

BRIEF HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF DARLINGTON

It can be seen from the geographical features that where the settlement of Darlington is located, it is ideally positioned as being central between the Tees Mouth area within the lower Tees Valley and at the commencement to the upper reaches of Teesdale. It is also ideally situated as being either on or near to the main artery routes and connections to the rest of the country.

However it would appear that the original settlement of Darlington was situated on the West Bank of the River Skerne, probably at the first practical narrow crossing point north of where the Skerne joins the river Tees at Oxeney Field, Croft. The Skerne rises in magnesium limestone hills between Trimdon and Trimdon Grange some 14 miles to the north of Darlington and is joined by many small becks and streams; the closest tributary to the Town is the Cocker Beck in Northgate of the Town. Today the Skerne is much narrower and straighter than it has been over its natural history, (however through an environmental project some meanders and 'Riffles' have been added to restore its more natural course in the 1990's). Evidence exists to show that there have been a number of bridges that have arched the river at the present location of Tubwell Row, although originally the river would have been forded here, historical records show that there has been a bridge at this location since 1343. The original construction began with timber and eventually Stone, one such bridge had nine arches in the early 1700's; the river was reputed to have been one Hundred yards wide at this point, (93mtrs) and often flooded that area of the town, due to the width the bridge had to be approached by a causeway which extended up to Bank Top. However the deliberate maintenance of the banks of the river over the past two hundred years to minimise flooding and to assist the development of the town have not only controlled where it flooded, it also increased the depth and speed of the river; which was no doubt of great benefit to the Pease family whose Mill was driven by a water wheel situated between the two water courses of the Skerne and Mill Race which conjoined together near the Tubwell Row.

The current day Town southern border is the river Tees. Politically Darlington currently enjoys unitary status and is also a Borough; it also sits within the southern part of the County of Durham, covering an area of approximately 76.2 sq. miles (19,745 Hectares).

Topographical evidence would suggest that there has been some form of settlement in this area since the Neolithic period from evidence that would seem to indicate that some form of cereal crop growing and woodlands clearances were apparent. Also Flints dating from Mesolithic or Neolithic periods have been found together with evidence of early Iron Age farming. The foundation of the town consists of boulder clays to the east of the river whereas the west is quite devoid of such structure, and is made up of a more fine sub-soil of sand and gravel.

It would seem that Darlington's place name has changed five times since its conception. It is suggested that its original name was **Deathingtun**, which was probably a derivative from the Anglo-Saxon word, which meant 'the settlement of Deornoth's people' ('ing' means Folk of or family, & 'Tun' means enclosed village / Farmstead or Manor). However there is a possibility that the river Skerne could have been called 'Derning' (the term 'Derne' in the names of rivers became 'Dare' over time, which could have given its name to '**Dearningtun**'). By Norman times its name had changed to **Derlynton (1457)** but for some reason the changes continued, for during the sixteenth and seventeenth Centuries the Town was generally known as **Darnton (1585)** or less politely as **Darnton i** (the Dirt) This unfortunate term was probably due to the once unpaved streets of the Town which inspired King James of Scotland to write some uncomplimentary verse during his visit in 1603:

*'Darnton has a bonny, bonny church
With a broach upon the steeple
But Darnton is a mucky, mucky town
And mair sham on the people.'*

The name '**Darlington**' seems to have been introduced in or around **1577** which is borne out by local historians, W H D Longstaffe, Robert Surtees, and the Hollinshed Chronicles edition of 1577, which made reference to the river Skerne being known as the 'Dare' or 'Dere' '*which runneth by 'Darlington' and likewise into the river above the aforesaid Bridge (Croft)*'. The word 'Dare' is also been used to describe the Cockerbeck at this time, when it was in spate and flooding its banks, the area adjoining the river Skerne was known as the 'ings' of the town (Danish term for low marshy land). It would seem that the letter 'L' was added about this time purely for the purposes of euphony. (Dar Ling Ton). There is no evidence to show that the town was a 'Darling' of a place.

The spelling of the Town has contained the following:

Dearnington

Dearningtun

Dernington

Dernigtune

Darnton

Darneton

Dernton

Derlynton

Darrington

Darrhton

Darlington

The first Ecclesiastics Register makes reference to the plague of 1597 and the names of the families that were 'carried off' had names of the township where they lived: Robert Darnton or Darlington and William Darnton or Darlington. The register continued to show this variation until 1622.

It would appear that the first major evidence of a settlement on the site of the present day Darlington, was the discovery in 1876 of an early 6th Century Saxon Cemetery at Greenbank, at the summit of a hill between Dodds street and Selbourne street, when construction work on a new housing estate on the western banks of the Skerne Valley revealed 6 skeletons of adult males, females and children together with a quantity of grave goods. This Cemetery was said to be one of the finest discoveries of this type; many of the artefacts that were found are now in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford.

There seems to be little early **documentary** evidence as to the existence of the town, but the earliest record in existence would appear to be a document concerning the grant of land to the new 'See of Durham' by a man called Styr, the son of Ulphus under licence of King Ethelred in **1003**. This grant of land to Aldhive the Bishop of Durham gave the 'Vill' of Dearthingtun and also other gifts of land in Cockerton, Coniscliffe and Haughton-le-Skerne; the handing over of this gift took place in York Cathedral, where it is said the great and good attended. At this time it is suggested that Darlington was split into two parts one being known as the Borough of

'Darlington' and the other the 'Vill' or 'Manor' of Bondgate in 'Darlington'. However Hugh de Pudsey in the 'Bolden Buk' made this reference, but as the original book's existence has disappeared, it is difficult to establish whether or not this is fact. However in 1197 the first reference to Darlington as a Borough appears in records for Richard I detailing revenues due to the Bishopric, following the death of Hugh De Pudsey.

As there is no known Charter in existence confirming Darlington's Borough status, it is assumed that under the powers of the Prince Bishops of Durham the Township of Darlington; which formed around the parish Church (commenced 1192) was allotted borough status to serve as a market Town. Essentially an agricultural community at this time, Darlington was to remain so until the industrialisation of the 19th Century.

The palatinate retained direct control over the collection of revenues from Darlington until 1380 when the rights of collection were sold. The burgesses or freemen of the Darlington Township were free from fieldwork and service but in neighbouring Bondgate, a distinctly separate manor, the tenants occupied copyhold lands and paid dues to the Bishop. The Records covering the Bishopric show that 'The Black Death' reached the surrounding area of the Borough in September 1349. This together with other plagues that followed reduced the inhabitants by nearly half and obviously restricted the development of the area; the reduction in those being able to pay rents and other dues, caused further hardship on those who survived this dreadful disease, as taxes were raised to make up the short fall. The records obviously did not cover the 'Borough' but only that of the 'Vill' of Bondgate, but it appears that everyone suffered in some way.

Darlington suffered another disaster in the way of the 'Great Fire' of 1585. Indications would suggest that approximately 273 houses were destroyed in the blaze, the area of the current High Row and Skinnergate being worst effected. Strong winds fanned the flames and as the properties were in such close proximity to each other and made of such materials as timber, wattle daub and Pitch, the fire spread rapidly. Government papers indicate that over 800 persons were left without a roof over their heads and businesses were lost in the fire. Warrants were issued to the Church to cut down trees from their parks and woods to assist in the rebuilding of the Town 'at a reasonable cost'. Lord Barnard also had trees cut on his Raby estate to assist. Stone from local quarries was also required under warrant.

The local records of the Bishop's Manorial Courts commence in 1612 and constitute the first civic records of the Town. A paid Bailiff appointed by the Bishop administered the Churches interests and the affairs of the Town. Transfers of land, civil disputes, regulation of markets and fairs and law and order were all the jurisdiction of the courts and the ancient office of Bailiff, (the area covered by a Bailiff is known as a 'Bailiwick') continued until incorporation of the Borough in 1867. However records show that there were many disputes between the Church and the Township over use of Common land and collection of rents and tolls.

Records dating from the early 17th century illustrate the importance of Darlington as a market town serving a wide rural area. The local authority purchased the market rights from the Bishop of Durham for £7.854.19s.4d in 1854. Darlington became reputed as an area for specialist trades, which had developed over a period of time, including leather tanning and a local wool combing and worsted weaving industry; by 1750 Darlington's Linen industry had received national recognition for quality. Livestock sales were a regular feature of the Town's markets and due to the skills of the Collin Brothers, Robert and Charles who farmed at the hamlets of Ketton and Barmpton, the Durham Shorthorn breed of cattle, became known worldwide. (The famous Ketton Ox known as 'Comet' which was bred by the Colling Bros. weighed over 1 Tonne (270 Stone) and was sold for a remarkable 1000 guineas in 1810. This wasn't the heaviest bull that they produced, that was the Durham Ox, which weighed 3.400lbs (1545Kgs).

Edward Pease (bn 1711), a Quaker came to Darlington from Fishlake in Yorkshire to participate in the wool combing business; which became so successful that the business soon expanded into dyeing, weaving, wool buying and banking. This was not only the beginning of the Quaker influence, but also of the Pease family, which was to be continued by his descendents into the developments of the Railways, politics and strong influences within the Borough Darlington in the 19th century.

It was Joseph Pease (bn 1799) who built the Old Town Hall in 1853 as a gift to the Town; and later added the Clock Tower and covered Market in 1864 at a cost of £16.356.8s.9d. The Clock face was produced by Cooke's of York, and was originally fitted with a red coloured dial and gilt hands; however these were replaced with the current white Face and black hands, which exist today. The hour and quarter Bells in the clock tower were cast by Warner & Sons of Norton, Teesside. (This company was also responsible for casting 'Big Ben' hour Bell in 1856).

The old Town Hall was superseded in 1970 when Princess Anne, The Princess Royal, opened the current Town Hall.

The Pease family also provided the money to build the Library in Crown Street in 1885, which was known, originally as 'The Edward Pease Free Library' located next to the family's Mill. A man called G G Hoskins designed the library, and many other buildings in the town.

Under the Reform Act of 1832 Durham County was effectively split into two areas, known as the Northern and Southern divisions. That same year, Joseph Pease (1799 – 1872), Great grandson of Edward Pease (1767 – 1858) was elected M.P. for South Durham and was also the first Quaker to serve in Parliament until retiring in 1841. Another son, Henry Pease (1807 – 1881) was also MP for south Durham in 1865. With the palatine powers of the Bishop of Durham being abolished in 1836, the role of the first Citizen, 'The Bailiff' was becoming redundant and the system of local government was obviously becoming out dated and in somewhat of a mess; as the responsibility for governing Darlington eventually became under the direct control of the Board of Health, constituted under the Public Health Act 1848. It was quite evident that the board was monopolised by the Quakers, and in particular by members of the Pease family, a plural and cumulative voting system gave eleven members of the Pease family 115 votes, thus ensuring continued service on the Board. Although there didn't appear to be any mistrust of the members on the Board, there was a demand for a new system of local government, which was more open and accountable for the rapidly growing town. Between 1861-71, the population increased by 10,000 from 15,789 to 27,729. Although the first request for an enquiry to be held in the town as to a change in the way Darlington was governed, was blocked by members of the board. A subsequent application found overwhelming support for incorporation and a Royal Charter was granted on 1st October 1867. At the first election in December of that year saw a marked victory for the old leaders of the Town. Seven of the ten Board of Health candidates and five members of the Pease family were elected, the first Mayor being Henry Pease. The population of Darlington now had the opportunity to take a more active part in the election of a Council of local administration.

As Darlington was not amongst the new boroughs in 1886 proposed by Gladstone, pressure was renewed when Disraeli's Conservative Government came to power in June 1867.

The Town also took an active interest in the 1867 campaign for Parliamentary reform and a local Enfranchisement Committee had been set up to obtain an M.P. for Darlington, which was still

part of the South Durham Constituency. The Constituency for Darlington comprising of the Township of Darlington, including Cockerton and Haughton was set up in 1868 and the first elected member of Parliament for Darlington was Edmund Backhouse, whose family was involved in Banking (est. 1774); their Bank on the high Row, Darlington was so ornate it was likened to a Venetian Palace, when it opened in 1864. The wishes of the people of the town to become a County Borough added pace when Disraeli's Bill gave voting rights to all men in the boroughs but restricted rights according to property qualifications to those in County constituencies.

The rapid growth of Darlington and its transformation from a long-standing agricultural base to an industrial town had its roots in the success of the Stockton and Darlington Railway. The Darlington Quakers had extensive financial interests in Coal, Iron, Brick, and quarrying was responsible for financing this revolutionary transport project. Designed to increase the efficiency of carrying coal from the South Durham pits to the Port of Stockton for shipment south, it was Quaker influence that routed the line via Darlington. Within a decade the potential of rail passenger travel was realised and the country's rail network began to grow. The railway industry began to flourish in Darlington, creating a high demand for iron and steel, which was fulfilled by the establishment of several iron foundries, which sprang up in the Albert Hill and other areas of the Town. Commencing life as small family concerns, several of these foundries were later absorbed into such well-known firms as Whessoe, Darlington Rolling Mills and Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Company. The Quaker interests in the Tees as a port saw further finance put into improvements for shipping and navigation and the provision of a rail extension to Port Darlington, (which is located under the 'Transporter Bridge'); and later developed on Quaker owned land known as Middlesbrough. The subsequent exploitation of Cleveland ironstone and the development of Middlesbrough's major iron and steel industry overshadowed Darlington's own iron trade and caused Darlington to rely increasingly on Teesside for the raw materials used in its manufacturing and engineering industries. A number of direct commercial links emerged between companies in both towns.

Naturally the newly elected Council of 1867 had inherited the powers of the Local Board of Health and also those under the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act, granting it the ability to raise rates for financing its own services. However, by 1870 an elected Board of Guardians (Overseers of the Poor) and a Local School Board were created allowing them to levy rates. The Local Government Act of 1888 saw the establishment of County and County Borough Councils

with powers similar to those of existing Boroughs. Subsequently, as the County Council was granted further powers, responsibilities tended to conflict with, and undermine those of the Borough. It was these anomalies coupled with the major growth of Darlington that prompted the rise of the Town to County Borough status in 1915.

On its incorporation in 1867, Darlington had been divided into six parliamentary wards. In spite of massive expansion of the population and extension of the boundaries, these wards remained unchanged until 1915. Anomalies had arisen where particular areas such as Harrowgate Hill, then just outside the town boundary were served by County fire, gas and water services and yet Darlington had its own Gas Company from 1830 and a waterworks opened in 1846.

Whilst the Technical Instruction Act of 1889 saw the County Council finance, a laboratory and chemistry master at the Darlington Grammar School, the 1902 Education Act was to herald serious difficulties and clashes between Darlington and the County Council. Under the 1902 Act, the Local School Board had been abolished and Darlington Council took control of elementary education. Secondary and technical schools came into the control of the County authority. Whilst most transfers were straight forward, in the case of Darlington's Queen Elizabeth I Grammar School founded in 1563 major problems arose. The Governors wishing to remain independent, had to concede after a fierce struggle with the County, when they were forced into an untenable position, being threatened with drastic reductions in County finance for the school. Likewise, the transfer of the first Technical College opened in 1897 as a joint initiative between local industrialists and Darlington Council, caused further furore as County restrictions on capital growth of the institution were imposed.

Following a Local Government Enquiry, which lasted for 6 days, Darlington gained its independence from Durham in April 1915, the Town becoming a County Borough. The new administrative area increased from 3,956 acres to 4,614 acres with two additional wards and an increase in elected members from 24 to 32. This included Cockerton, Branksome, Faverdale and Harrowgate Hill being now incorporated into the Town. At the election in May 1915 the first lady Councillor was elected to the Council serving Cockerton Ward, her name was Clara Curtis Lucas and she represented this Ward until her death in April 1919, she was actually elected into office by men as women did not have the full vote until 6th February 1918.

Following the First World War and the depression, the Town took on a new lease of life and in 1930 Haughton Village, Whinfield, Lingfield, Firth Moor, Skerne Park and Blackwell Grange wards were added to the Borough. The town now consisted of ten wards with 40 elected members. The old village of Blackwell remained isolated, its secondary school pupils travelling to Stockton, until it was absorbed into the County Borough in 1967.

The opening of the North Eastern Railway Locomotive Works at North Road in 1863 had created large-scale employment. For almost 100 years, locomotive and wagon building were the major employing industries in Darlington. These and other heavy engineering skills flourished at Darlington Forge (forgings for shipbuilding), Robert Stephenson and Hawthorn (locomotives for export) and Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Co. (bridges throughout the world) and Darlington Railway Plant (rail track and points). However with the introduction of diesel traction, Beeching's decimation of the railway system and new technology in other fields caused a rapid decline in the basis of the Town's industry in the 1960's when 4,000 jobs were lost with the closure of locomotive and wagon works. With some foresight, Darlington Council purchased railway land and premises at Faverdale to develop fully serviced factory sites attracting new industries and companies such as Conder, Bowaters, B.S.A. Foundries and Amdega. On the east side of Darlington, agricultural land was acquired and serviced industrial sites provided to form the Yarm Road Industrial Estate. These attracted a number of major companies, including Cummins Engine Co., Torringtons and Carreras Rothman. In more recent years, the Cleveland Bridge and Engineering Co. moved to works at Morton Palms.

Diversification since the 1960's has redirected many of the local skills and other major employers such as the Department of Education and Science had been attracted to Darlington. More recent newcomers have seen further diversification into electronics and telecommunications with the establishment of Millisat and Hutchison Telecommunications in the Town. But time does not stand still, and due to the change in emphasis on the type of goods being produced, Darlington began to lean more towards the Service sector, than the heavier industry. To date 'Orange Telecoms, Student Loan Company and other service providers have moved into the borough, and the old site of Paton & Baldwins (Rothmans) is being recycled into new life and bringing new opportunities to the town.

Following the Local Government Act of 1972, Darlington was granted District Status in April 1974. The new boundaries now enclosed most of the area of the former Darlington Rural

District Council enlarging the Town to 25 wards, represented by 52 Councillors and with a population approaching 100,000. Major administrative changes accompanied reorganisation. Services previously provided by the County Borough such as fire, ambulance, highways, libraries and weights and measures were transferred to the County Council. The new District Council retained control over local housing, planning, development, environmental health and a range of recreational facilities.

However in 1997 Darlington gained Unitary Status, this created another shift in services and the Town gained more control over the direction it wished to take. The Town still retains the characteristics of the original market town but has developed as a major commercial centre for South Durham, North Yorkshire and the Dales. It has owned the Civic theatre since 1966, which originally opened in 1907 as the 'New Hippodrome' and extended its capacity in 1990; it is renowned to have the highest attendances of any provincial theatre in the country. With its excellent leisure facilities at the Dolphin Centre, The Art Centre, the refurbished South Park, which dates back to 1636, and became a public recreation ground in 1849, is the largest of the Borough's 25 parks with inclusion of the new West Park. The Town is continuing to develop with new schools and Academies, together with plans for the development of a new shopping centre, the 'Pedestrian Heart' of the Town Centre, and resiting of Market Stalls has created an area to relax and shop in comfort. There is no doubt with good road and rail communications and shopping provision, the Town is ideally situated for access to other parts of the country and the pleasant countryside of the Pennine Dales and now seeks to enhance its role in the tourist potential of the area.

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