

Wylam Evening Walk - after parking in the (free of charge) country side park car across the bridge on the north side of the Tyne, meet in the Station car park in Wylam (post code NE41 8HR) OS Explorer sheet 316 grid ref 120645 which can be reached by train from Newcastle. The 6 mile route will follow the Tyne to Newburn bridge via the south bank and return via the north bank.



The earliest record of Wylam is in 1158 which records the settlement as belonging to the priors at Tynemouth Priory. Guy de Balliol, Lord of Bywell, had given the land to Tynemouth and which they owed until dissolution in 16th century. In 1659 Chrisopher Blackett purchased the Wylam estate and the Blackett family continued ownership until the third quarter of 20th century.

The prosperous period for Wylam was the late 18th century when the Blacketts developed the colliery which was thriving and an Ironworks, leadshot manufactory and brewery were all established. In 1864 the ironworks closed followed four years later by the colliery as did the brewery in the 1870s. The decline in the village changed its character and by the early 20th century it was mainly residential.

Wylam has links to several famous engineers, the walk will pass the house where George Stephenson was born in June 1781, whilst Timorothy Hackworth's father was foreman blacksmith at the colliery and his son was born in the village in December 1786. Hackworth together with William Hedley and Jonathan Forster were involved with the development of locomotive engines at the colliery, the most famous being Puffing Billy followed by the Wylam Dilly which are both housed in museums in London and Edinburgh respectively.

The Newcastle & Carlisle Railway Company formed in 1825 and built the railway on the south bank of the Tyne which opened in 1834 between Blaydon and Hexham with passengers being carried the following year. The line was extended in stages, in 1837 the line ran between Gateshead and Carlisle. A line between Scotswood and a Newcastle terminal opened in 1839. It did not extend to the Central Station until 1851 following it's opening in 1850.

The Boathouse pub beside the station in Wylam on the south bank of the Tyne is noted for it's extensive selection of real ales and its proximity to the railway making it a good night out!

The walk leaves the station carpark and follows the south bank of the Tyne in an easterly direction downstream to Newburn Bridge. Take care because the walk is shared with a popular cycle route, the Keelmans Way. Shortly after leaving Wylam the path borders the 18 hole Ryton Golf Club course established in 1891. The club has an odd address which is also marked on the OS map - Doctors Stanner's.

Watch out for information boards along the route that provide information about wildlife, history and industry.

A section of the path is diverted beside the golf course because a fire started last summer and is still burning within the turf.

As the path follows the Tyne downstream it will be noted that the river is tidal at this point even though at Ryton it is 17 miles from the sea.

After the golf course, the railway runs close to the path which becomes sandwiched between the river and railway. As the path leaves the railway, still close to the river, Ryton Willows is reached, managed by Gateshead Council. It consists of woodland, grassland and ponds which are Sites of Special Scientific Interest consisting of flora and fauna.

Between Station Bank and the curling pond close to the path is some brickwork which is the only remains of an ice rink last used at the start of WW2 by the Newcastle Caledonian Curling Club. In Edwardian times the main part of the site was used as a mini funfair with "shuggy boats" and cafe together with boats for hire on the ponds.

On 28th August 1640 the Battle of Newburn Ford took place on the site which was an important event in the lead up to the English Civil War. Information plaques along the route explain events in detail.

The route climbs to the road and crosses Newburn Bridge which was opened in 1893 with a span of 145m. For the first 50 years or so it was a toll bridge until bought by Newcastle City Council. From Roman times the Tyne was forded here as it was the easterly point where it was possible to ford and there have been numerous ferries operating around Newburn. Remnants of the ferry landings can be seen a short distance before the bridge.

After crossing the bridge the walk turns left, upstream or westerly if you prefer, now following the Hadrian Wall Footpath. Still close to the river a sports complex is crossed and a slip used by water sport enthusiasts. As with the "out route" this is a popular cycle route so take care.

It is also a popular rowing centre and several boat houses will be seen on both sides of the river near Newburn Bridge.

The route is simple as it follows the river closely, eventually leaving the bridleway/cycle way and following a footpath along the edge of fields/woodland. There is also the option to follow the signed cycle route known as route 72 and Hadrian's Cycleway which is a made up path on this stretch, both ending in Wylam. Short sections of the path have been eroded by the river during recent storms but it is still safe to walk.

Prior to becoming a cycle path it was yet another waggonway which in turn became the Scotswood, Newburn and Wylam railway, a 6.5 mile line that linked with the Newcastle-Carlisle line just west of Wylam via an impressive bridge but not visited in this walk. The railway was built between 1871 and 1876 and known as the north Wylam loop. Dr Beeching's report in 1963 scheduled the railway between Scotswood and Wylam for closure but was rejected and it was the Scotswood, Newburn and Wylam line that closed in 1968.

To the north of the cycle route is Close House which was formally owned by Newcastle University and used as a sports complex comprising of two cricket grounds, rugby, hockey and football. It also included an 18 hole golf course although some holes were also rugby pitches!

In 14th C Close House was the site of a monastic house. A later house on the site was sold by the Read family to Robert Bewicke a merchant adventurer who was Sheriff of Newcastle in 1615 and mayor in 1628 and 1637. The estate remained in the family for 300 years.

The house was the home of Calverley Bewicke who was high sheriff of Northumberland in 1782 and MP for Winchelsea 1806 to 1815. In 1779 he demolished the house and replaced it with the current imposing mansion house.

From 1906 the house was let to tenants and sold in 1957. It was in the university's hands from 1960 until it was purchased by Graham Wylie in 2004 who opened it as a hotel in 2005. In 2014 he closed the hotel and converted it into his mansion home. He has developed the grounds as a golf complex, designed by Lee Westwood which has hosted PGA Seniors tournaments.

The Hadrian Wall Path departs our route and heads north to Heddon on the Wall not long after reaching the golf course.

Beyond the golf course and adjacent to the cycle route lies the house where George Stephenson was born, the family living in a single room within the four room house. It is now owned by the National Trust and open to the public including a tea room.

The final section of the river path is closed due to flood damage from the December storm and it is necessary to complete the walk, when directed, along the cycle path.

Martin Forster

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