



Historic Bishopwearmouth

Bishopwearmouth is now part of Sunderland's busy city centre, but it began as a small village. It was organised around a central village green and parish church and surrounded by fields.

Bishopwearmouth Village through time...

The medieval village, around 1380

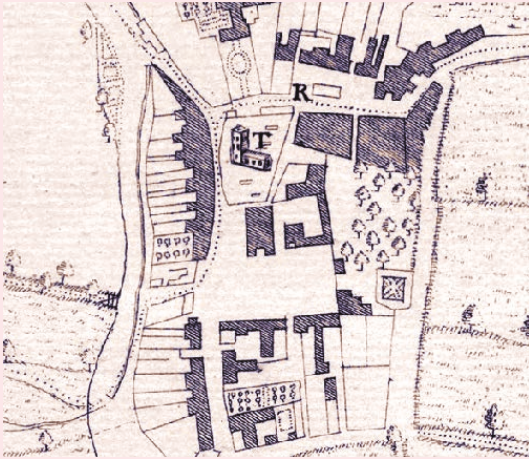


Drawing by Peter Ryder

This artist's impression of the village is based on information taken from a survey done of the Bishop of Durham's estates in 1381. It shows the impact of the Black Death, a terrible plague which raged through the 14th century. We can still recognise some of the elements of the village today.

To the left of the image are Low Row and High Row (which is now Green Terrace) and the route now known as High Street West can be seen at the top. The parish church of St Michael and All Angels had been built by this time.

Bishopwearmouth around 1737



Burleigh & Thompson's River Plan, c.1737

In this view of the village from the early eighteenth century we can see that Bishopwearmouth was still a village rather than part of Sunderland. The north part of the green has been built on, probably because there was pressure for more housing as the population increased.

Amongst the new streets were Southgate and Littlegate. The first record of Littlegate dates back to 1647.

Bishopwearmouth in the nineteenth century



Unknown artist, 1857

chimneys which show that Sunderland was becoming increasingly industrial. The pollution that came along with industry was starting to change the formerly quiet rural village.

By the mid-nineteenth century Bishopwearmouth was no longer a separate village, but had merged with Sunderland to form a single urban settlement.

The area appears well-to-do with lots of trees and gardens. The grand houses to the right of the green in the image (Fenwick Lodge and Crowtree House) still have large gardens.

To the left we can see

Bishopwearmouth Village Timeline



933/935

First mention of Bishopwearmouth when the great shire estate of 'South Wearmouth' was given by King Athelstan to the monastic community of St Cuthbert at Chester-le-Street.



1183

The township of Bishopwearmouth is documented in the Bishop of Durham's Boldon Book as 'Weremouthe' (as shown in this 1576 map).

The church was built, or perhaps rebuilt in stone, in the 1100's.



1214

First record of a church on the site of Sunderland Minster, at this time it was known as St Michael and All Angels.

The earliest images we have of the church date to the eighteenth century. This view of the church is from 1824.



1785-99

By this time Bishopwearmouth was linked to Sunderland by High Street West, with buildings lining the whole route.

In 1799 the oval village green was enclosed (made private) by the owner of Crowtree House creating the ringed shape which still survives today.

It can be clearly seen in this 1856 map.



1930's– 40's

In the early 1930's St Michael's Church was rebuilt by architect WD Caroe.

This image shows communal air raid shelters being built beneath the green as World War 2 approached.

In 1943 a bomb struck in the area between the church and almshouses.



1960's– 1980's

Buildings to the south and east of the church were demolished including the Bowes Almshouses, Littlegate and Southgate.

This enabled Crowtree Leisure Centre (1978) and the Bridges Shopping Centre (1980's) to be built, as well as the creation of Town Park, now known as Minster Park.

The picture shows the area in the 1970's.



1998

St Michael, All Angels and Benedict Biscop Church became Sunderland Minster in recognition of Sunderland being granted city status in 1992.



2019– 2020

Town Park re-modelled and enhanced to create Minster Park.

Out and about in Bishopwearmouth

Next time you're in Sunderland City Centre, visit Bishopwearmouth to find out more about the heritage of the area and the work of Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme.

Can you spot the hidden details of the Bishopwearmouth Townscape?

Minster Park



The landscaping of the new Minster Park was completed in 2020. The design reflects the layout of the old streets which were demolished in the 1960s. **Can you find the four street signs in Minster Park?** Two of them are originals (visible in this photo) and two were created as part of the park redevelopment.

Sunderland Minster



Sunderland Minster is a significant part of the townscape of Bishopwearmouth. The first record of a church on this site dates to 1214. **Can you find the cherub headstone in the churchyard?**

Building conservation



Repair and restoration work has been completed at Sunderland Empire, the Dun Cow and the Peacock as part of the Townscape Heritage Scheme. This includes things like repairing the roof and windows as well as restoring stone carvings or other historical features of the buildings. **How many animals can you spot in the stonework on the buildings on High Street West?**

Community Projects



Local volunteers were involved in creating a Village Atlas for Bishopwearmouth, tracing its history from Anglo-Saxon times to the present. This inspired volunteers (pictured) to create a beautiful tapestry based on the features and history of Bishopwearmouth - **can you find it in Sunderland Minster?**

Hidden histories



Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme offered a range of walks and talks on the history and heritage of the area. One of the interesting things to spot on the 'Edwardian Bishopwearmouth' walk is the foundation stone at Sunderland Empire. This was laid by music hall artist Vesta Tilley in 1906 - **can you find it?**

What is Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme?

Sunderland City Council was awarded £1.9m by the National Lottery Heritage Fund in June 2018 to deliver this heritage led regeneration scheme, which focuses on the area shown in the map below.



The 'townscape' means the collection of historic buildings which add interest to our built environment. As well as individual buildings or monuments it also relates to how everything fits together - the built, natural, cultural and social elements of a place.

Through repairing historic buildings, improving the overall appearance and raising awareness of the rich heritage of Bishopwearmouth the Townscape Heritage Scheme is preserving what people value most, making the area a better place to live, work or visit.

Local volunteers worked with Sunderland City Council and the Archaeological Practice Ltd in 2019-2020 to create a Village Atlas. This study investigated the archaeology, architecture and geography of the area. You can read the Atlas at www.sunderland.gov.uk/bishopwearmouth

This leaflet was produced in 2023 as part of the Bishopwearmouth Townscape Heritage Scheme. The project was funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund.