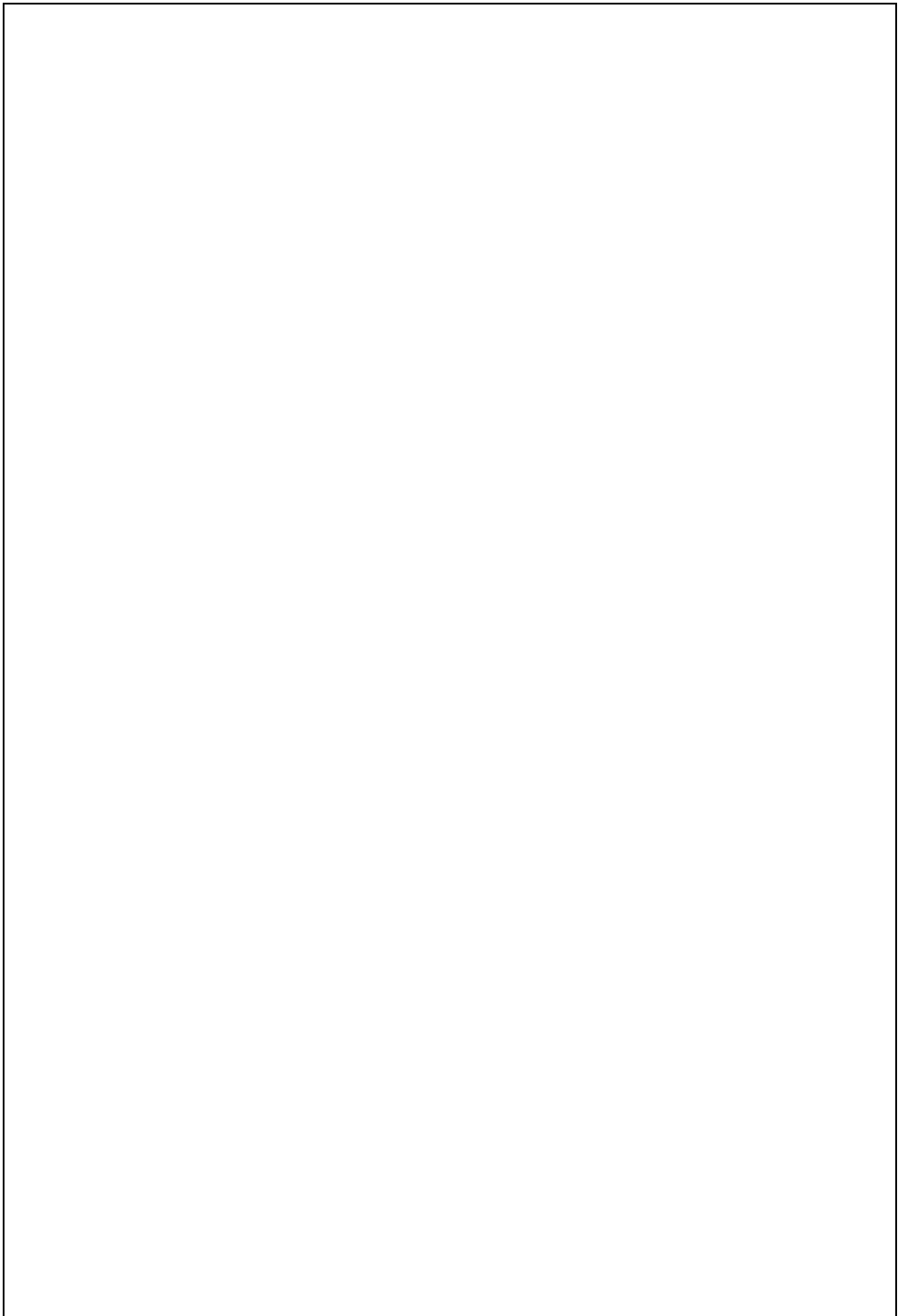


The Archaeology of Hartlepool Headland



***Tees Archaeology & Hartlepool Museum
Service***



*This booklet was produced by
Tees Archaeology and Hartlepool
Museum Service and the printing
was funded by a grant from the
Hartlepool Archaeological and
Historical Society.*

*Tees Archaeology, Sir William Gray House, Clarence Road,
Hartlepool. TS24 8BT.*

Phone: 01429 523455

e-mail: teesarchaeology@hartlepool.gov.uk

web: www.teesarchaeology.com

© Tees Archaeology/Hartlepool Museum
Service 2023

Contents

Foreword

1. Introduction

Topography

Sources of Information

Excavations

2. The Anglo-Saxon Monastery

Organisation of the Monastery

The Buildings

The Cemeteries

The Finds

Conclusion

3. The Medieval Town

The Organisation of the Town

The Houses and Properties

Religion

The Medieval Economy and Trade

Defence

Conclusion

4. Hartlepool from 1500 to 1750

5. Hartlepool from 1750 to 1918

6. Places to visit on Hartlepool Headland

7. Further Information

Foreword

The Hartlepool Archaeological and Historical Society was formed after the discovery and excavation of the Catcote Romano-British Settlement in 1963-64 on what is now the site of English Martyrs School.

Whilst still at school I joined the Society in 1971, a few years later I became a member of the Committee and have held the position of Hon. Secretary and finally Chairman.

The Society had a close working relationship with Durham University Department of Archaeology, Cleveland Archaeology and later Tees Archaeology. Society members assisted on most of the excavations and fieldwork in and around the Hartlepool area, including sites in County Durham.

Monthly lectures on archaeological and historical topics were held in the Gray Art Gallery and Museum (Now Sir William Gray House), and later in the Art Gallery. A number of yearly publications entitled "Heruteu" were also produced and can be found in libraries as far afield as New York City and Harvard University in the USA. After over 50 years, the Society was closed in 2019.

Keith Alder
Chairman H.A.H.S.

1. Introduction

This booklet summarises what we know about the archaeology and history of Hartlepool Headland. While there are hints of activity from the Mesolithic onwards, it is only with the establishment of the Anglo-Saxon monastery in the 7th century AD that there is a significant amount of archaeological and historical evidence for human activity on the headland.

Topography

The headland comprises a ridge of limestone jutting out into the North Sea. To the north and east there are high limestone cliffs, while to the south the land slopes down to a natural harbour in the lee of the cliffs. To the west there is a tenuous link to the mainland with a low lying area that flooded at times converting the headland into an island.

The topography is reflected in the place-name, the Anglo-Saxon name for the headland was 'Heruteu' meaning the island of the stag. The medieval name of 'Hiartar Poll' evolved into 'Hartlepool' and was first recorded in 1155; it means pool of the stag (Watts 2002, 55).



Figure 1. Contour map of Hartlepool Headland (darker shading is higher ground)

Sources of Information

There are two main sources of information about the history of the headland, the first was published in 1816 by Sir Cuthbert Sharp and covered the history of the town up to that point (Sharp 1978). Sharp was at one time Mayor of Hartlepool and led an adventurous life; however, his history of the town is

generally reliable at a time when many antiquarian accounts contain more myths than facts. Sharp's description of the fishing industry of his time and of the men and women engaged in it is particularly good. The other major source of information is the Hartlepool section of the Victoria County History, County Durham Vol 2 (1907). In addition to these, there are two modern accounts of the archaeology of Hartlepool, published by Tees Archaeology (Daniels 2007 & 2010).

Excavations

There have been numerous archaeological excavations on the headland and work by Durham University in the 1960s led to the development of the Hartlepool Archaeological and Historical Society. The society worked alongside Durham University and also carried out their own work largely under the leadership of Ian Reed. From the 1970s Cleveland County Archaeology Section ran a number of major excavations while in more recent times a number of commercial archaeological companies have carried out work, as has Cleveland County Archaeology's successor, Tees Archaeology. All of the finds and archives from this work are held by Hartlepool Museum Service.

2. The Anglo-Saxon Monastery

There are documentary references to the Anglo-Saxon monastery at Hartlepool in Bede's, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, this was written in about 730 AD at a time when the monastery still existed.

Bede makes it clear that a religious community had been established in Hartlepool sometime in the 640s AD under a nun called Hieu. This monastic community was then re-organised by Hilde when she was placed in charge of it. Hilde was helped in the re-organisation by Bishop Aidan of Lindisfarne.

Hilde was a member of the Northumbrian royal family and went on to establish the monastery at Whitby, whilst retaining control of that at Hartlepool.

Organisation of the Monastery

The monastery at Hartlepool was a double monastery with both monks and nuns. This was quite a common arrangement in the early development of monastic houses in Britain.

The monastery was spread across the whole of the headland and would have had a number of churches and separate centres.

It looked very different to medieval monasteries such as Rievaulx and Fountains Abbeys.

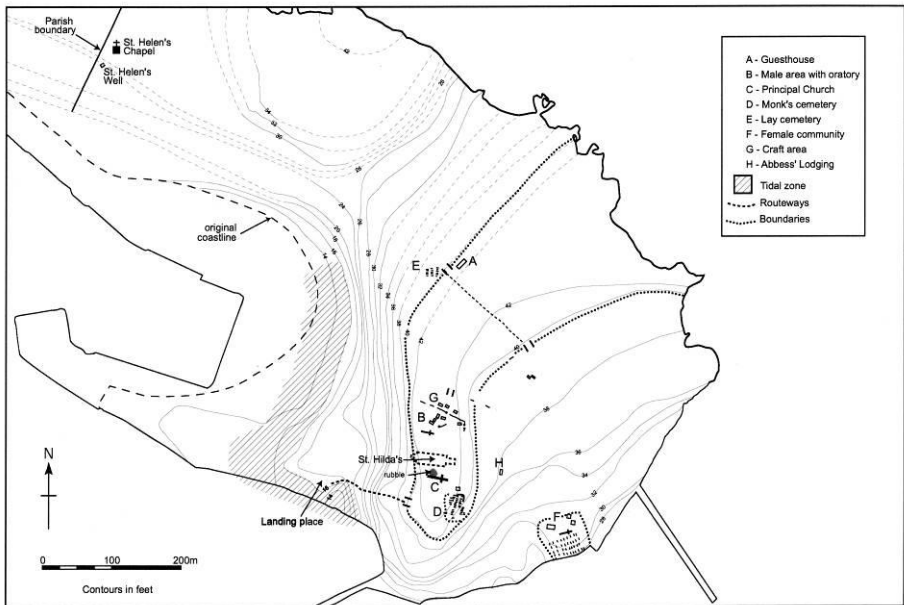


Figure 2. Reconstruction of the Anglo-Saxon Monastery

At the moment we think that Hilde's monastery was based on the ridge (stretching from St Hilda Church to the Heugh) and that the earlier community of Hieu was at the south-eastern part of the headland (South Crescent). There also seems to have been a focus at the north-western edge of the ridge (Gladstone Street). Lastly there may have been a completely

separate, older religious centre near St Helen's Junior School.

The monastery was split into areas using palisades, fences, hedges and open spaces as markers.

Archaeological excavations have uncovered boundaries, groups of buildings and three cemeteries. There would also have been guest houses, communal eating spaces and a scriptorium to produce holy books.



Figure 3. Trench for boundary palisade

The Buildings

The buildings were all made of wood, with posts set into the ground. They would probably have had thatched roofs and there is some evidence that their

walls may have been plastered and possibly painted inside and out.



Figure 4. Excavated Anglo-Saxon Building at Hartlepool

Those that have been excavated were quite small, about 4m x 5m, and were probably built for private prayer and study. Possibly for the monks or priests as the buildings are close to a cemetery (Church Walk) that is believed to belong to the monks of the community.

Although small, the buildings were well built and required more resources to construct than some of the great halls of the Anglo-Saxons excavated in

North-East England. This reflects the importance and wealth of the monastery.



Figure 5. Reconstruction of Hartlepool monastic building, Jarrow Hall

The Cemeteries

Three cemeteries have been discovered, one at South Crescent, one at Church Walk and a third at Gladstone Street, and there are undated burials at St Helens which may be Anglo-Saxon. All the cemeteries are mixed with men, women and children, but each has a different layout.

South Crescent

This cemetery was first discovered in the 19th century during building works. The bodies were laid out north-south and a number of them were accompanied by 'namestones', blocks of limestone about 0.3m square with a cross and names of people on them. This may have served the earliest community and been used by the nuns of the monastery and their families.

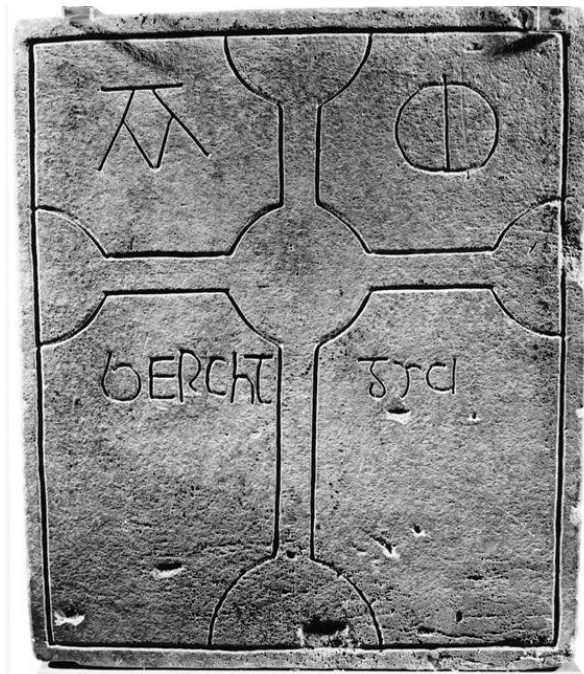


Figure 6. Namestone from South Crescent, © Durham University

One of the namestones with the name 'Hildyryth' can be seen on display in St Hilda's Church on Hartlepool headland.

Church Walk

There are distinct groups in this cemetery, a large proportion were older men and it is thought this may have been for the monks of the monastery and their families. Children were buried in a completely different part of the cemetery and a group of graves were set apart and marked with stone edgings.



Figure 7. Church Walk, stone edged graves

Gladstone Street

This was an area of dense burials. It is possible that this cemetery was just outside the monastery gate,

a place where those who could not get entry to the monastic burial ground could be as close as possible to the holy place.

The Finds

There are relatively few finds from the monastery, but there were some very fine craftsmen at the monastery.

The namestones (Figure 6 above) were made at the monastery from the local stone, they are very well made and the lettering clearly indicates an ability to read and write.

There are a few bronze pins and tweezers, which are common finds in the Anglo-Saxon period, but more important is evidence of high quality metal working. Small clay crucibles and a finger sized ingot mould suggest that precious metals were worked and this is confirmed by three exquisite clay moulds, each a few centimetres in size.

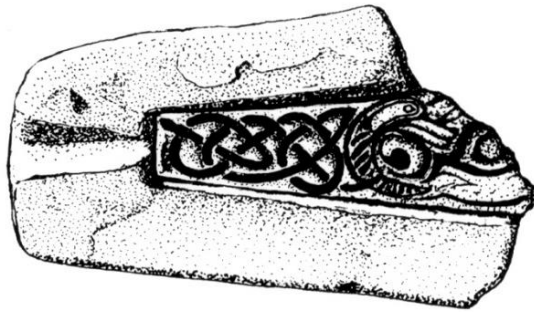


Figure 8. Clay mould of brooch with intertwined animals



Figure 9. Clay mould of cross with interlace

The first one (Figure 8) could come from any Anglo-Saxon site, the second (Figure 9) is clearly religious in nature. The third one (Figure 10) is the symbol for St Luke used in the gospels. The trumpeting figure is directly paralleled in the Lindisfarne Gospels. It is

possible that the object made from the mould may have decorated a gospel book.

Analysis of these moulds and crucibles showed that they had been used for copper alloys and silver.



Figure 10. Clay mould showing Calf of St Luke with trumpet

An example of the high quality object that was being manufactured was a pin found in Baptist Street on the headland (Figure 11). This pin has a silver/copper alloy head with a thick layer of gilding and a replacement bronze shank has been riveted on. It shows two intertwined animals with open mouths.



Figure 11. Gilded pin

Conclusion

The Anglo-Saxon monastery was sited within a large estate known as Hartness that stretched from Castle Eden Dene in the north to the River Tees in the south. It included the later parishes of Hart, Elwick Hall, Stranton and Billingham and the administrative centre was at Hart. The Anglo-Saxon monastery drew its wealth from this area and we know that there

were religious communities at Billingham and Hart that were offshoots from Hartlepool.

The Anglo-Saxon monastery at Hartlepool was established in the 640s AD, we don't know exactly when it ended but there was little happening after 800 AD. This was probably a result of it being overshadowed by its daughter monastery at Whitby and the beginning of the impact of Viking raids.

There is no evidence that the monastery was destroyed but life at the coast became difficult and it is possible that the community dispersed inland, perhaps to a new base at the important centre at Hart. In support of this there is evidence of a large saxon cemetery at Hart and it continued to prosper during the period of Viking attacks.

3. The Medieval Town

The Norman Conquest of North-East England took a considerable amount of time and it was not until the first decade of the 12th century that they had true control over the area. By this time the region had suffered from Scottish, Viking and Norman raiding and a civil war. None of the monastic institutions of the Anglo-Saxon period had survived and there had been no towns north of the North York Moors since the Roman period.

The great Norman Lords, de Brus (or Bruce), Baliol, Bishop of Durham and Prior of Durham and others reconstructed the economy of the area. The construction of castles was followed by the establishment of religious houses and the creation of planned villages (such as Elwick and Dalton Piercy) and finally the creation of towns. There were only three towns in the Tees Valley by the end of the 12th century; Barnard Castle founded by the Balliols, Darlington founded by the Bishop of Durham and Hartlepool founded by the Bruce family.

Hartlepool prospered as a port and was an important naval base during the wars between England and Scotland in the 14th century. This was its time of greatest prosperity, providing supplies for the English armies.

The Organisation of the Town

It is probable that following the end of the Anglo-Saxon monastery a village of fishermen continued on the headland. The first indication of a substantial settlement is not until after 1142 and a range of documentary information suggests a foundation date for the town between 1150 and 1180. It was raided by Vikings in 1153 and was used as a port in 1174 when a force of Flemish Mercenaries landed here.

The early town was based on the western edge of the limestone ridge and ran alongside Durham Street and around the church. It was not until the middle of the 13th century that the economy of the town took off.

This resulted in the town being re-planned using a grid arrangement (Figure 12). It was only at this time that the land leading from Durham Street to the harbour was re-claimed and properties laid out on the deep deposits of sand that are present here.

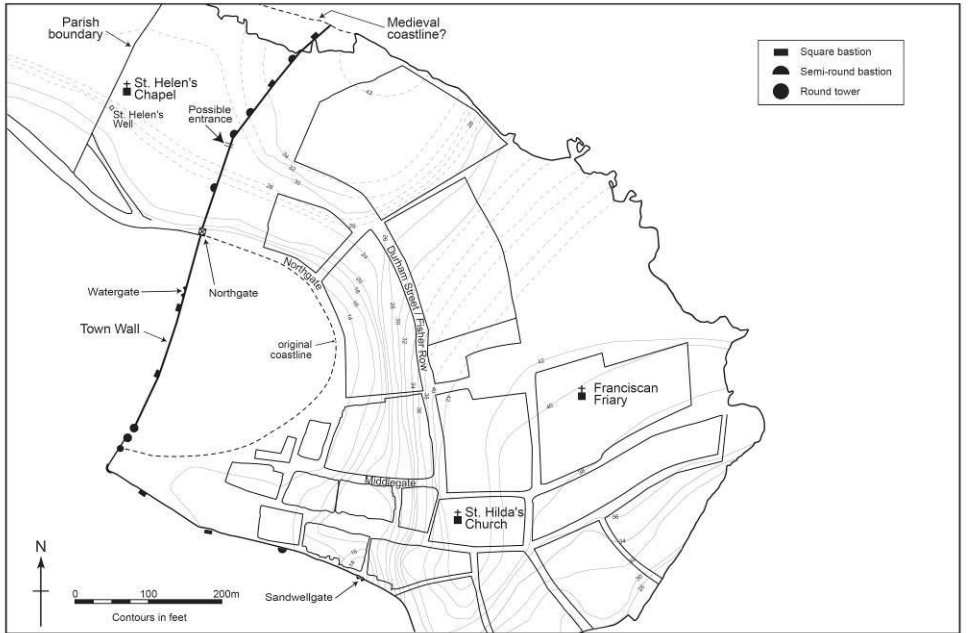


Figure 12. Medieval Hartlepool

The Houses and Properties

The first houses had wooden posts set into the ground, and were probably longhouses with paired timbers (crucks) supporting the roofs. People lived at one end and animals the other (Figure 13).

At first people had to combine farming with crafts to earn a living, but by about 1250 AD the town was becoming wealthier. More houses were squeezed into building plots and houses were constructed with a stone ground floor and timber upper floors. Part of

the wall of one such house survives at 3 Barker Place on the headland (Figure 14).

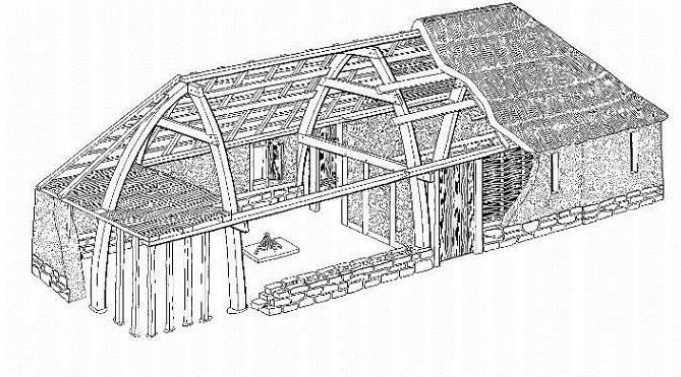


Figure 13. Longhouse



Figure 14. Medieval wall, 3 Barker Place

The houses had a number of small rooms and many of those excavated had ovens in them. These were used for baking and cooking on a large scale, probably as local bakers and merchants provided supplies for the English forces in Scotland.



Figure 15. Medieval oven excavated in Hartlepool

Religion

There were three religious institutions in Hartlepool, St Hilda's Church, St Helen's Church and the Franciscan Friary.

St Hilda's Church

St Hilda's Church is in a commanding position on the headland. Its construction was funded by the Bruce family as a mark of their control of the town. It was built in the late 1100s and is a re-building of an

earlier, Norman Church, the doorway of which has been re-built in its south wall. The east end of the church has been re-built, while the huge buttresses at its west end are necessary because of cracks in the underlying bedrock.



Figure 16. St Hilda's Church

St Helen's Church

This was at the very western end of the headland, beyond the boundaries of the town but was a favourite of the fishermen of the town. It was completely ruined by the 19th century but limited excavations confirmed a Norman date for the building, while some of the burials may indicate an even older origin for it.

Franciscan Friary

The Franciscans, or Grey Friars came to England in 1224 and came to Hartlepool in about 1240, when each was given money for a tunic by King Henry III.

The Friary was in Friarage Field and had a substantial church with a cloister range to the south. The church had a tiled floor and coloured glass windows as well as a bell tower. There was very intensive burial inside the church which was regarded as particularly holy ground.



Figure 17. Model of Hartlepool Franciscan Friary

The Franciscan Friary was demolished in the 16th century as part of Henry VIII's 'Dissolution of the Monasteries' and the stone was re-used in buildings all over the headland.

The Medieval Economy and Trade

The economy of Hartlepool was based on trade and fishing and occupations reflected this.

Crafts

Shoes were produced in the harbour area and waste material was thrown in the dock.



Figure 18. Medieval Shoes from Southgate, Hartlepool

Metal workers produced the large quantities of iron fish hooks, boat fittings and household utensils that the town would have needed and a number of smithies have been excavated in the town. Bakers used the large numbers of ovens to provision the town and English forces.

There was a large stone working industry. Limestone was quarried on the headland and blocks were dressed to build the churches and town walls and a few of the houses.

Masons produced the architectural stonework that was required for the doorways, windows and interiors of the churches. Craftsmen produced a range of objects such mortars and containers.



Figure 19. Stone mortar from Hartlepool

Trade

Most of Hartlepool's trade was along the east coast and around the North Sea, mainly to the Low Countries. Salt and fish were imported for Durham Priory, as was timber, wine, iron and flax while exports included wheat, rye, beans, hides, wool and cloth.

Docks

In order to trade, facilities were needed for ships and docks were constructed along Southgate as early as

the 12th century. These were built of timber and stone and boats would have settled on the sand when the tide went out.

There were two periods of dock construction; in the 12th century as the town was being developed and in the 14th century when the port prospered during the wars against the Scots. The first docks were backfilled with sand and rubbish and houses built on them.



Figure 20. Dock of 14th century date on Southgate

Shipping

There were a range of different size of vessels based in Hartlepool. Most of the known Hartlepool ships

were relatively small and designed for coastal trade. Some would have sailed around the North Sea, and in 1396 the vessel 'La Marie', Robert Howdene master, sailed for Santiago in Spain with 80 pilgrims on board.

Parts of a ship of 10-30 tons, dating from the 12th century were found during excavations of the medieval docks at Southgate. These were clinker built (overlapping planks) and caulked with wool and yarn. A medieval gravestone depicting a ship still survives in St Hilda's Church (although badly damaged).

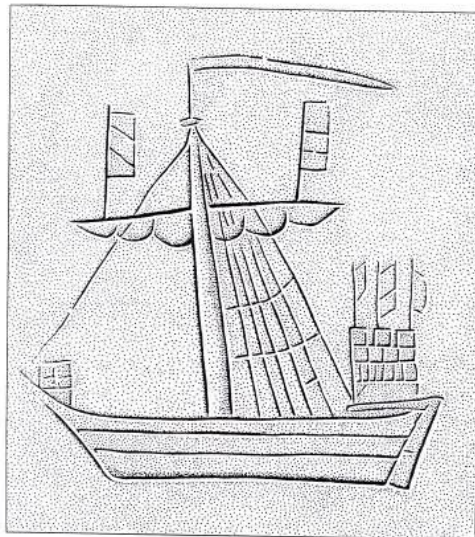


Figure 21. Illustration of medieval ship in St Hilda's Church

Fishing

There are 12th century documentary references to fishing boats at Hartlepool and these would have looked very similar to the cobbles that still sail today. These were built with overlapping planks for maximum strength and flexibility to cope with North Sea conditions and to allow them to be beached.

As long as people have lived at Hartlepool, fishing has been a key part of the diet. There was a major change in the type of fishing in the medieval period. At the time of the Anglo-Saxon monastery only those fish that migrated close to the shoreline were caught. In the medieval period offshore fishing of herring and cod developed as a major industry.



Cod and related fish were caught using long lines baited with shellfish. Piles of shells from baiting the lines have been found outside medieval buildings.

Figure 22. Medieval fishhooks from Hartlepool

Herring was caught in nets in vast numbers. In 1326-27 over 93,000 herring were brought into Hartlepool.

Many of the fish were bought by Durham Priory and transported to Durham.

Defence

Hartlepool was one of only ten towns in the north of England to have a set of town walls. Those at Hartlepool, as with most of the others, were built to defend against Scottish raids. It is one of the ironies of Hartlepool that a town built by the Bruce family had to defend itself against them when they became kings of Scotland.



Figure 23. Sandwell Gate, Hartlepool

Construction of the defences at Hartlepool began with a bank and ditch dug across the neck of the peninsula, probably begun in 1315, and construction

of the wall followed this, continuing for another hundred years.

The defences comprised a series of round and square towers along a stone wall with a defended gateway on Northgate and large towers either side of the harbour entrance. A chain could be slung between these to seal off the harbour.



Figure 24. Hartlepool in the 14th century

The defences stopped at the cliffs just beside the Sandwell Gate and the medieval pier. The harbour area they enclosed was large enough for a hundred

vessels and reflected the importance of the port in the wars against Scotland.

Conclusion

Medieval Hartlepool was established by the Bruce family, and it enjoyed its greatest prosperity as a supply base during the wars with Scotland. Ironically its greatest threat was also from the Bruces when they became Kings of Scotland and led Scottish forces into the area.

When the English crown began the Hundred Years War against France at the end of the 14th century, the prosperity of the town went into decline and we can see buildings and properties being abandoned.

The core economy of the town based on fishing and limited coastal trade did however continue, as did its strategic importance as an east coast port.

4. Hartlepool from 1500 to 1750

By 1500 AD Hartlepool was past its medieval heyday but was still a well known North Sea port, with a fishing community and continuing North Sea trade.

The Reformation

The Reformation of the church under Henry VIII brought the town back to national attention.

The Franciscan Friary was demolished. In its place the Conyers family built a great mansion (Figure 25), one wing of which still survives.



Figure 25. Friarage Mansion of 16th century date

The Reformation led to religious unrest in the north and both the Spanish and French identified Hartlepool as a port at which they could land troops to support northern rebellions.

In one such rebellion, 300 rebels occupied the town in 1569, although it was noted that the town defences were in a poor condition at this time.

English Civil War

During the civil war between King and Parliament in the middle of the 17th century, Hartlepool was first garrisoned by the Royalists but was taken by the Scots in July 1644. The garrison was allowed to march out and there is no record of any fighting taking place.

The Scots stayed in the town until 1647, but following their departure a Parliamentary garrison replaced them and stayed until at least 1658.

It seems probable that the medieval defences were brought back into use and we know that new

defences were built as the House of Commons ordered them to be destroyed when the Scots left.

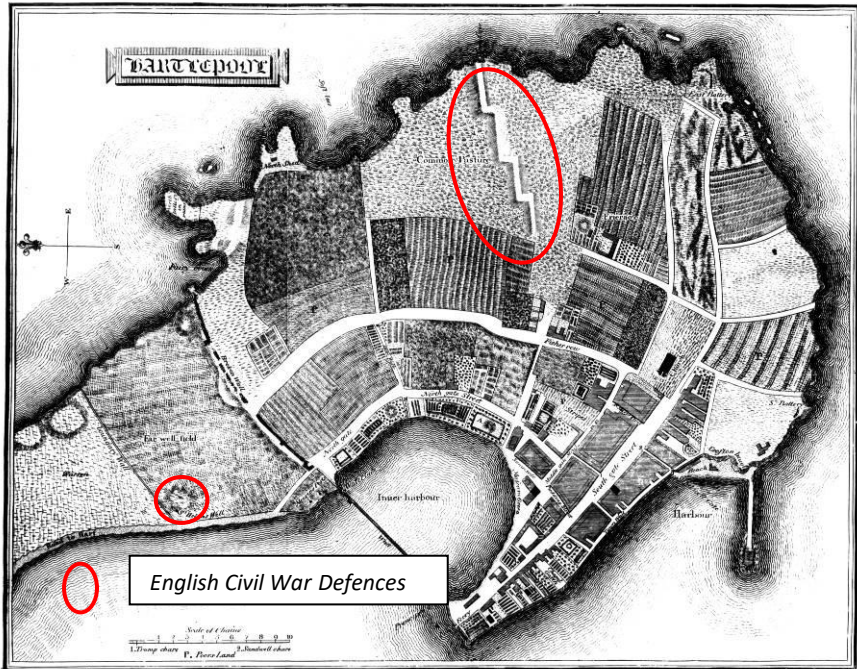


Figure 26. Sharp's Map of Hartlepool, 1816, with English Civil War Defences marked.

The English Civil War defences seem to have comprised of a mound for cannon at St Helen's and earth ramparts and trenches. Some of these were set beyond the Town Walls, but some were on the Town Moor and these survived into the 19th century.

Following the Civil War, the defence of the headland was based on gun batteries protecting it from seaborne attack. Five gun batteries were set up by 1740 and there were at least ten guns in place.

5. Hartlepool from 1750 to 1918

The town continued with little sign of prosperity and the situation had become so bad that in 1808 the harbour was sold and enclosed for growing crops.

Major change started with the development of the Durham coalfields and the creation of the Hartlepool Dock and Railway Company in 1832.

This led to the excavation of the Victoria Dock on the site of the medieval harbour and the construction of coal staithes for the transfer of coal to ships. The railway approached the staithes along an embankment so that the wagons could be emptied straight into ships.

The competing Stockton and Hartlepool Railway started by using these staithes, but its trains came in at ground level and had to be hauled up to the staithes by the winding engine housed in Throston Engine House, which was built between 1838 and 1840.

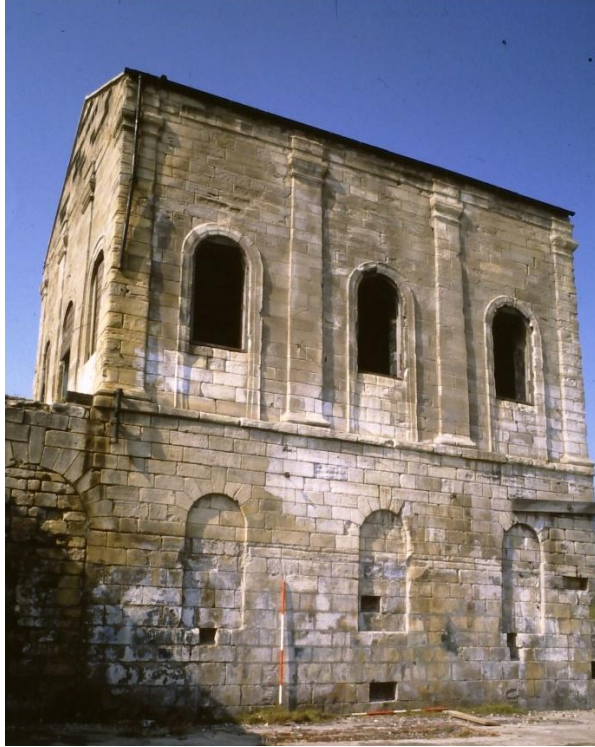


Figure 27. Throston Engine House

The cost of this led the Stockton and Hartlepool Railway to build their own docks and West Hartlepool developed from this.

The development of the Victoria Dock led to a huge increase in the amount of shipping using the port.



Figure 28. Hartlepool in the middle of the 19th century

In 1834, prior to its construction, 30 vessels a year cleared customs leaving the port, by 1851 this had increased to 8,188. The developing coal trade meant that prosperity began to return to the town.

The increase in shipping caused a review of the safety precautions and it was decided that a lighthouse was needed on the headland.

Construction started in 1846 and the light came into use in 1847 and is claimed to be the first to be lit by gas in the country. The first lighthouse was dismantled in 1915 after it was found to obstruct the fire from the adjacent gun batteries (see below). A

temporary wooden structure was built on town moor and used until 1927.

The present lighthouse was built in 1927 near the site of the original. It comprises a steel tower which could be quickly dismantled if necessary in times of war.



Figure 29. The Lighthouse (built 1927) and the Sebastopol Gun from the Crimean War, presented to the town in 1857

Defence

Coastal defences were strengthened during the Napoleonic Wars as there was a real fear of invasion. Hartlepool had eight guns in three batteries

manned by local volunteers, but none of these early works survive.

In 1860 gun batteries were constructed at the Heugh and adjacent to the lighthouse. These were continually developed as guns and ideas of defence changed.



Figure 30. The Heugh Gun Battery with the Lighthouse and site of the Lighthouse Battery in the distance. ©Heugh Gun Battery

At the beginning of the First World War there were two six inch guns in the Heugh Battery and one in the Lighthouse Battery to the immediate south.

Bombardment of Hartlepool

On December 16th 1914 three German battlecruisers bombarded Hartlepool as part of a plan to trap and

destroy Royal Navy ships. The bombardment was met by return fire from both the Heugh and Lighthouse Batteries and damage was inflicted on the ships. The bombardment, which started at 8.25 am and finished at 8.53 am, resulted in the deaths of 130 people and injuries to many more together with a great deal of damage to the town. This was the only First World War battlefield on UK soil.

The Heugh Battery continued in use into the Second World War and is now a nationally protected scheduled monument and is open to visitors. The Lighthouse Battery was dismantled but the remains of it are still present under the grass next to the lighthouse.

6. Hartlepool Headland, Places to See

St Hilda's Church (Medieval Church)

St Hilda's Church is normally open for visitors on a Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday. Check their website for details.

Heugh Battery (First World War Gun Battery)

The Heugh Battery and its café are normally open for visitors, there is a charge for entry. Check their website for details.

Sandwell Gate (Medieval Town Defences)

This can be visited at any time, try to visit at Low Water so that you can see it from the beach.

Southgate / Barker Place (Medieval Town)

This is part of a medieval house with a window opening. In the medieval period houses faced onto Southgate, away from the sea, not towards it as today. This is private property but can be viewed from the street at any time.

Friary Mansion (16th century Mansion)

This is private property but can be viewed from the street at any time.

Lighthouse / Crimean War cannon

This site can be visited and viewed at any time.

The Museum of Hartlepool

This contains finds and information about the town and is well worth a visit, entry is free. Check their website for details.

7. Further Information

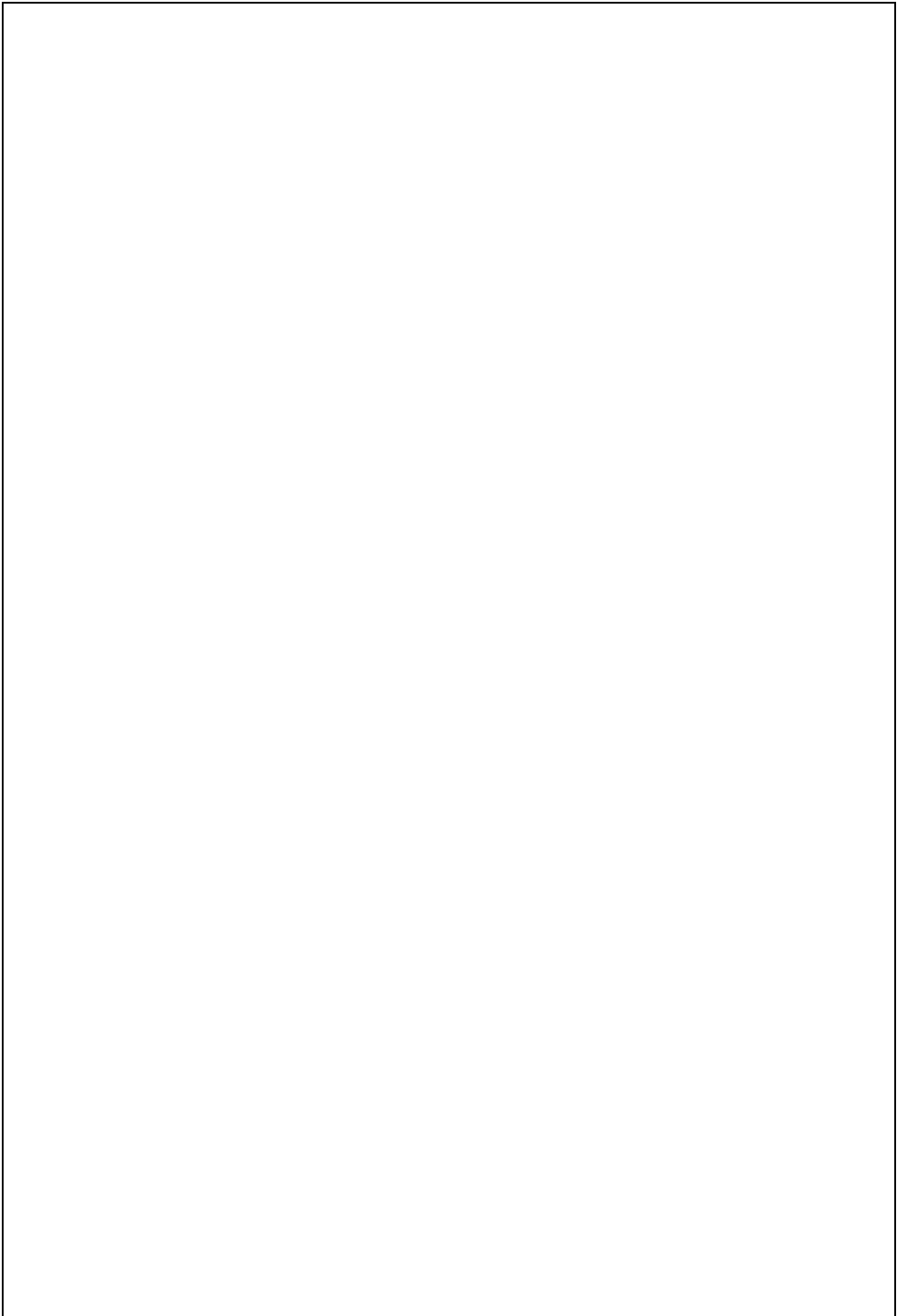
Daniels, R, 2007 Anglo-Saxon Hartlepool and the foundations of English Christianity: an archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon monastery. Tees Archaeology Monograph series No 3

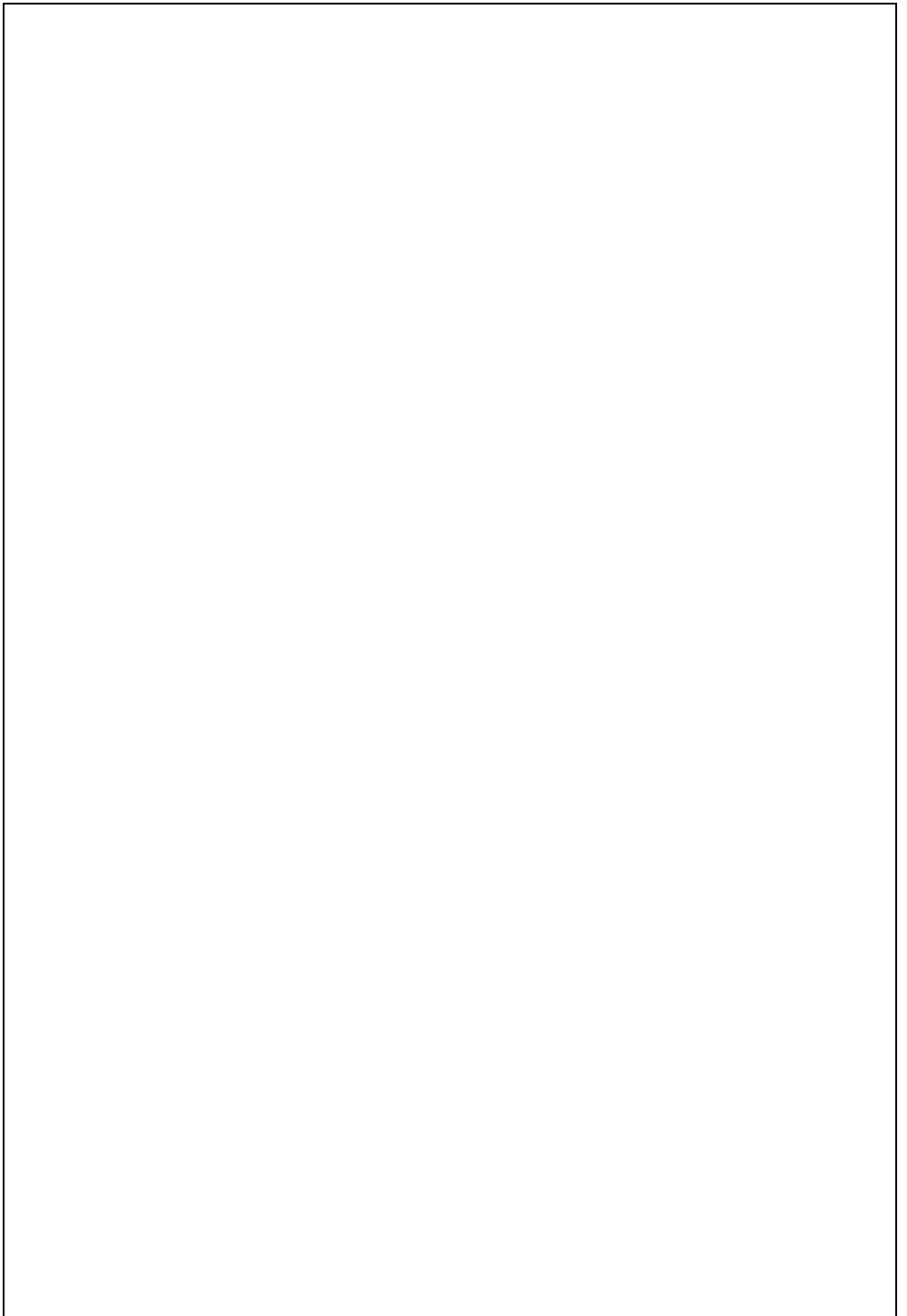
Daniels, R, 2010 Hartlepool: An archaeology of the medieval town. Tees Archaeology Monograph series No 4

Foster, J, 2004 The Guns of the North-East: Coastal Defences from the Tyne to the Humber

Sharp, C, 1978 A history of Hartlepool. Reprint of the 1851 edition that included a supplement to the original 1816 text

Watts, V,E, 2002 A Dictionary of County Durham Place-Names





*Published with a grant from Hartlepool
Archaeological & Historical Society*

