

# The West End of Newcastle

This heritage guide introduces you to some of the famous historical figures of West Newcastle - a varied parade of people who lived and worked here in the past, from the Benwell spy to the Benwell bishop.

## Search

Search is a community-based voluntary project working in the inner west of Newcastle with and for older people. It has shop-front premises which provide a drop-in advice and information service for people of pensionable age and it runs a variety of groups and activities for over-fifties in community venues across the area.

In 2013 Search ran a programme of guided tours to explore the fascinating and varied history of the west end of Newcastle, funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund's "All Our Stories" programme. This is one of a series of Heritage Guides based on these tours.

**Contact:** Search Project, 74 Adelaide Terrace, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE4 9JN

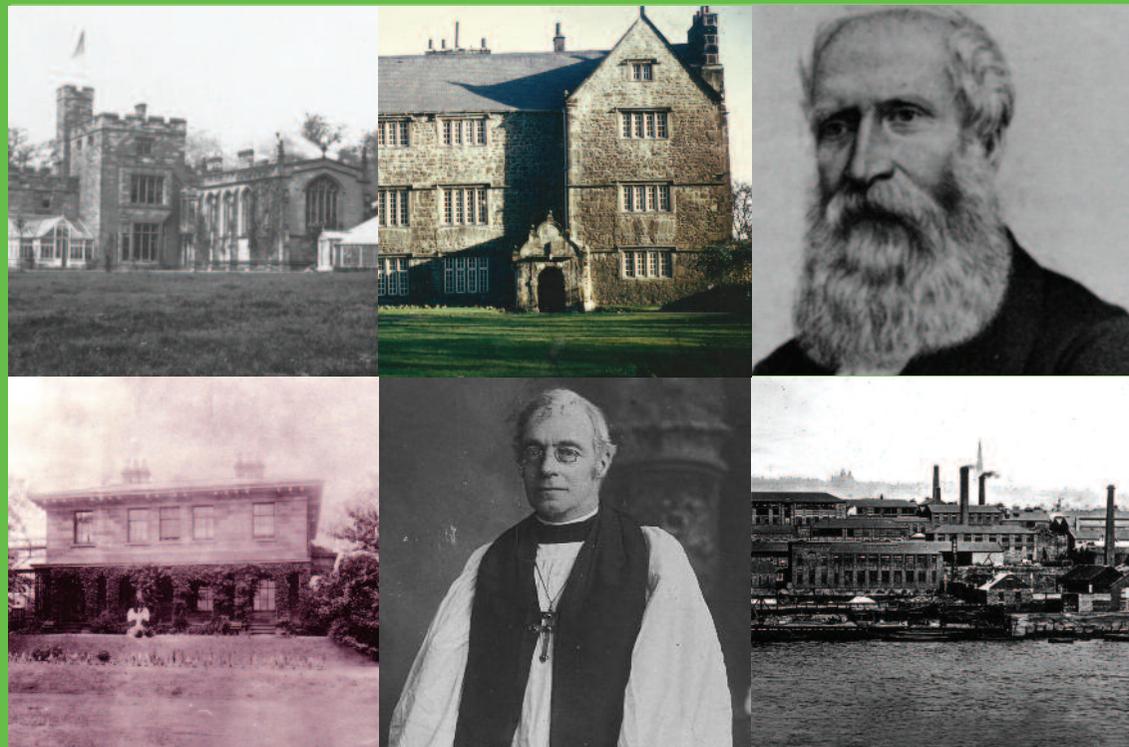
**Tel:** 0191 273 7443 **Email:** searchprojectuk@yahoo.co.uk

## Acknowledgements:

This guide was created by Judith Green with help from West Newcastle Picture History Collection and St James' Heritage and Environment Group. It is based on the guided tours developed by Pat Lowery for Search's Exploring our West End project. The images were supplied by West Newcastle Picture History Collection. The design of this guide was funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund through the Exploring Our West End project.

Thanks also to all the participants in the Exploring Our West End project who contributed their memories.

# Famous Historical Figures of the West End of Newcastle



## A heritage guide



© Search Project 2014

St James'  
Heritage &  
Environment  
Group



West  
Newcastle  
Picture  
History  
Collection



## Famous Historical Figures of the West End of Newcastle

West Newcastle is an area with a long and rich history going as far back as the Roman occupation, which has left relics of Hadrian's Wall, temples and other visible remains. In the 18th and 19th centuries it was a fashionable residential area for some of the wealthiest and most influential industrialists, bankers and developers of the time who wanted to live in fine houses with their own landscaped grounds away from the noise, dirt and disease of the city but conveniently close to its society and amenities. Then, in the latter half of the 19th century, this became one of the foremost economic areas in the world. The creation of thousands of homes for the influx of people needed to work in its booming factories and coal mines meant that it was transformed into a dense urban area in just a few decades.

This guide is an introduction to just a few of the famous people who have lived in Newcastle's west end over the years.



**Image:** Emperor Hadrian who had the Roman Wall built across northern Britain from Wallsend to Bowness-on-Solway in the 2nd century AD.

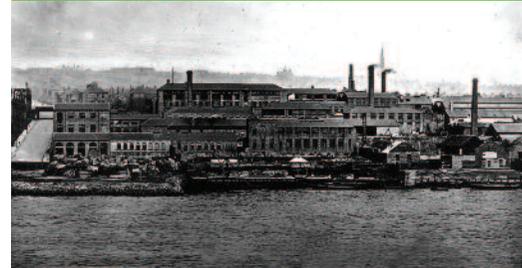


**Image:** St James' Church, Benwell, pictured here at the beginning of the 20th century contains memorials to many of the area's famous residents in the graveyard and in the church itself. For more information about tours and opening hours, visit <http://stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com>

### 1 The Richardsons

The Richardson family moved to Newcastle from Whitby in 1766 and opened a leather works in Elswick in 1863 on a riverside site adjacent to Armstrong's works. This continued to be run as a family business for the next hundred years until it was taken over by a London company. Meanwhile some family members diversified into other areas of business, notably John Wigham Richardson who became one of Tyneside's foremost ship-builders.

**Image:** Richardson's leather works viewed from across the Tyne, c1930



### 3 Richard Grainger

Richard Grainger was a builder and developer who transformed Newcastle's city centre in the 19th century. He built many of the most important streets and buildings in the town, including Grey Street, Grainger Street, Theatre Royal and the Grainger Market. Next came an ambitious plan to create a whole new town with houses, factories, roads, railways and community facilities in Elswick. This had to be abandoned because of rising debts, and Grainger narrowly avoided bankruptcy.



**Image:** Grainger's home, Elswick Hall, demolished in 1978

### 2 William Armstrong

William Armstrong established his first engineering works in Elswick in 1847 to build hydraulic machinery. It grew rapidly, branching out into manufacturing bridges and then into armaments.

In 1884 a shipyard was added, giving the capacity to build and equip an entire warship from raw material to finished product. Armstrong's became the most successful exporter of warships in the world. The 50 acre site was at one time the biggest employer in Newcastle.



**Image:** Armstrong's Elswick shipyard c1885

### 4 William Haswell Stephenson

Stephenson was a very successful Tyneside businessman with diverse business interests including shipping, utilities, insurance, coal mining, and steel manufacture. He was an influential member of Newcastle City Council, becoming the city's youngest mayor in more than 600 years.

**Image:** Stephenson pictured c1880 in Lord Mayor's regalia



## ⑤ Willie Fisher

Willie Fisher, also known as Rudolf Ivanovich Abel, was a high-ranking Soviet spy. Convicted in the USA in 1957 for conspiring to pass military secrets to the Russians, he was later exchanged for the American spy pilot Gary Powers. He lived

in the Soviet Union until his death in 1971, receiving the Order of Lenin and other honours. Son of a Russian emigre, Fisher was born at 140 Clara Street, Benwell, in 1903.

**Image:** Fisher's grave in Moscow



## ⑥ Thomas Hodgkin

Thomas Hodgkin was a banker who lived with his family for 30 years in Benwell Dene. Hodgkin was a partner in the Newcastle bank of Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence which later became Lloyd's Bank. In 1893 Hodgkin moved to Bamburgh Castle, selling Benwell Dene house to the Royal Victoria School for the Blind and giving six acres of the grounds to be developed as a public park which is still known as Hodgkin Park today.



**Image:** Hodgkin: banker, historian and antiquarian

## ⑨ Stoney Bowes

Andrew Robinson "Stoney" Bowes was the most notorious occupant of Benwell Towers, a great mansion that had been associated with many famous names in the past, including the Delaval and the Shaftoe families. Bowes was an 18th century high soci-



ety villain who married the wealthy Countess of Strathmore for her money and then subjected her to considerable mental and physical cruelty. Rumour has it that he bought the ruined house in Benwell as a base for his smuggling racket.

**Image:** Benwell Towers, c1900

## ⑩ Bishop Lloyd

Arthur Thomas Lloyd lived in Benwell Towers from 1903-7. A large house to the north of Benwell Lane, this had been the home of the bishops of Newcastle since the arrival in 1882 of the first Bishop, Ernest Wilberforce, grandson of the anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce. A further four bishops lived there before it was sold to the mines fire and rescue service in 1943.



**Image:** Bishop Lloyd unusually had chosen to be buried at his local parish church, St James' in Benwell, although there is also a memorial in St Nicholas' Cathedral



## William Bramble

William Bramble was known as the "Dick Whittington of Newcastle" because he is said to have arrived in the city to seek his fortune with his possessions in a bundle on his back. He achieved considerable wealth through retailing and property development, and also status and power as



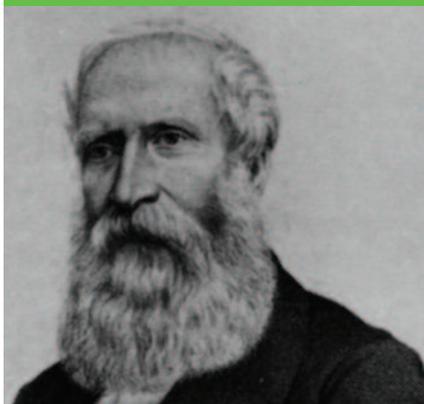
a Justice of the Peace, local councillor, and Lord Mayor of the city. The Bramble family were the last residents of Benwell Hall where they lived from the 1920s until 1979.

**Image:** Benwell Hall, c1969

## ⑧ William Hawthorn

William Hawthorn was a railway engineer and steam engine builder. Together with his brother Robert, he built more than 900 locomotives. From about 1840 until his death in 1875, William lived at the misleadingly named Benwell Cottage - a large house standing in extensive grounds.

**Image:** William Hawthorn, one of Tyneside's most illustrious industrial pioneers



## ⑪ John William Pease

Pease belonged to a well-known Quaker family with extensive business interests in cloth making, railways and banking, and was himself a banker and a director of the



North East Railway Company as well as a local councillor. The family lived at Pendower Hall, a large house with ample grounds south of the West Road. Pease also owned Benwell Towers, and gifted this to the newly formed Anglican Diocese of Newcastle in the 1880s as an official bishop's residence.

**Image:** J.W.Pease (seated centre) pictured with the other partners of the Hodgkin, Barnett, Pease and Spence bank

## ⑫ Elizabeth Montague

The Montague family of East Denton Hall were at the centre of economic, political and social life in the 18th century. There were several strong, independent women in the family, notably Elizabeth Montague known as "the queen of literary London". She was a frequent visitor to East Denton Hall, from where she managed the family's coal mines after the death of her husband. She described the local mining community as "little better than savages".

**Image:** East Denton Hall, residence of the Roman Catholic Bishops of Newcastle since 1943





**Key:**

① Richardson family	⑤ Willie Fisher	⑨ Andrew Stoney Bowes
② William Armstrong	⑥ Thomas Hodgkin	⑩ Bishop Lloyd
③ Richard Grainger	⑦ William Bramble	⑪ John William Pease
④ William Haswell Stephenson	⑧ Robert and William Hawthorn	⑫ Elizabeth Montague