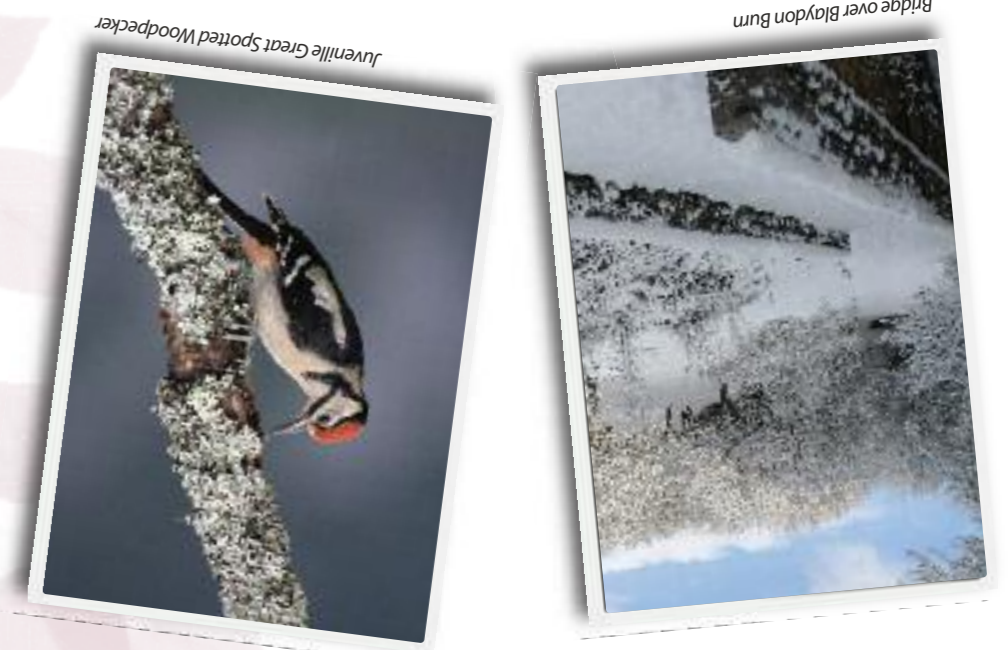


Welcome to Blaydon Burn Nature Reserve

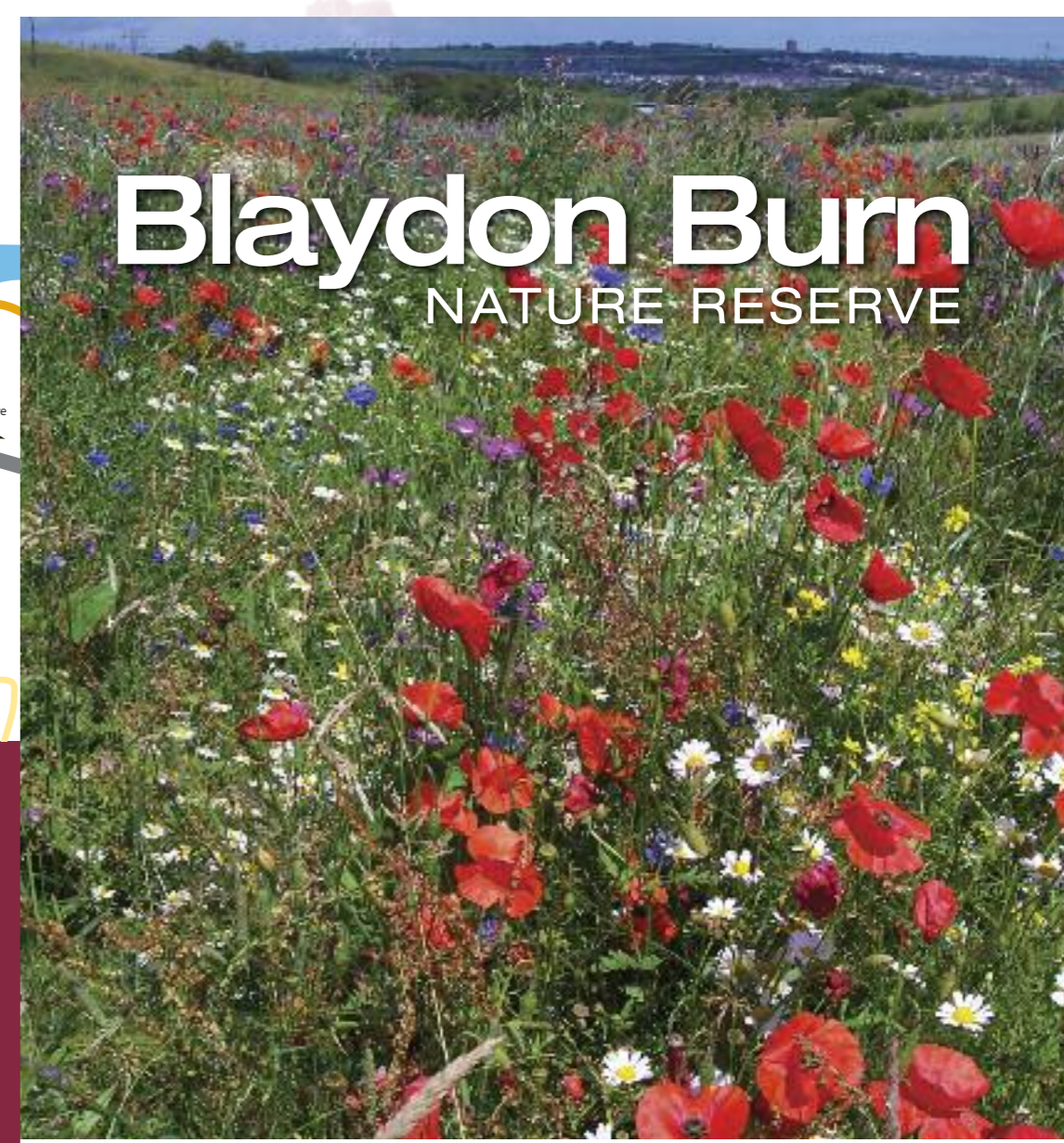
Once the heart of the industrial revolution in Gateshead, Blaydon Burn is a wonderful example of what happens when industry moves away and nature returns. Over one mile long and covering over 50 hectares of woodland, grassland and wetland, Blaydon Burn is a treasure trove of industrial archaeology and wildlife waiting to be discovered.

Recognising Blaydon Burn's unique historical, wildlife and recreational importance Gateshead Council began a major project in 2007 to conserve and improve Blaydon Burn for people and wildlife. The aim of this three year long Blaydon Burn Project was to record the areas of archaeological interest, to conserve and improve opportunities for wildlife and to encourage local people to enjoy, learn about and care for Blaydon Burn.



Juvenile Great Spotted Woodpecker

Bridge over Blaydon Burn



Blaydon Burn NATURE RESERVE

A moderate two and a quarter mile circular walk, taking in the best of Blaydon Burn's rich archaeological heritage and abundant wildlife.

History

We know from archaeological evidence that Bronze Age people lived at nearby Summer Hill and that people have been living and working in Blaydon Burn since the Middle Ages.

Initially the key to the industrial development at Blaydon Burn was water power and by the 18th century at least eight corn mills were operating along the stretch of Blaydon Burn described in this leaflet.

From the 19th century industrial development expanded rapidly to include a number of industries related to the processing of coal. The supply of cheap local fuel and good transport links led to the development of coke works, steelworks, iron foundries and brickworks making Blaydon Burn one of the most industrialised parts of the region.



Cowen's Brickworks (lower yard) c.1900

However, from the 1950s advances in technology, declining local raw materials and overseas competition saw the decline and closure of the industries in Blaydon Burn. In the 70s and 80s reclamation schemes were carried out to treat and 'make safe' the most derelict areas of the Burn. The Ottovale Works were reclaimed, Cowen's Lower Yard was cleared, the Blaydon Burn Waggonway was taken up and the Burn was largely left to return to nature.

Today, the remnants of the area's industrial history can still be seen in the 108 different stone and brick-built features which are scattered throughout the nature reserve and in the historical records which make Blaydon Burn one of the most important sites for the study of industrial archaeology in the north east.

The Cowens

No story of Blaydon Burn would be complete without mentioning the two most influential characters in its history.



Sir Joseph Cowen

Sir Joseph Cowen (1800-1873) and his eldest son, also Joseph Cowen (1829-1900) made their money from mining and making firebricks and clay products in Blaydon Burn.



Joseph Cowen

Both Cowens were radical politicians, who campaigned for democratic reforms such as voting by secret ballot – a freedom we take for granted today.

He befriended many influential continental revolutionaries, including Garibaldi and Marx making Blaydon Burn famous throughout Europe. He was allegedly under surveillance from foreign spies for smuggling revolutionary texts abroad in shipments of bricks.

The Blaydon Brick followed his father as MP for Newcastle but retired from parliament in 1866 after professing his disgust at the intrigues of politics. But he still continued to influence public opinion until his death in 1900 through his ownership of the 'Newcastle Daily Chronicle'.

Blaydon Burn Today

Blaydon Burn is a unique Nature Reserve where wildlife thrives amongst the remains of our industrial past. The Nature Reserve contains a wide range of habitats and wildlife including areas of ancient semi-natural woodland, flourishing wetlands and colourful wildflower meadows.



Blaydon Burn Meadows

Pockets of oak and birch woodland survived all the years of industrial activity and later acted as seed banks for reclaiming the abandoned industrial areas.



Green Woodpecker

Five small leaved lime trees also survived the industrial revolution and are now over 300 years old. This tree reaches its northern limit in Gateshead and there are only about 300 small leaved lime trees in north east England.

A wide range of birds also live in the woodland including, green woodpecker, tawny owl, woodcock, willow warbler and sparrowhawk.



Tawny Owl (L.Mudd)

The Blaydon Burn Project brought areas of woodland back into a system of traditional woodland management. This work involved thinning and removing trees to ensure that the woodland continues to regenerate itself. Works have also been carried out to safeguard the many ancient 'veteran' trees.



Get Involved!

- You can get involved in learning about and caring for Blaydon Burn by
- Becoming a Friend of Blaydon Burn
 - Joining the Gateshead Volunteer Countryside Rangers
 - Taking part in our events

For further information, please contact:
 Thornley Woodlands Centre
 Rowlands Gill,
 Tyne & Wear,
 NE39 1AU
 Telephone: 01207 545212 • Email: countryside@gateshead.gov.uk

For information on public transport
 Contact Traveline North East on 0871 200 22 33 or
 www.travelinenortheast.info

Photographs supplied courtesy of S.Charlton and L.Mudd
 This leaflet was produced using funding from the Forestry Commission
 Jan 2010

Even the archaeological structures provide shelter for wildlife including pipistrelle bats, which use the cracks in walls as roosting sites.



Common Pipistrelle Bat

Some of the adjoining meadows have been re-seeded with wildflower meadow seed mixes. These areas are grazed by cattle to help the wildflowers and birds such as grey partridge and skylark to thrive.



Blaydon Burn community archaeological dig, Massey's Forge

The Project also worked with the local community and especially the Friends of Blaydon Burn, a dedicated group of local people who have worked tirelessly to raise awareness of and improve Blaydon Burn for everyone.

The Burn itself flows underground through much of the site, emerging for only short stretches. Despite Blaydon Burn's industrial past, the water itself is very clean, containing a variety of invertebrates such as mayfly and freshwater shrimps. In turn, these creatures support birds such as dipper and grey wagtail.



Grey Wagtail



Dipper

As part of the Blaydon Burn Project, the ponds have been restored and improved to control the level of water and encourage wildlife. The wetlands are proving particularly attractive for a range of animals including palmate newts, emperor dragonflies, azure damselflies, water shrews, willow tits, grasshopper warblers and kingfisher.

The Nature Reserve also includes a number of meadows. Surprisingly the thin, poor and 'contaminated' soils left behind after the demolition of the former industries make the meadows ideal for a number of interesting wildflowers including common spotted orchid, and rare butterflies such as the dingy skipper.



Kingfisher



Dingy Skipper Butterfly

Blaydon Burn Trail

This leaflet details a circular two and a quarter mile moderate walk, taking in the best of Blaydon Burn's rich archaeological heritage and abundant wildlife. Along the way you will encounter some stiles and moderate slopes. The path may also be muddy in places so please wear footwear suitable for walking in the countryside.

Alternatively follow the gently sloping path along the bottom of the valley along the old Blaydon Burn Waggonway and back again.

1 Cowen's Lower Yard Firebrick Manufactory

The factory, which opened in 1838, made 6 million firebricks a year. At that time a good hand moulder could make 2,400 bricks per day! The workmen seen in the foreground of the picture are eating lunch or 'bait' on top of the ovens. The cooling brick ovens made a warm seat on a cold day. The factory closed in 1975 and the walls you can still see near the bridge are part of a kiln back. Today this area is a wildflower meadow supporting dingy skipper butterflies.



2 Blaydon Burn Waggonway

From here the path up the valley follows the line of the Blaydon Burn Waggonway. This was built in 1840 to link Cowen's High Yard, pits and mills with the Lower Yard and the Newcastle-Carlisle railway which transported goods away.



3 Massey's Forge

Built in the 18th century this water-powered corn mill was converted to a forge in the 19th century. The waterfall provided power for the 'overshot' water wheel. The site was subject to a major archaeological excavation in 1982 and two community digs in 2007 and 2009. Along the burn look out for dippers bobbing amongst the remains



4 Stands of Elm Trees

These trees support white letter hairstreak butterflies. These butterflies are particularly rare as they only lay their eggs in flowering elm trees and therefore suffered serious declines following the introduction of Dutch elm disease.

White Letter Hairstreak Butterfly



5 Hobby's Mill

Hobby's Mill began operating in 1767 as a corn mill and some of the walls still survive. This site was part of a community archaeological dig in 2006.

6 Hobby's Mill Pond and Dam.

Named after an 18th century miller, this pond was created after 1713 to power Hobby's Mill. By 1914 the pond was a reservoir used by Priestman Collieries to supply water to the worker's houses at Ottovale Terrace. As part of the Blaydon Burn Project, the pond was re-excavated and now provides a home for wildlife such as the tiny water shrew.



7 Edward Pit and Tar Tunnel.

A brick archway marks the entrance to the Edward Pit, where coal was mined from the 1850s to 1896. The site was re-used around 1900 by Priestman Collieries as the entrance to a tunnel connecting the tar works at Ottovale above the valley, with the railway to the Tyne below.

8 Mature oak trees

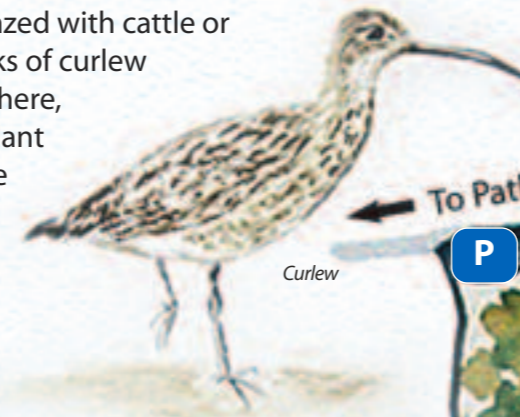
These support rare purple hairstreak butterflies and the shy green woodpecker.

Purple Hairstreak Butterfly



10 Blaydon Burn Meadows

These have been re-seeded with a wild flower seed mix, and at certain times of the year are grazed with cattle or horses. Large flocks of curlew spend the winter here, feeding on abundant earthworms in the sandy soil.



Curlew

11 Reservoir

Now redundant, this early 20th century reservoir supplied water for quenching coke, burned in ovens in the valley below or as a general supply for Blaydon Burn Colliery. Birds such as nuthatch and treecreeper can often be seen clinging to the bark of surrounding trees, searching for insects and spiders.

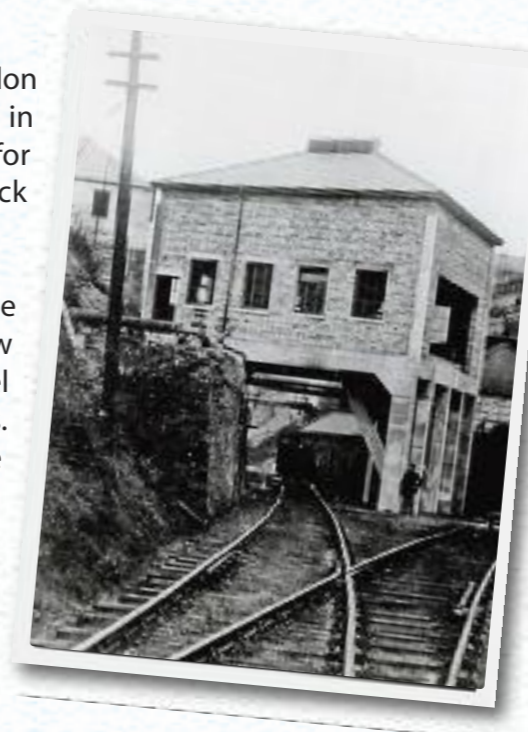
Nuthatch



12 Bessie Drift Mine

This pit was part of Cowen's Blaydon Burn Colliery. Most of the mines in Blaydon Burn were worked for fireclay for Cowen's Firebrick Manufactory.

The actual entrance to the mine was through the shallow sandstone bay spanned by a steel girder now blocked with bricks. The cracks and crevices in the crumbling retaining walls now provide the ideal home for pipistrelle bats, which feed on insects by night.



9 Herd's House Pond

In the spring time, look out for amphibians such as frogs, toads and newts, whilst over the summer months iridescent dragonflies and damselflies can be seen flashing across the surface of the pond. Sightings of the illusive water shrew have also been made here.

Smooth Newt



Map Key

- Blaydon Burn Waggonway
- Blaydon Burn Wildlife and History Trail
- Parking
- 100m

13 Coal Drop at Bessie Pit

Along this southern section of the trail are a long series of retaining walls. These were related to spoil heaps, coal screens, railways, waggonways, pit heads and other buildings. The four openings here were coal drops. Coal was carried from the Bessie Drift Mine to the drops on an elevated platform and transferred to waggons below.



14 Wintrip's Mill

Wintrip's Mill was a water-powered flint mill. Flint milling was a significant industry along Blaydon Burn. Ground flint was usually used in the production of porcelain but in Blaydon Burn was used to make firebricks. By 1914 Wintrip's Mill had been demolished and replaced with coke ovens.



15 Coke Cutting Platform

From 1900 Priestman Collieries operated a 230m long battery of coke ovens. This brick laid 'path' was used as a coke cutting platform in the early 20th century. Bricks from the demolished coke ovens were laid flat forming a platform on which to grade and cut the coke into 'nuts'.



16 Priestman 'Ottovale' Coke Works and Newcastle Tar Works

The Priestman coke ovens became known as the 'German Ovens' or 'Ottovale' after their German manufacturer, Otto Hilgenstock. The ovens produced coke, while the nearby Newcastle Tar Works refined crude tar, a by-product of coke production. The Newcastle Benzol Works was the first place in the world where petrol, known as Blaydon Benzole, was produced from coal. An Electricity Power Supply Station also ran on the heat and gas produced by the Coke Ovens. Reclamation of the site began in the 1970s and the area has now been returned to grassland.

17 Blaydon Burn Site of Nature Conservation Importance

These fields were fenced to enable grazing by native breed ponies. This 'conservation grazing' creates the perfect conditions for rare flowers to flourish. During spring and summer, vivid pinks and purples splash the meadows, as common spotted orchids and self heal bloom.

Common Spotted Orchid

