The present one dates to 1992. Closed in March 2020, but now actively seeking new operators.



Along Liddlie Street and Clive Street there are multiple gated apartment blocks, and at the junction of Clive Street and Borough Road another public house, originally The Golden Fleece, then renamed The Porthole, looks as if it has been “done up” to live a new life as Blake Hopkinson Architecture and Design. Looking above the main doorway the original golden fleece logo can be seen from the original pub.



On the opposite side of the road, the Sailors Home on New Quay, North Shields, was a historic building built between 1854 and 1856 to house 80 visiting seamen. It was designed by famous local architect Benjamin Green and funded by the Duke of Northumberland. It closed in 1938 but the building remains. It is protected as a Grade II listed building



As we pass the ferry car park, another unprepossessing war-time relic can be seen: a cylindrical steel fabrication that was a fire and mine watching observation post. Dating from the Second World war, many factories and major civilian installations, like docks, gas works and railway depots, devised their own defensive positions, in conjunction with the military, which were later taken over by regular troops. This armoured firing position seems to fall into that category. It is located close to the ferry landing, and although now very exposed, would have been camouflaged to blend into the busy dock-side landscape.



Talking of repurposed pubs, further along on our right is The Crane House, a former Newcastle Breweries pub from 1905, renamed The Chain Locker in 1986 and converted into flats in 2005. Opposite the Crane House is the not very well signed access to the pedestrian ferry (at least the street is called Ferry Mews!).



The ferry operates a half hourly service in each direction. Those with Metro Gold Cards added to their passes use them exactly the same as the card readers on the buses for free ferry fare! Whilst journeying from North Shields to South Shields, the evidence of the area's shipbuilding and ship repair industries can be seen on both sides of the River Tyne with unused slipways and drydocks very evident with the empty berths of ship repairers Smith's Dock to the north.



The North Shields to South Shields route is the last remaining ferry service on the Tyne, others in the past being:
 Whitehill Point (Shields) Ferry - 1856 to 1952. Direct (Shields) Ferry - 1847 to 1954
 Howdon - Jarrow Ferry - 1863 to 1967, Wallsend/Walker - Hebburn Ferry - 1854 to 1986.

As a note, in 1929 there were 11 ferry routes across the Tyne between Newburn and the mouth of the river. Some of the ones that closed in the 50's, 60's and 80's were initially operated by a consortium of major Tyneside employers Swan Hunter & Wigham Richardson, Hawthorn Leslie and Vickers-Armstrong, plus electrical engineers A.E. Reyrolle. With the decline of shipbuilding and heavy engineering, and with improved road and Metro links the need drastically reduced.



Of course, one mustn't forget the Mid Tyne ferry scene in "Get Carter"!



Braving the briny (well, the Tyne is tidal well above this point!), we take the journey, lasting no more than a few minutes, to the ferry landing in South Shields. The old docks on both sides of the river are visible on both sides of the river. Walking up the ramp from the ferry, a turning to the right heads towards the Custom House passing a memorial to the employees of Joseph Readhead, shipbuilders, who lost their lives during the First World War.



The Custom House which is now an arts and entertainment venue in the Mill Dam Conservation Area of South Shields, South Tyneside, opened in July 1864 as a custom house, built to facilitate the import and export of goods at Shields Harbour. Around the corner to the Custom House and facing the River Tyne is the Port Health Authority building, which also housed the River Police headquarters, opened in 1886 and operated until 1985



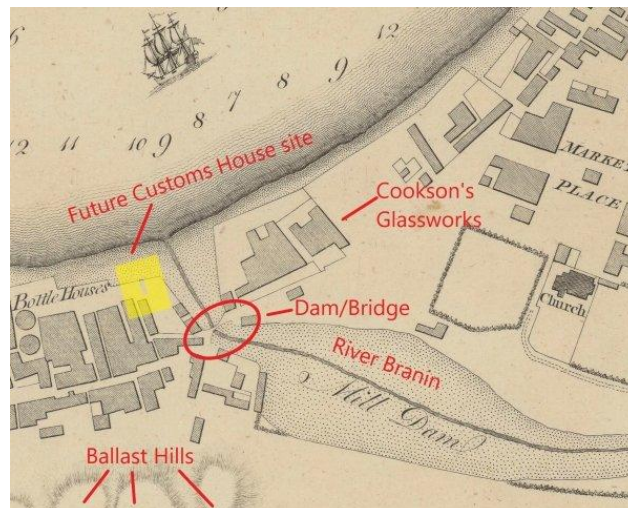
Next to the Custom House is the Merchant Navy Memorial. This statue was unveiled by Countess Mountbatten of Burma (daughter of the 1st Earl Mountbatten of Burma) on 19th Sept, 1990 in memory of the thousands of merchant seamen who sailed from this port and lost their lives in WWII.



A few yards from the Merchant Navy Memorial is the 1865 monument. The year 1865 is pivotal to the Mill Dam area in South Shields, as it marks when the town was officially declared an independent customs port, separating from North Shields.



Looking to the right, there is a brick built tower which is the only remnant of Edward Moore's Tyne Flint Glass Works, built in 1860. In 1862, during the International Exhibition at Crystal Palace, it was noted that his products were "marvellously cheap and technically excellent". At the river edge, there were also Swinburne's Glass Works as well as the South Shields Bottle Works (conveniently situated next door to the Subscription Brewery and close to the Custom House!)



Mill Dam is a historic quayside area in South Shields. It originated as a natural tidal creek and corn mill recorded as early as 1347. Originally, the Mill Dam Creek was a natural inlet that separated the town, acting as a southern boundary and creating an "island" at the Lawe Top. It was eventually dammed and filled in to expand the town. The term Lascar was used referring principally to those from the Middle East, usually Yemeni, but the term broadened over the years, eventually becoming a generic term for non-Europeans including those from India, Indo-China and the Philippines.

In discussing the Mill Dam area in South Shields, two separate but similar incidents are of note:

Initially, resentment arose because, during the First World War, a large number of merchant seamen were recruited into the Royal Navy. The ship owners started to employ low cost middle eastern personnel:

February 1919: Following the end of World War I, large groups of demobilized white seamen clashed with Arabs at the Mill Dam. White mobs attacked and looted Arab-owned businesses and boarding houses. Eight Arab men were arrested and imprisoned, while no white rioters faced charges.

A few years later, when the effects of the Depression began to significantly change the level of employment of local merchant seamen:

August 1930: Sparked by high unemployment and a newly introduced rota system that white seamen felt discriminated against them, the Mill Dam was the site of the infamous "Arab Riot". Following impassioned speeches at the Shipping Foundation Offices, a large mob of white seamen roamed the waterfront attacking foreign workers.

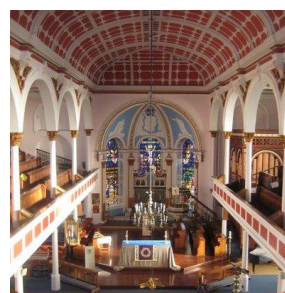
Police handled the situation harshly, leading to the jailing of 15 Arab men and the subsequent deportation of 20 Yemenis.

A few more yards into the walk, and there are blue plaques commemorating the Missions to Seamen, and another to Catherine Cookson, author, who based her book 'Colour Blind' near the site. From Mill Dam, on the right the first road is Commercial Road, the second, next to Asda, is Station Road. Those on the last amble in South Shields may recall that two of the town's first railway stations (The Stanhope and Tyne Railway and The Brandling Junction Railway Company) were in this area, the Low Station being located behind the Steamboat Inn.



The Brandling Junction Railway Low Station is shown near the centre of this 1855 OS map. The BJR was also more interested in mineral traffic - note their drops at bottom left. Hilda Colliery drops were further up river. The Stanhope & Tyne Railway runs north - south on the right. Ballast was a problem until wooden brigs were replaced by iron steam colliers with water ballast from about 1860, although the ballast also provided raw materials for bottle, glass & brick works.

From there, the route leads to St Hilda's Church:



The church, the parish church of South Shields is said to be on the site of a chapel founded by Aidan of Lindisfarne circa AD 647 and placed in the charge of Hilda of Whitby. Some restoration work was carried out in 1675 by Robert Trollope. In 1753 a north aisle was added to the church. It was then mostly rebuilt between 1810 and 1881 and the interior galleries are supported on cast-iron columns. The church is most famous for the model of a lifeboat by William Wouldhave dating from 1802 which is suspended from the ceiling. Unfortunately, the church now only opens for services and very specific visiting hours.

Continuing, the opportunities for refreshments of various kinds are on offer, so decisions had to be made. Once satisfied at the Wouldhave (South Shields so where more appropriate?) the return journey continued homewards via bus, metro or a combination of both.

Tynemouth To South Shields Mill Dam

