



DURHAM  
*In Time*

## Houghton-le-Spring - A Short History

by Jane Hatcher

### General Background History

The place-name comes from two Old English words, 'hoh' meaning a hill-spur and 'tun', so the name 'Houghton' means a village by the hill. The addition 'le spring' comes from it being held in 1311 by Albreda, the widow of Lord Henry Spring, rather than it describing the settlement as being by a spring, although that has led to misunderstandings because being beside a spring became a more fashionable interpretation in the 19th century.

Houghton-le-Spring was originally a large village with the ancient parish church of St Michael with the nearby Keping Grammar School founded in 1574, the Davenport Almshouses of 1688 and some handsome Georgian houses. The famous Durham white ox was bred in the parish. The village was not directly affected by industrialisation until quite late. Slater's Directory of 1848 (1) says "There is no business of any consequence carried on in the place except extensive iron works belong to Mr George Hopper which give employment to a great number of hands."

The 1st edition of the 6" Ordnance Survey map, published in 1856, shows a number of interesting features north of the old centre, a Union Workhouse, Presbyterian and Baptist chapels, also Houghton-le-Spring Iron Works, a steam corn mill and gasworks. To the north-west are Houghton Tile Sheds, and Flint Mill further west. By 1879 there was a large brewery in the town (2).

By the time the 2nd edition of the 6" map was published in 1898, housing had been built on the site of the Iron Works. New development to the north-west included housing, two inns and a school. The Tile sheds have gone, and a new hamlet has appeared called Sunnside,





## DURHAM *In Time*

further to the north-west, which also includes a small chapel which seems to be held in a cottage.

By 1910 (3) Houghton-le-Spring had 5 chapels and a Roman Catholic Church, and Infectious Diseases Hospital, also an electric tram service. The 1921 edition of the map shows a lot of new housing north of the Workhouse, and also to the north-west in a new area called Grasswell. Near Houghton Quarry there is now St. Mark's Mission Church, and Sunnyside has a purpose-built chapel. Later trades directories show the town continuing to grow and offering an increasing range of facilities.

### **Mining History**

The 1848 Directory states that "The mines around here produce the finest sorts of coal, and which in the London market obtain the highest prices." Among the commercial entries is a special section devoted to colliery agents, viewers and engineers, containing 14 entries (4). The 1856 map shows Houghton Colliery, on the terminus of the Houghton Branch of the Lambton Railway. The site of the former Betty Pit is marked further to the north-west. The commercial entries in the 1879 Directory show that Colliery Row is clearly one of the main streets of the town. By the 1898 map, Houghton Colliery, now called Houghton Pit, is much enlarged, with extensive development around railway sidings.

(1) Slater's Directory of Durham (1848) p.216.

(2) Post Office Directory (1879), p.145.

(3) Kelly's Directory of Durham and Northumberland (1910), pp. 268-9

(4) As (1).





# DURHAM

*In Time*

**Note:** The views that are expressed on the website are the contributors own and not necessarily those of Durham County Council. This is a community website so no guarantee can be given of the historical accuracy of individual contributions

