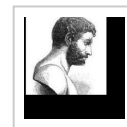
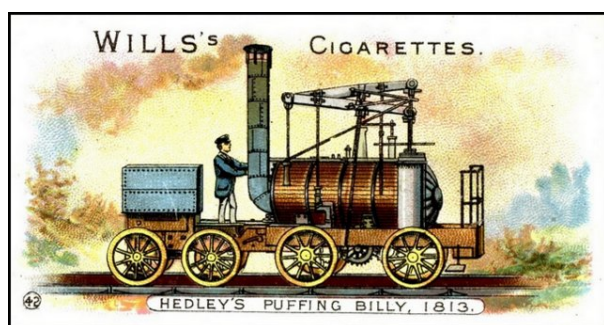


Wylam Walk

Andrew Curtis

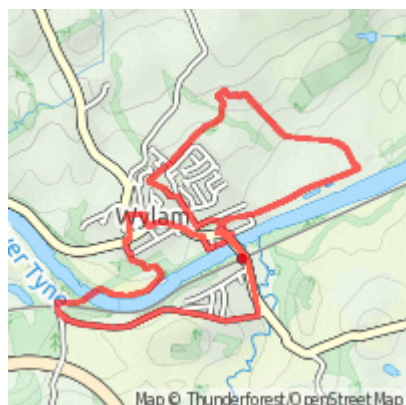


Route Summary



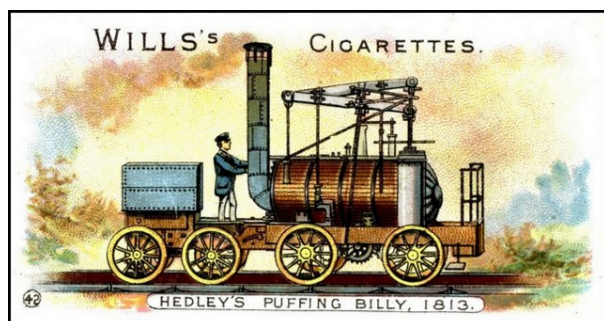
A figure of eight route to visit the important historic sites in Wylam village. Start and Finish at the riverside carpark where the route can also be split into two separate parts. Based on previous VR route, East Tynedale 05, with historical information from Peter Brooks and Wylam Parish Council.

Route Overview



Category: Walking
Length: 6.710 km / 4.19 mi
Last Modified: 4th June 2018
Difficulty: Medium
Rating: Unrated
Surface: Smooth
Date Published: 1st May 2018

Description



A figure of eight route to visit the important historic sites in Wylam village.

Start and Finish at the riverside carpark where you can also split the route into two separate parts.

Based on previous VR route, East Tynedale 05.

'A Walk Around Wylam' was written by local historian Philip R. B. Brooks. First published by Wylam Parish Council in 1982, it was revised and updated for the website in 2016. Philip served as a member of Wylam Parish Council for 40 years from 1973 to 2013.

Wylam Parish Council - A Walk Around Wylam

Best map for this, partly urban, walk is the Open Cycle Map which can be used offline by saving tiles to your device.

You can walk the full route easily in 2 hours but will take longer if you take detours or get into the detailed history at each waypoint.

Please note that you are walking on busy roads, often on narrow pavements or no pavement, so take adequate care when crossing, within the village and on the narrow road south of the river. Dogs and children will need constant supervision.



OS 6" scale (1864) 'Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland' <https://maps.nls.uk/index.html>

Waypoints

Start

(54.97622; -1.81636)



Start just outside the entrance to the car park, close to the War Memorial.

The Gothic-style cross commemorates those from the village who died in both World Wars. It was erected by the people of Wylam in 1923, 'in grateful memory of those who gave their lives in the Great War 1914-1918'. Sir James Knott offered to provide the memorial, but this was turned down by the villagers, who wanted to provide it themselves. The Memorial Green was originally enclosed by railings which were removed during 1939-45. Full details are given here: [North East War Memorials Project](#)

From the memorial, head SW along Stephenson Terrace towards the river until the terrace turns to the E. Look for a path on your right which descends to the riverside and then passes below Wylam Bridge.

WP01

(54.97538; -1.81713)



Hollow-way leading to old ferry crossing (A Curtis 2018)

Close to the site of an **old ford**, which apart from a small ferry, had been the only means of crossing the River Tyne before the opening of the bridge. Even after the bridge was built in 1836, the ford continued to be well-used by drovers who wanted to avoid having to pay the bridge tolls. A hollow-way created by users of the ford can be seen running down the grass to the river bank just east of the terraced houses of Tyne View.

Climb the steps to the road on the south side of the terrace and follow along to Tyne House, taking the lane to its east side which leads to the former site of Wylam Mill.

WP02

(54.97555; -1.81780)



Former Blacksmith's Shop (A Curtis 2018)

This is the site of Wylam Mill.

Early in the 19th century, the colliery pumping engine (used for extracting water from the mine workings) might have been seen on the right, together with the colliery workshops.

These have all disappeared, apart from an old single-storey stone building with a pantiled roof which has been restored but was in use as the **Blacksmith's Shop** until the 1930's.

It has been suggested that it was in this building that the first Wylam colliery locomotives were built by William Hedley, Timothy Hackworth and Jonathan Forster, in 1813-1815. There is there is no conclusive proof if this and early maps of the area seem to show that the present building is not as old as this, although some repairs to colliery equipment may have been undertaken here.

The two-storey redbrick Victorian building set back from the road frontage (and now the Wylam Co-Op), was built as the mill stables.

Wylam Mill itself was originally driven by water from the Oakwood Burn but in 1876 it was modernised and converted into a steam mill. It became a thriving concern by the turn of the century (the size of nearby 'River House' which was the miller's house certainly suggests prosperity) grinding flour and feedstuffs for many local farmers.

However, on August 9th 1931, a dramatic fire completely destroyed the premises, necessitating the demolition of the mill buildings, including the chimney which had been a prominent local landmark. The rebuilt mill has been converted into dwellings in modern times.

Continue to the Main Road and turn left.

WP03

(54.97592; -1.81846)

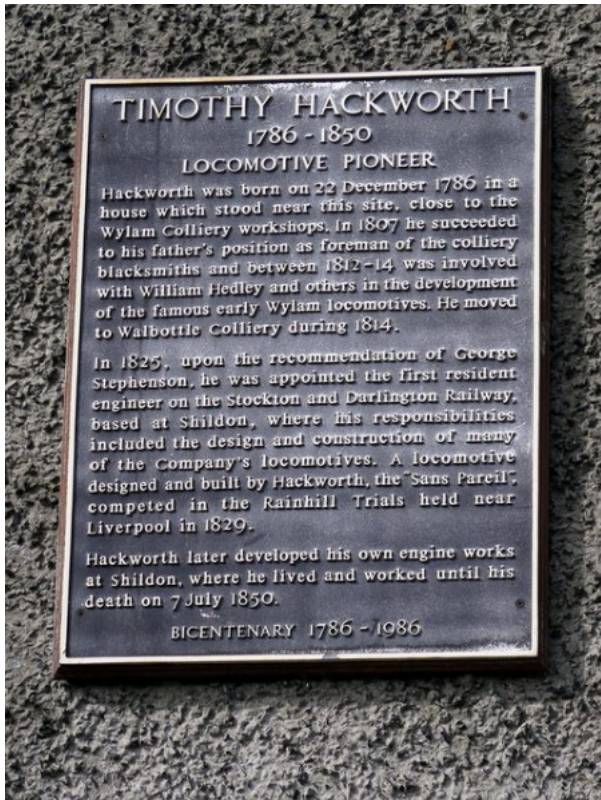


Former stables building for Wylam Mill, now Wylam Co-Op (A Curtis 2018)

Wormald House faces down the Main Road and is the site where Timothy Hackworth was born.



Wormald House (A Curtis 2018)



Hackworth plaque (A Curtis 2018)

Hackworth's birthplace (site of)

Timothy Hackworth, the famous railway engineer, who was at one time blacksmith at Wylam Colliery, was born in a cottage which stood near the entrance to the playing field, commemorated by a plaque on **Wormald House**.

Continue up Main Road, crossing the disused railway and passing the Fox & Hounds pub on the right.

WP04

(54.97650; -1.82075)



Few signs of Wylam's former iron industry remain, although lumps of the waste clinker ('scoria') can be seen in the

retaining walls to gardens on both sides of Main Road through the village.

WP05

(54.97639; -1.82273)

Chapel Lane (left) is named for the location of Wylam Wesleyan Chapel.



Wylam Methodist Church (A Curtis 2018)

Wylam formed part of the ecclesiastical parish of Ovingham until 1902 when, with Horsley, it became a separate parish.

Although there was no parish church until 1886, the Wesleyans had had a chapel in the village at least half a century earlier and part of the present **Methodist Chapel** in Chapel Lane dates from 1834.

During the 18th century, non-conformists in the village probably worshipped at a meeting place at the nearby village of Horsley, which was visited by John Wesley several times during his trips to Northumberland.

In spite of the strong Methodist movement, the census in 1891 reveals there was no shortage of **Inns**: Black Bull, Ship, Fox & Hounds, Boathouse (still operate today) and Stephenson's Arms, Bird Inn (converted to private houses).

Four of the six Innkeepers, were also doing other jobs. At the Stephenson's Arms, Michael Lynch was described as a 'beerhousekeeper and general dealer', at the Fox and Hounds, Robert Johnson was also a miner, John Phillips at the Bird Inn was a grocer, and at the Ship Inn, Edward Hawkins also worked as a bootmaker as well as the Innkeeper.

Our route turns north up Cherry Tree Lane next to J A Stobo greengrocers shop directly opposite Chapel Lane.

WP06

(54.97704; -1.82317)

Turn left where the pedestrian lane joins the south end of Algernon Terrace. Pass the Church Hall on your left and stop at the church.



Wylam Church Hall (A Curtis 2018)

WP07

(54.97699; -1.82395)



St Oswin's Church (A Curtis 2011)

St Oswin's Church

The only church in Northumberland dedicated to St. Oswin. Oswin was King of Deira (the southern half of Northumbria) from 644 until 651 and his kingdom extended from the Humber to the Tees, with York as the capital. His cousin Oswy ruled over the adjoining northern part of Northumbria, known as Bernicia. Following several disputes between them, their opposing armies met for battle near Catterick in 651 and Oswin, whose men were outnumbered, fled shortly afterwards. He was betrayed to Oswy and slain at Gilling near Richmond. He was later buried in the Priory at Tynemouth.

The foundation stone of the Parish Church was laid by Mrs. Richard Clayton of Wylam Hall on 1st January 1885, in the presence of the donor, George Hedley and his brother William, the youngest sons of William and Frances Hedley. The two brothers had been born in the village shortly after their father had taken up his job as the colliery viewer in 1805 and were small children at the time of the development of the early locomotives in Wylam between 1812–15, in which their father played a major part.

Although George Hedley died in July 1886 before the church had been completed, his brother gave £10,000 to endow the living and build the parsonage. The total cost of building the church was £7,061.

WP08

(54.97693; -1.82453)

Pass through the lytchgate onto Church Road and turn left (south).



St Oswin's Church from the Lytchgate (A Curtis 2018)

Lytchgate of St Oswin's Church

Latin words carved on the interior panelling are in memory of Richard Clayton who lived at Wylam Hall and died in 1903. His wife continued to live at the Hall until 1909, then moved to 'Elmfield' at the corner of Station Road and Wylam Wood Road.

There is also a memorial window to him in St Oswin's Church as he was instrumental in the campaign to have it built, avoiding the need for villagers to travel to St Mary's in Ovingham. The church was completed in 1886, funded by George and William Hedley, in memory of their parents, William Hedley, the pioneering railway engineer, and his wife Francis.

WP09

(54.97640; -1.82438)



Wylam Institute (A Curtis 2011)

Pass by Wylam Institute (built by public subscription in 1895) with the attractive bungalows, Blackett Cottages, facing it across the road.

The cottage in which the original Reading Room and Institution was housed stood where the bus shelter now stands on the opposite corner, known locally as Charlie's Corner.

Wylam Castle

During the Second World War there were both German and Italian POW camps close to this location.

German prisoners, over a period of just eight days in 1947, built a 3 foot high Bavarian castle in the gardens around their nissen huts. It was built using stones from the river with roofs made from tins and had four towers, electric lighting and elaborate home-made furniture, and a ball room with tapestries and carpets.

The front door could be opened and closed automatically and the castle even had its own ornamental fountain.

A discreet panel above the front door read 'Built by German prisoners' and it was intended as a lasting reminder of their stay in Wylam. It attracted hundreds of sightseers over the next two years, but in May 1949, a lorry appeared on the site, the castle was lifted from its foundations and is reported to have fallen into pieces.



WP10

(54.97591; -1.82425)

Charlie's Corner is named for Mr Charles Atkinson of **West House, Ovingham Road** who acquired and gave the land to the Parish Council around 1950. He was a leading figure in the planning of the village war memorial, its construction and unveiling in 1923.

At the junction with Main Road, which comes up through the village, keep right onto Ovingham Road and turn left onto Woodcroft Road opposite Brewery House.

Just left along Main Road if you are in need of refreshment is the Coffee Tree Cafe and The Ship Inn.



Ship Inn (A Curtis 2015)



OS 6' (1864). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

WP11

(54.97564; -1.82479)



Brewery House, Ovingham Road (A Curtis 2011)

Brewery House

The house facing the end of Woodcroft Road has been known as Brewery House. The outbuildings of the former brewery stood at the back of this house until replaced by flats in recent years. The brewery itself closed in the 1870's, not long after the main colliery and the ironworks ceased production, when the demand for a local brew must have dropped!

Brewery House, with its neighbour, Willow House (at one time the colliery manager's house) are both late 18th century buildings and with West House, form an attractive group fronting the Ovingham Road. This pleasant road which runs

along the riverside linking Wylam and Ovingham was originally constructed in the mid-18th century by John Blackett of Wylam Hall.

From the early 12th century until the dissolution of the monasteries by King Henry VIII, the village belonged to the Priors of Tynemouth, and **Wylam Hall** (within private grounds to the north-west of your current location) incorporates part of the 'Sporting House' built for the monks by Prior Whethamstead in 1405. Little of the original medieval work remains in the Hall, which has been substantially altered since that time.



Wylam Hall glimpsed over high wall west aalong Ovingham Road (A Curtis 2011)

WP12

(54.97544; -1.82465)



Old Colliery School and Schoolhouse (A Curtis 2011)

The former **Colliery School and Schoolhouse** stands on the left side of Woodcroft Road.

The school is a fine but somewhat austere stone building completed in 1854 (note the date stone on the bell-tower). It continued to be used until the new County Council school (now itself replaced) was built on Falcon Terrace in 1910. Its construction was largely promoted by J.F. B. Blackett, the local squire, who had also been responsible for

establishing the Reading Room and Institution in the village in 1850.

Elected an MP for Newcastle in 1852, Blackett died four years later at the early age of 35. During his short Parliamentary career he made a considerable impact and was undoubtedly one of the most able members of the local Blackett family who were Squires of Wylam for a period of nearly 300 years from about 1679 to 1971.

The older building to the left of the 1854 school was used as an earlier school and later as the master's house, but is now a private residence.

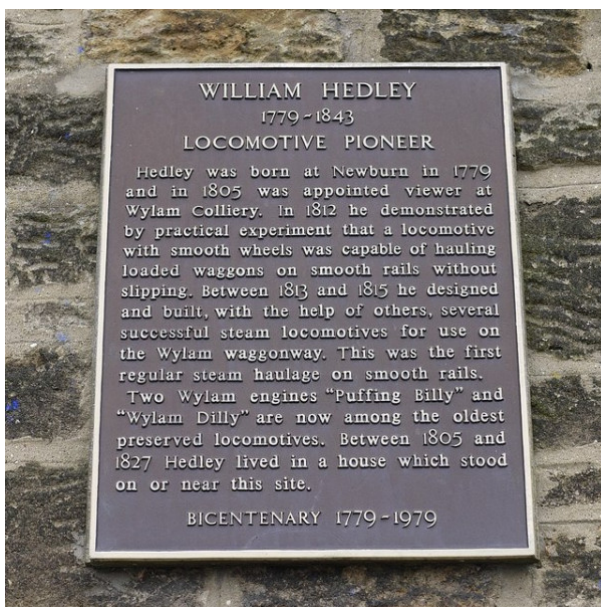
On the opposite corner stood the **White House**, home of William Hedley (1779-1843), and his family between 1805 and 1827. A plaque was erected on the present house in 1979 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of Hedley's birth and his important contribution to railway history.

Hedley was born in Newburn on 13th July 1779 but educated in Wylam. He became viewer (Manager) of Walbottle Colliery in 1801 before moving to Wylam in 1805 as viewer to Christopher Blackett, owner of Wylam Colliery.

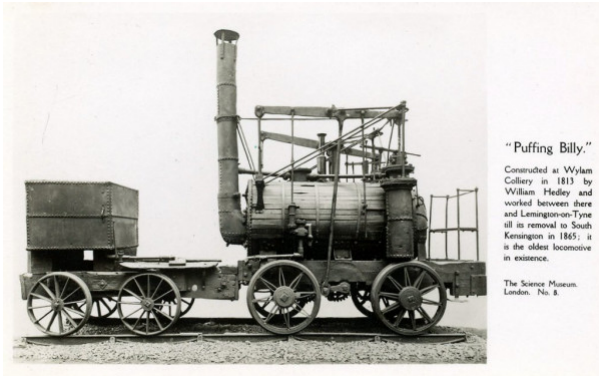
In 1812, he demonstrated by practical experiment that a locomotive with smooth wheels was capable of hauling loaded waggons on smooth rails without slipping (the principle of adhesion).

Between 1813 and 1815 he designed and built, with the help of others, several successful steam locomotives for use on the Wylam Waggonway. This was the first regular steam haulage on smooth rails. Two Wylam engines 'Puffing Billy' and 'Wylam Dilly' are now among the oldest preserved locomotives.

Between 1805 and 1827, Hedley lived in a house on or near this site. He left Wylam in 1828 becoming a coal-owner and lessee of collieries in County Durham. He also owned four ships. In 1837, he moved to Burnhopeside Hall where he died on 9th January 1843 and was buried at Newburn



Hedley plaque on wall of Rose Cottage (A Curtis 2013)



Puffing Billy (Science Museum postcard)

WP13

(54.97502; -1.82421)

Where Woodcroft Road turns to the left, cross to the corner and walk down the narrow path (behind the lime tree) which leads onto the old railway track.

Locally known as 'The Doctor's Path' as it goes behind the GP surgery.

WP14

(54.97455; -1.82322)



Disused railway leading to Hagg Bank Bridge (A Curtis 2018)

The railway line formed part of the 6½ mile long Scotswood-Newburn-Wylam railway which was begun in 1872 and finished four years later at a total cost of just over £100,000. Never a financial success, it was taken over by the North Eastern Railway Company in 1883.

The line eventually closed in 1968 and was subsequently acquired by the County Council. It now forms part of the Tyne Riverside Country Park, which extends westwards to Low Prudhoe and eastwards to Newburn.

Turn right to follow the line of the disused railway to Hagg Bank Bridge (shorter route) or take small path opposite the junction, towards the allotments and site of Haugh Pit.

WP15

(54.97448; -1.82215)

The tree-covered mound next to the river is the former location of **Wylam Colliery**.. This was the spoil heap of the **Haugh Pit**.

The colliery winding engine stood on the site of the small group of allotments, where a sub-station and electricity poles are now grouped.

Thomas Hair, a famous local artist, painted a fine series of views of the collieries in the north east, including one depicting the Haugh Pit in 1839, showing the winding engine and pit head, and a colliery locomotive

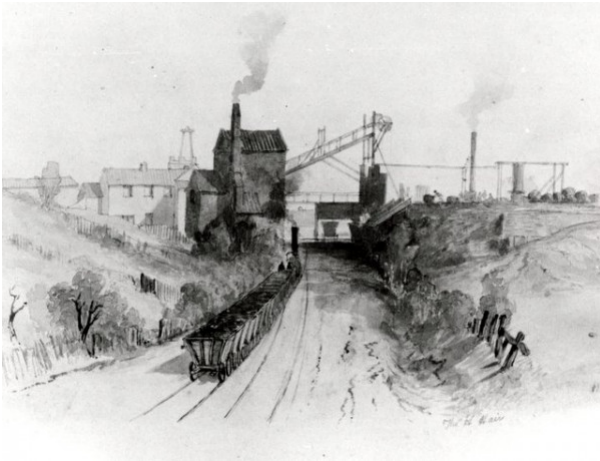


The Wylam waggonway was built in the mid-18th century and was one of the earliest in the north of England. It ran from the site of Haugh Pit eastwards alongside the Tyne for five miles linking the colliery to loading staithes on the river at Lemington, where the coal was loaded into keels (barges) for transporting to ships waiting in the mouth of the Tyne.

It was originally built with wooden rails and coal waggons were horse-drawn. Later it was converted to iron-rails and used by early steam locomotives that were made by local colliery engineers.

The colliery workings extended under the river and suffered badly from flooding and these problems, together with the high costs of transporting coal on the waggonway resulted in this colliery operating at a loss for several years before it was eventually closed late in 1868.

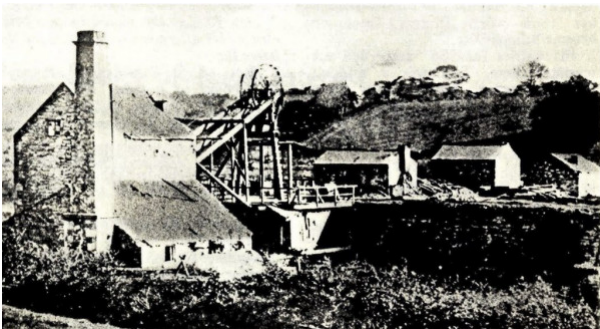
Subsequently, the waggonway fell into disuse and was in poor condition when construction of the Scotswood-Newburn-Wylam railway, which followed the waggonway route for much of its length, was begun four years later.



Wylam Colliery by Thomas Hair (1839)



OS 6' (1864). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.



Wylam Colliery at time of its closure in 1868 (Wylam Globe No 20, April 1978)

From this location there are a choice of routes to Hagg Bank Bridge: either along the riverside, several routes through The Haughs local nature reserve (steps up to the end of the bridge), or back the route you came from the disused railway, then turn left.

WP16

(54.97306; -1.82752)



Hagg Bank Bridge (A Curtis 2011)

Hagg Bank Bridge (known locally as 'Points Bridge' or the 'Bird Cage') is an early example of an arch suspension bridge. When it was built in 1876 by the Scotswood, Newburn & Wylam Railway Company its design (by W.G. Laws, later City Engineer of Newcastle) was ahead of its time, but paved the way for the Newcastle Tyne Bridge (1928) and Sydney Harbour Bridge (1932).

The bridge allowed trains to cross the river from North Wylam Station to join the Newcastle to Carlisle line at the West Wylam Junction. The bridge has a single span of 240 feet (73 metres), is made of wrought iron, cast by Hawks, Crawshaw & Co. of Gateshead. It used to carry a double railway line but was closed on March 11th 1968 and the rails lifted in 1972.

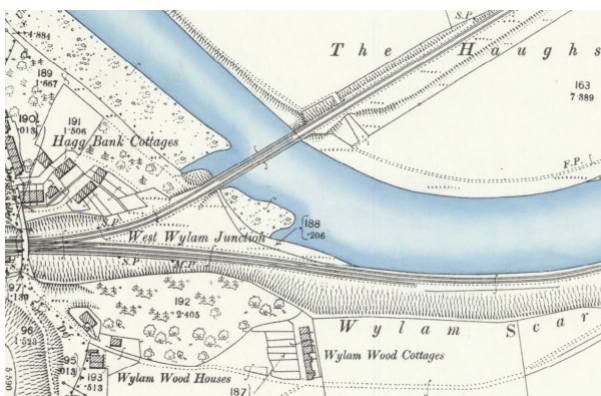


'Union of South Africa' steam special on river wall below Wylam Scars (A Curtis 2013).

Cross the bridge and continue along the path (uphill) to the small railway hamlet of Hagg Bank.



Hagg Bank Bridge (A Curtis 2003)



OS 25' (1897). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

WP17

(54.97266; -1.83050)

Turn left on Front Street and cross the railway bridge.

Look down on the **Newcastle-Carlisle Railway** from the road bridge at Hagg Bank.

The former junction with the Wylam, Newburn and Scotswood loop on the north bank of the River Tyne was just to the east. A local name for the Hagg Bank Bridge was Points Bridge from this junction.



Railway Bridge at Hagg Bank (A Curtis 2018)

After crossing the bridge, turn left on the narrow Wylam Wood Road which has passing places, taking care of traffic from both directions.

WP18

(54.97144; -1.82482)



Hagg Bank Bridge from Wylam Wood Road at Coldwell Hill (A Curtis 2018)



View east towards Wylam Bridge and Wylam Railway Station (A Curtis 2018)

The length of river bank east of Hagg Bank is known as **Wylam Scars** and it was here that work on the Newcastle-Carlisle railway began in 1831. The scene was delightfully illustrated by J.W. Carmichael in one of his famous views of this railway. This was the first cross-country line to be built and the first section, between Blaydon and Hexham, opened on March 9th 1835.



'The River Wall at Wylam Scars, on the south bank of the Tyne, 9 miles from Newcastle, is three quarters of a mile in length, and 26 feet in height from the low water level to the top of the Railway. It is built of rubble stone, quarried from the rocky scars above it.

The River formerly flowed close up to the base of the Scars, which are about 50 feet in height above the Railway, and presented at one time, to all appearance, a formidable barrier to the formation of a roadway. To the left of the view, or on the north side of the Tyne, is Wylam Colliery, belonging to Christ. Blackett, Esqr., and Wylam Iron Works, lately established by the Messrs. Thompson.

The Bridge in the distance was erected by subscription since the opening of this part of the Railway, for the purpose of affording a ready communication from the latter to the works above named, as well as for the accommodation of the public generally, it being suitable for the passage of every description of vehicle, as well as for Railway vaggons. It consists of a Timber Roadway, with piers and abutments of stone, there are 9 openings of 40 feet span each.'

WP19

(54.97229; -1.82140)

At this location on Wylam Wood Road a narrow footpath leaves the road on the left and provides a good short-cut to Wylam Railway Station.



Footpath on Wylam Wood Road (A Curtis 2018)

If you can find a gap between the trees there can be good views here over the river to Wylam village.



View of Wylam from Coldwell Hill (A Curtis 2011)

WP20

(54.97201; -1.81324)

North-west of this location on the far side of Stanley Burn, on the hill hidden by trees, is **Wylam Manor** formerly known as **Castle Hill**, formerly the country branch of Newcastle's Royal Victoria Infirmary (a convalescent home) and now developed into private apartments.

Originally built in 1878 by Newcastle architect, Archibald Dunn, as his own residence. He had been born at nearby Castle Hill Farm.

The Dunns were a prominent Catholic family and his father, Matthias, a famous colliery viewer, became one of the first Government Inspectors of Coal Mines in 1850.

The house was bought c.1900 by F. Stirling Newall of the Gateshead firm of wire rope and submarine cable manufacturers. Following his death and that of his wife, the house and grounds were presented to the RVI by their son G. S. Newall in November 1933.

The building can be accessed by a private path which leads up from the eastern end of the station platform, or by a private drive from Crawcrook Lane.



South of here is **Bradley Hall Farm** (formerly Sour Mires), the birthplace in 1795 of Nicholas Wood (1795-1865), an eminent mining engineer and lifelong friend of George Stephenson.

The farm lies in a somewhat isolated position south of the village.

If you really wanted to find it, you would turn right onto Crawcrook Road and fork right at the next junction along Sled Lane. 300 yards on the right is Daniel Farm (where there is a nice tea room). A footpath from there runs westwards across the front of the farmhouse; keep to this path along the edge of successive fields for ½ mile, and the first farm you reach is Bradley Hall Farm.

Turn left onto Station Road and walk along to Wylam Railway Station, passing The Boathouse pub on your left (if you can).

WP21

(54.97488; -1.81439)

Wylam Railway Station



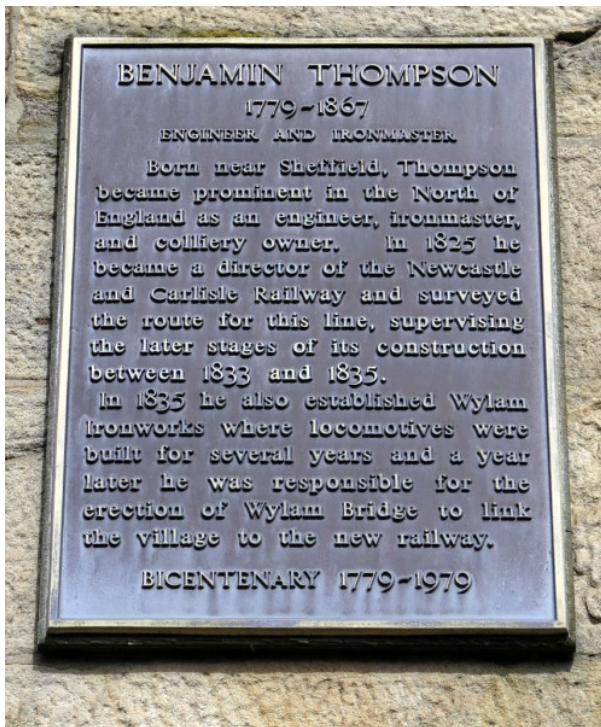
Wylam Railway Station is now one of the oldest in the world still in regular use by passengers.

The two-storey Tudor-style stationmaster's house, together with the small extension incorporating the booking office, are the oldest parts of the building, and date back to the opening of the railway in 1835. The house was described at that time as being of 'neat, rustic design'. The single-storey waiting rooms were added a few years later.

The footbridge and signal box were added in the late 19th century and are grade II listed.

On a wall of the station building is a plaque commemorating Benjamin Thompson (1779-1867), engineer and ironmaster. In 1825 he became a director of the Newcastle & Carlisle Railway and surveyed the route for the line and supervised the later stages of its construction.

In 1835, he established the Wylam Ironworks which built locomotives for several years. In 1836, he was responsible for building Wylam Bridge as a means of connecting the ironworks with the railway.



Plaque for Benjamin Thompson (A Curtis 2018)

Leave the station and cross Wylam Bridge.

WP22

(54.97538; -1.81512)

Wylam Bridge



Engraving by R.P. Leitch in 'The Life of George Stephenson and his son Robert Stephenson' by Samuel Smiles (1868).

Wylam Bridge was built in 1836 to link the ironworks and the colliery to the newly opened Newcastle-Carlisle railway on the south side of the river. John Blackmore, engineer to the railway company, designed the bridge and performed the opening ceremony on 25th April 1836.

The original toll-house stood at the southern end of the bridge at the entrance to what is now the station car park, but in about 1902 this was replaced by a new **Toll House** at the north end, next to River House.

On December 2nd 1936, one hundred years after its construction, and after a long campaign by the Parish Council and local residents, the bridge was acquired by the County Council and freed from tolls. (See plaques at the bridge ends).

Little of the original bridge of 1836 remains, and the timber superstructure of the old bridge was replaced by steel and timber in the late 1890's after the waggonway rails had been removed, and again in 1942, 1960 and 2007 the decking was reconstructed. The stone supporting piers have also had to be rebuilt and their foundations protected several times – the last being during the floods of 1957 when the bridge was in danger of collapse.



OS 6' (1864). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

WP23

(54.97591; -1.81591)



Former Toll House (A Curtis 2018) - spot the Puffing Billy weather vane.

Pass the former Bridge Toll House at the north side of the bridge and head back into the Wylam car park where you started. Either complete your walk here or continue on the eastern loop via George Stephenson's Cottage and The Rift.

WP24

(54.97670; -1.81611)

The former **North Wylam station yard** is now laid out as a car park.

In 1881 it was used for displaying 16 'modern locomotives' which took part in a procession from Newcastle to Wylam as part of the celebration to mark the centenary of Stephenson's birth, and this event was perhaps the highlight in the story of the Scotswood-Newburn-Wylam railway.

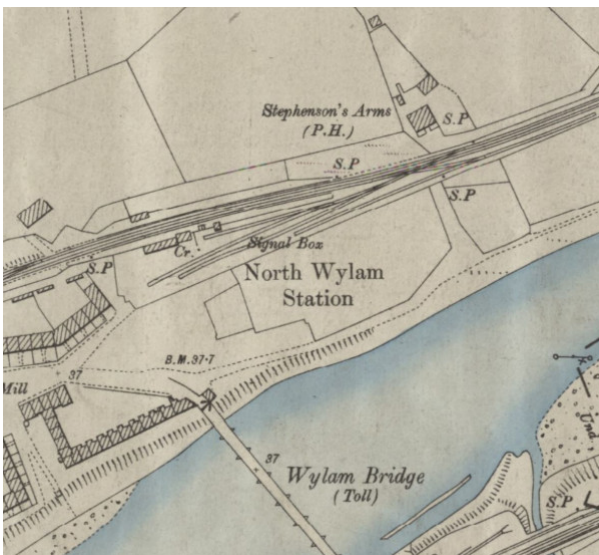


Remains of North Wylam Station platform.

North Wylam was the most westerly station on the Scotswood, Newburn & Wylam Railway. It was opened in 1876 and closed in 1968. The site was cleared in January 1975 leaving few visible remains. It is now a grassy open space adjacent to the car park of the Tyne Riverside Park and the former track ('Wylam Waggonway'), a popular walking and cycle route.



North Wylam Railway Station in 1950 (J W Armstrong in Wylam Globe No 40, May 1986)



OS 25' (1898). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

From the old north station yard car park, follow the track of the former waggonway/railway eastwards.

WP25

(54.97695; -1.81399)



Former Stephenson's Arms public house (A Curtis 2011)

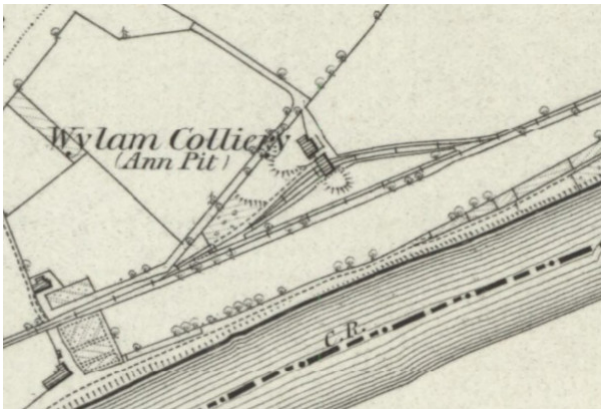
Stephenson's Arms (now a private house) was at in the 1890s one of six pubs in the village. It is located just east of the former North Wylam Railway Station.

WP26

(54.97772; -1.81075)

Among the outbuildings of Bythorne Farm on your left is the site of the former **North Wylam Colliery**.

This pit, the last to work in the village, was once known as the 'Ann Pit' and later as the 'James Pit'. It closed in 1933.



WP27

(54.97925; -1.80473)

George Stephenson's Cottage



HIGH-STREET HOUSE, WYLAM. [By R. P. Leitch.]

George Stephenson's Cottage - engraving by R P Leitch in 'The Life of George Stephenson' by Samuel Smiles (1868).

Stephenson's Cottage is the birthplace of Wylam's most famous son – George Stephenson.

Officially known as High Streethouse, from its position alongside what had at one time been the old post road between

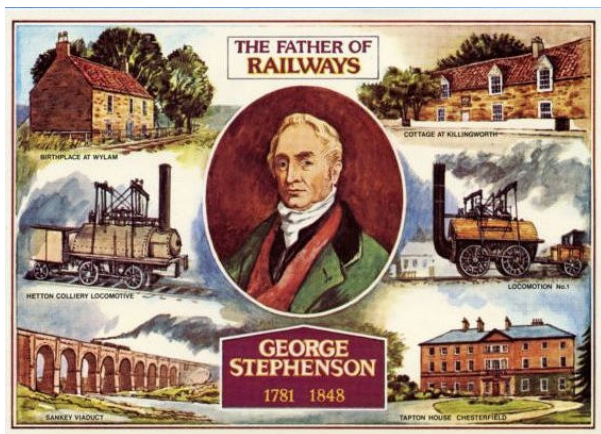
Wylam and Newburn, this small stone cottage, with its red pantiled roof, is where Stephenson was born on 9th June 1781.

At that time, there were four families living in the cottage, each occupying a single room, and the Stephensons, who had six children, lived in one of the ground floor rooms.

The family left Wylam in 1789, when George was only eight years old, some twenty three years before the famous locomotive experiments were carried out in the village by Hedley and his colleagues. The cottage is now owned by the National Trust.



The engraved image on the plaque is of his successful steam locomotive, The Rocket, built in 1829.



Immediately beyond the cottage, turn left through the gateway and follow the track leading behind the back of the building.

The oak tree on the right was planted by the Lord Mayor of Newcastle in June 1881, to mark the Stephenson centenary, and new trees were planted alongside the waggonway in 1981, the bicentenary of his birth.

(54.98054; -1.80659)



East from here, towards Heddon-on-the-Wall, lies **Close House**, a fine country mansion built in 1779. The Close House Estate was owned by the Bewicke family (no relation to Thomas Bewick, the famous local wood engraver).



At the time when the early locomotives were first brought into use, Calverley Bewicke, (over whose land a wayleave for the waggonway had previously been obtained when horses hauled the wagons) threatened a legal action to prevent the use of 'monster' locomotives, which he regarded as a serious and dangerous nuisance. Fortunately for the history of locomotive development, the dispute was satisfactorily resolved!

In 1906, Close House was leased to Sir James Knott (ship-owner), for a period up to 1929 when he moved to Jersey following the death of two of his sons in the First World War.

Now follow the track north up to The Rift on the brow of the hill.

WP29

(54.98274; -1.81499)

The Rift Farm is a range of stone farm buildings, some with their distinctive stone archways in traditional Northumbrian style. They have been attractively renovated.



Passing the old farm buildings, turn left just beyond the cottage on your right and walk around the perimeter of the paddock and down through the wooded Rift Dene and back towards the village.

WP30

(54.98136; -1.81754)

Beyond the dene, the scrub covered mound on the left hides a few foundations of the winding engine of the old **Hope Pit**, known locally as the Chuckee Pit. This pit had been worked periodically during the 18th and 19th centuries, but eventually closed in 1893-4.

The embankment which carried the waggonway linking this pit to the station sidings ran down from here towards the river.



Site of Hope Pit (A Curtis 2018)

Continue across the field, through the gate and along the path bordering the housing estate.

WP31

(54.98083; -1.81875)



Pillbox north of Wylam village (A Curtis 2011)

Spot the **concrete pillbox** in the arable field just north of the houses that front onto the footpath. It is one of the few visible remnants of the Second World War when it was manned by Wylam Home Guard.

Further north still, on private grounds and hidden by trees are Holeyn Hall and Oakwood House.

John Dobson, the famous Newcastle architect, was involved in designing substantial extensions to **Holeyn Hall** in 1858, only six years after it was built for Edward James, a wealthy Newcastle lead merchant, who had previously rented Wylam Hall from the Blacketts.

In 1894, Charles Parsons (who subsequently became internationally famous as the inventor of the steam turbine) purchased Holeyn Hall and carried out several of his engineering experiments in the adjoining workshops and parkland. During the First World War he made Holeyn Hall available as a Convalescent Hospital for the treatment of wounded soldiers. He owned the Hall until his death in 1931, but spent much of his time in later years at his estate at Ray, near Kirkwhelpington.



Holeyn Hall (A Curtis 2009)

Oakwood House lies to the south of Holeyn Hall and is well screened by trees. A Georgian building, it was the home of various members of the Blackett family during the 19th century, although they also owned (and occasionally occupied) both Wylam Hall and Wylam Cottage.



Oakwood House (A Curtis 2013)

WP32

(54.97907; -1.82181)

Beyond the houses, the path crosses an open landscaped area, **Engine Dene**.

It was from near here that brick earth was extracted during the Victorian era and brick makers were employed by the Blackett Estate to manufacture bricks and tiles for use in the village. The rate of payment was equivalent to 4p for every hundred bricks produced! One man could make about 1,000 per day.



Engine Dene (A Curtis 2018)

When Septimus Forster, a Northumberland coal-owner, leased the **Wylam Hills Colliery** during the 1870's, he was given permission to construct a waggonway from the colliery (which lay to the north-west of the village, behind Wylam Hills Farm) down this dene to the station, but there is no record of this ever having been done. Although this colliery closed at the time of the First World War, coal was being extracted from nearby Horsley Wood during the 1920's.



OS 6' (1864). Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland.

WP33

(54.97862; -1.82274)

As a short diversion you can cross the dene, past the end of Algernon Terrace and join Holeyn Hall Road.

You will be opposite **Wylam Hills Farm**, which was until the 1990's an active dairy farm. The farmhouse remains a fine solid stone building, built about 1858 and typical of many Northumbrian farmhouses of that period, now at the centre of a new housing development.



Wylam Hills Farm from Church Road (A Curtis 2015)

One of the village's more unusual past industries, a **Patent Lead Shot Manufactory** was located in what was the stock yard of the farm. It was presumably because of the Blackett family's close associations with lead mining in Allendale and Weardale that the industry was introduced into the village.

Under an agreement dated 18th November 1799, between Christopher Blackett, Joseph Locke, a Newcastle merchant and Richard Welton of Newcastle, a glass-blower, Welton was to be paid 23/- (£1.15) per week for seven years for his services as a shot-maker in the manufacture of lead shot at Wylam. This document still survives in the

Northumberland Archive at Woodhorn.

A unique feature of this industry was that, instead of building an expensive shot tower, use was made of a disused pit shaft for casting the shot – an ingenious and cheaper alternative.

Little is known about the early history of the firm of Locke, Blackett & Co., which was founded in 1797 but the local directories show that they remained in Wylam until at least 1834, and were important lead merchants in Newcastle. The firm remained independent until 1936 and became part of the Associated Lead Manufacturers group in 1950.

As late as 1877, a Newcastle merchant, Robert Lampen, had the lease of the 'Shot Pit' in Wylam, but there is no record of shot being produced after that date.

Return the same way back to Engine Dene and work your way back through the housing estate using a network of footpaths and streets. If you want a simpler route to that shown, return using The Dene, pass another open area on your left, and turn left onto Falcon Terrace, just before you reach the disused railway line.

WP34

(54.97661; -1.81774)

Note the fine stone houses of **Falcon Terrace** and, above the road, the former village school, now occupied by the Library, Playgroup and a small Railway Museum.

The latter was opened in in 1981, the bi-centenary of the birth of George Stephenson, to commemorate Wylam's unique contribution to railway history. There are displays on the famous local railway pioneers, George Stephenson ('the Father of the Railways'), William Hedley (manager of the Wylam Colliery and designer of the historic locomotives, Puffing Billy and Wylam Dilly), Timothy Hackworth (colliery blacksmith) and Nicholas Wood (colliery and early railway engineer). There are working scale model locomotives of Wylam Dilly and Puffing Billy).



The Falcon Centre (A Curtis 2011)

In the mid-nineteenth century **Wylam Ironworks** occupied the site later used for the school. Few signs of the iron

industry remain, although lumps of the waste clinker ('scoria') can be seen in the retaining walls to gardens on both sides of Main Road through the village.

The ironworks was established by Thompson Brothers in 1836. The brothers were the two sons of Benjamin Thompson, a director of the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Company who also had an interest in various industrial enterprises in the North East. He lived at Wylam Hall for several years while his sons managed the ironworks. The firm built steam locomotives at Wylam and produced six engines (each costing over £1,500) for the Newcastle and Carlisle Railway Company between 1838 and 1841.

Thompsons left in 1844 and although Bell Brothers took over the works, the discovery of iron ore in the Cleveland Hills in the late 1840's and the subsequent development of ironworks around Middlesbrough (Bells themselves established an ironworks at Port Clarence on the Tees in 1853) meant the death of small and comparatively isolated ironworks like Wylam, and the local works closed in 1864.

The single blast furnace at the works stood on the line of the road, immediately outside the school playground, and behind this were rows of beehive coke ovens set into the bank. Several of the disused ovens remained until the school was built in 1909-10.

There remains a large piece of blast furnace slag on the grass just round the corner on The Dene, in front of Swindale Cottages.

Return from here to the car-park.

