



DURHAM
In Time

Annfield Plain - a short history

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General Background History

The place-name Annfield Plain is unusual in not having the characteristics of the early, mainly Scandinavian, languages which gave us most County Durham place-names. The earliest references are to Anfield Plane. The Annfield part is thought simply to mean “the fields of An”, with An having been a man’s name in perhaps pre-Conquest times (1). The Plane came from an inclined plane on the Stanhope and Tyne Railway of 1834. The considerable gradient along Loud Hill, on the southern slope of the 1,000 feet Pontop Pike, was too steep for early locomotives to cope with, and so it was operated as an inclined plane, on which heavy full wagons travelling down the slope hauled lighter empty wagons back up, with the assistance of a stationary steam-powered winding engine. This became known as the Annfield Engine because it was near Annfield House, a building which had been in existence at least by 1778 (2). The word Plain, adopted from the mid-19th century, was more appropriate to the plateau or moorland roundabout.

The settlement of Annfield Plain grew up as a result of coal-mining activity, which had given its name to the area as Collierley, from “Collier Lea”, “lea” meaning a meadow (3). The older spelling of this place-name is Collierly, which is marked on a mid-18th century map of County Durham, as is “Penthorp” (Pontop) Pike, but Annfield Plain is not yet in existence (4). An early-19th century directory still does not include Annfield Plain, but gives Collierly as a township which includes the two adjoining villages of Dipton and Pontop, “and a number of coal mines, from which it





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derives its name” (5). By the time of the 1851 Population Census, the only entries which use the name are under Annfield Plane, Annfield Engine and Annfield Farm.

The area was originally part of the ecclesiastical parish of All Saints, Lanchester, until the new parish of St. Thomas, Collierley was created (6). A new parish church was built in 1840, designed by G. Jackson in the Early English style. The church was restored in 1886 (7). Another new parish for Annfield Plain, dedicated to St. Aidan, was created in 1914 (8). So anyone researching the residents of this area might have to consult parish registers for All Saints’ Lanchester from 1560 to 1841, St. Thomas’ Collierley 1841-1914, and St. Aidan’s Annfield Plain from 1914. Later material might also be found in the records of a number of nonconformist chapels established in the area.

The 1st edition of the 6 inch Ordnance Survey map published in 1858 shows Annfield Plain as a small settlement on the Newcastle-Durham turnpike road. The small amount of development already there straddles the Pontop and South Shields Branch of the North Eastern Railway line, and includes Melbourne Buildings and Greenwell Lodge, the Railway Inn, and Wesleyan and Primitive Methodist chapels. There are railway sidings at Bankfoot and Pontop Coke Ovens. A short distance to the north-west along the turnpike road is “Catch Gate”, consisting of only a few buildings, including two public houses, the Smiths’ Arms and the Crown & Thistle. Just to the north of Annfield Plain lies the small hamlet of West Kyo. The word “kyo” means cows. John Buddle, the famous colliery viewer and mining engineer, was born at Kyo in 1774, and later went on to work with the Marquess of Londonderry in the development of Seaham Harbour (9). Further east lies Oxhill, a small hamlet with the Bull public house.





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By the later 19th century, the village of Annfield Plain is mentioned as part of Collierley, with a wide range of commercial facilities in the area, including five public houses, several shops, a surgeon, chemist and druggist and a clock and watchmaker, as well as several colliery officials (10). The second edition of the Ordnance Survey map, published in 1898, shows considerably more development at Annfield Plain. In addition to the original housing, now called Pontop Rows, there is a new area to the south of the turnpike road called Wood Rows, the houses presumably being constructed of wood, and Lizzie Square further west. There is a school at the southern end of the settlement, and a reservoir to the west. From the new Annfield Plain Junction on what is now called the Annfield Plain branch of the North Eastern Railway, a new branch railway line provides a railway station before heading south-west. Catchgate is now built up, with a Methodist Chapel, school and the Bethany Christian Lay Church. To the east of Annfield Plain there is now development along Shieldrow Lane, and at Oxhill there is now a Methodist Chapel, and the public house name has changed to the Ox Inn.

A trades directory (11) which is almost exactly contemporary with this map gives a detailed description of Annfield Plain generally and also details of individual facilities. "Annfield Plain is a population village, situated about ten and a half miles south-west from Newcastle, and contains many large and handsome shops, and several good inns. It is well lighted with gas, and supplied with water by the Consett Water Company." It describes the Wesleyan Chapel as being a good stone building, in the Early English style, erected in 1853 but rebuilt in the late 1860s and renovated in 1890, able to seat 320 people, and with a Sunday School added in 1887. The Primitive Methodist Chapel had been rebuilt in 1870 and could seat 250 people. There was a Board School, originally built as a 'British' school and enlarged in 1878.





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Catchgate also had several Board schools, a small iron United Methodist Free Church and a plain brick Christian Lay Church.

The 1921 edition of the map shows Annfield Plain continuing to develop. The turnpike road is now called West Road, the Catchgate road Front Street The Wood Rows have been renamed Clavering Place, Northgate has been built, also Mitchell Terrace, and Lizzie Square has been rebuilt as Derwent Terrace. East of the railway line there are several new terraces, with two new chapels and a school, and the school on Station Road has been extended. There is also an extensive area of Allotment Gardens. Along Shieldrow Lane, now called New Kyo, there are many new terraces, with a Miners' Hall, club, school and chapels. To the south-west of Annfield Plain there is now a football ground. Other leisure facilities, including two cinemas, the Regal and the Picture Theatre, and a billiards hall, are listed in 1938 (12). Also mentioned is the lending library - this was the handsome Edwardian Baroque-style public library erected in North Road, Catchgate in 1908 (13).

Mining History

Coal mining in the Annfield Plain area began with the working of shallow pits in Tudor times (14). A farm which included coal mines was sold in 1602 (15). Mines on Pontop Pike and South Moor were opened in 1763 and 1759 respectively (16), then the scale of coal mining increased in the early-19th century. The future of the area's industrial history was determined when Annfield Plain became roughly the half-way point along the very early railway line constructed by the Stanhope and Tyne Railroad Company to connect Weardale with South Shields in 1834. The Stanhope and Tyne public house commemorates that bit of history. A block of six limekilns was





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built for the company in 1833 alongside the line at East Castle, the limestone arrived by rail and local coal was used as the fuel for the kilns (17).

The 1st edition of the 6 inch Ordnance Survey map published in 1858 shows the Pontop and Bankfoot coke ovens very close to Annfield Plain. The nearest evidence of actual mining is “Stewart Pit (Coal)” a short distance to the north. To the north-east, with a firebrick manufactory and coke ovens, is South Tanfield Colliery, which was opened in 1837 (18). To the east of Annfield Plain lies Southmoor Colliery (Quakinghouse Pit). By 1879 (19) the principal collieries in the Collierley area were said to be South Pontop, South Tanfield, South Down, Pontop and Lily Top, with several coke ovens.

By the 2nd edition of the Ordnance Survey map in 1898, immediately west of Annfield Plain there are the South Derwent Colliery and Willie Pit. Towards the east, South Moor Colliery has been extended and connected by the Morrison Pit Wagonway to South Tanfield Colliery, which has been enlarged, at Oxhill. By the 3rd edition in 1921, the Pontop coke ovens are described as disused. South Tanfield Colliery, and its coke ovens, are also disused.

(1) Ian Stuart Robinson, *The Place-Names of County Durham*, (1998).

(2) Thomas T. Ayer, *Annfield Plain in old picture postcards*, (European Library), no.20; Iain Watson, *Why Pity Me?*, (Durham County Council); Eilert Ekwall, *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Place-Names*, (1977).

(3) Thomas T. Ayer, *Annfield Plain in old picture postcards*, (European Library), Introduction.





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- (4) *A Modern Map of Durham Drawn from the latest Surveys*, 1766.
- (5) Parson and White's *Directory of County Durham*, (1828), p.172.
- (6) William Whellan & Co., *History, Topography and Directory of the County Palatine of Durham*, (1856), p.889.
- (7) Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: County Durham*, (1983).
- (8) Durham County Record Office, list of ecclesiastical records.
- (9) William Whellan & Co., *History, Topography and Directory of the County Palatine of Durham*, (1856), p.890.
- (10) *Post Office Directory* (1879), pp.42-3.
- (11) Francis Whellan & Co., *History, Topography and Directory of the County Palatine of Durham*, (1894), p.1227.
- (12) *Kelly's Directory of Durham and Northumberland* (1938), pp.55-56.
- (13) Nikolaus Pevsner, *The Buildings of England: County Durham*, (1983).
- (14) Durham County Council, Sites and Monuments Record.
- (15) Thomas T. Ayer, *Annfield Plain in old picture postcards*, (European Library), Introduction.
- (16) DCRO, *Durham Collieries*, (2001).





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(17) Durham County Council, Sites and Monuments Record.

(18) DCRO, *Durham Collieries*, (2001).

(19) Kelly's *Post Office Directory* (1879), p.42.

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