

Hartlepool Through the Ages

Medieval 1485 AD

Here is the town of Hartlepool in the year 1485 AD, the first year of the Tudor king Henry VII. The town had prospered since the Norman period some 350 years earlier when the De Brus family had developed Hartlepool as a port for the city of Durham. They laid out the street plan familiar to us today and ordered the building of the first docks and quayside. The town's status as an important port was raised when local merchants bought a Charter from King John in 1201, allowing them to hold a regular market, and become wealthy from selling exotic imports like sugar, almonds and spices. Good profits raised demand for retail space close to the docks so much that land was even reclaimed from the sea to form the area of Southgate. The natural shape of the coastline was changed forever.

Religion, too, was important in the lives of medieval people. St. Hilda's church was rebuilt in the early 13th century, as was the smaller St. Helen's chapel just outside the town. The Franciscan order of monks soon followed, constructing their Friarage on the eastern side of the town. Visitors to the Friarage would include pilgrims heading for shrines in Britain and Europe, the sick seeking a cure in the friars' hospital, or even thieves lucky enough to have found sanctuary within the Friarage and the chance for a new life abroad.

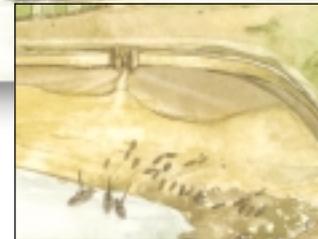
Hartlepool's medieval "golden age" came to an end with war, plague and economic decline. Raiding by the Scots after their victory over the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 put the town on the defensive, and led to the building of the town wall. The Black Death followed in 1348, killing off both the town's population and its trade, and leaving Newcastle to take over as the premier north-eastern port. By the Tudor period Hartlepool was mainly reliant on fishing, a situation that would last right through until the Industrial Revolution.



St Helen's chapel lay just outside the town wall. Documentary evidence suggests there was also a well and a windmill close-by.



In 1346 five ships from Hartlepool joined Edward III's royal fleet. They took part in the capture of Calais during the Hundred Years War against the French.



Sandwell Gate was built at the end of the 14th Century, some 60 years after the town wall was first constructed. Did local fishermen ask for easier access to the sea?



In 1298 friar "Hugo of Hartlepool" is appointed the head of the English Franciscan friars. He dies in Assisi in 1302, and is buried near St. Francis.

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