

Penshaw Monument



The structure

The Grade I listed monument, built in the form of a Greek temple, stands 136 metres above sea level. It is based on the design of the Theseion, the Temple of Hephaestus, in Athens. It was designed by Newcastle architects John and Benjamin Green and built by Thomas Pratt of Sunderland.

The Monument is made of gritstone from the quarries of the then Marquess of Londonderry. Steel pins and brackets held the gritstone blocks together, but over the years these deteriorated. As a result of deterioration and settlement caused by nearby mining, the Monument was underpinned in 1978. In 1979 the entire western end of the Monument was dismantled block by block in order that damaged lintels could be replaced by new reinforced concrete lintels, these have artificial stone facings and are recognisable by their buff-yellow colour.

Though the Monument is modelled on the Theseion, Penshaw has different dimensions:

- 100ft (30 metres) long x 53ft (16 metres) wide
- 70ft (21 metres) high
- 18 columns - 6ft 6ins (2 metres) in diameter.

A brief history

On the summit of Penshaw Hill is the Monument, built in honour of John George Lambton, the first Earl of Durham. Penshaw Monument dominates the skyline and can be seen for miles around, from County Durham, Wearside and Tyneside. It overlooks Herrington County Park on the south side and Washington Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust on the north side. Penshaw comes from the old British word **pen**, meaning hill and **shaw** describes a wooded area.

The foundation stone was laid on Wednesday 28 August 1844, by Thomas, Earl of Zetland, in the presence of a large crowd, attended by about 400 members of the Provincial Grand Lodges of Freemasons. About £6,000 was raised by public subscription, which was used to build the Monument. However funding ran out and the roof and interior walls were never added. In 1988 when Sunderland City Council invested £50,000 in floodlights, the dramatic play of light among the columns added to the visual effect.

The monument is now in the care of the National Trust.



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John George Lambton

John George Lambton was born in 1792. He became MP for County Durham in 1813 and was elevated to the Peerage in 1828 as Baron of Durham, he later became Viscount Lambton and the Earl of Durham in 1833. His political opinions were so advanced that he was known throughout England as "Radical Jack". he was one of the main forces behind the electoral reform movement of the 1830s, which gave the vote to the wealthier people of large towns such as Sunderland, who had previously not been represented in Parliament. It was his political opinions, which made him popular with the ordinary people. Later in his career he became Ambassador to Russia and also Governor General of Canada. He died in 1840 aged 48 and was buried at the family vault at Chester-le-Street; fifty thousand people attended the funeral. "He was a good friend to the poor", exclaimed a labourer, as the sad procession left the church. Subsequently funding for the Monument was raised by public subscription.

The Lambton family features in the legend of the **Lambton Worm**, which according to the song, wrapped its tail "ten times round Penshaw Hill". Although an older version of the tale states that the Lambton Worm wrapped itself around Worm Hill at nearby Fatfield.

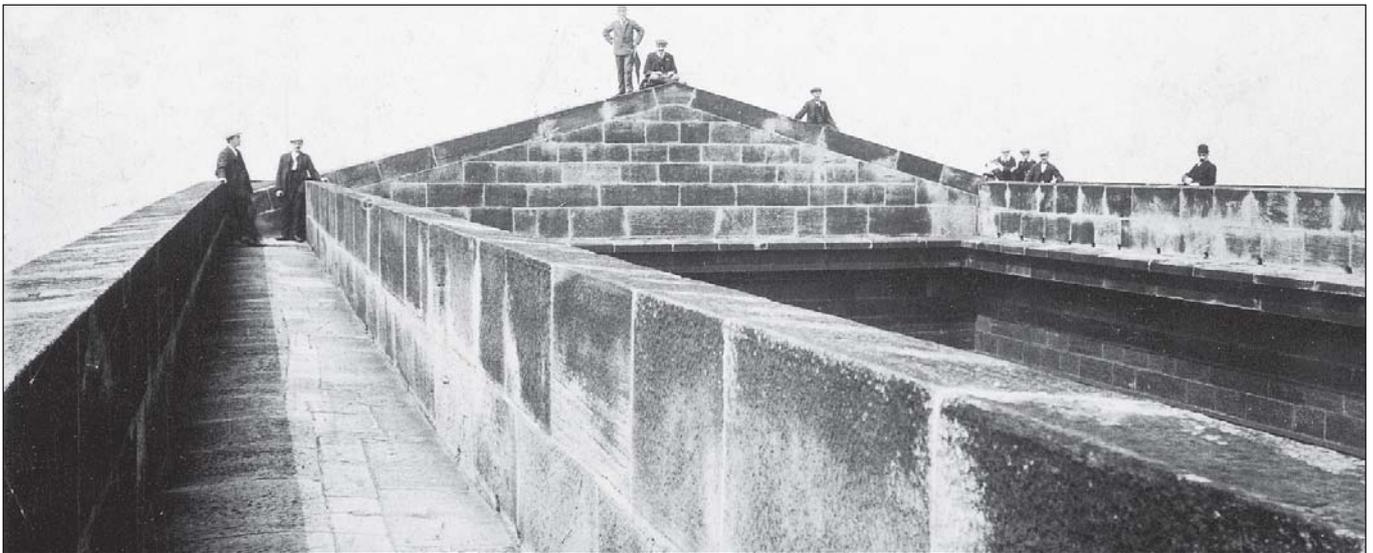
Penshaw Bowl

This is a tradition that has taken place on Penshaw Hill for many years, every year on Maundy Thursday, weather permitting, children take part in this popular event. Children who manage to roll their hard-boiled egg the furthest down the hill receive a prize.

This custom is believed to be associated with the commemoration of Christ's resurrection. The specific symbolism relates to the rolling away of the stone from the mouth of Christ's tomb.

A tragedy

The 18 columns of the Monument are solid except one, which contains a spiral staircase providing access to the upper walkways. This was originally open to the public until April 1926 when a tragedy occurred. People often climbed to the top of the Monument at holiday times and a young man called Temperley Arthur Scott, from Fatfield, was visiting with three of his friends. In order to pass from one side of the Monument to the other, they had to pass round the ends where there was no protecting wall; Temperley fell 70ft and was killed. At the Inquest the Coroner recommended that the staircase to the top should be kept locked, it has been ever since!



Find out more about Penshaw Monument

For more information, visit the Local Studies Centre at Sunderland City Library and Arts Centre, which has books on Penshaw Monument, such as:

- 'Penshaw Monument' by Albert Hind (1978)
- 'Penshaw, Shiney Row, Philidelphia & Newbottle' by Lena Cooper (2000)

More information and images can also be found at: www.visitsunderland.com