

Welcome to historic Bishop Auckland. Throughout the town there are a number of information boards, linked by walks, bringing to life our cultural and natural heritage, from the Romans to Stan Laurel. We hope that this series of leaflets describing the walks and points of interest will help you enjoy discovering County Durham's "best kept secret".

Bishop Auckland Town Trails



A Saxon Stroll

A Stroll Through Escomb and Surrounding Area

A stroll through the village of Escomb and the surrounding countryside is both delightful and rewarding, with its ancient church, a rich and diverse wildlife and its industrial and mining heritage. Escomb Community Centre, and its convenient car park, offers the visitor an obvious starting point. The reclaimed land to the west was once the site of The George Pit. The path from the Community Centre will take you down to the village where, for lovers of history and architecture, Escomb Church offers a rare delight. The restored Saxon Church is believed to date back to 675 AD, although there is some evidence that a church or holy place existed on the site at an earlier date.

The Church was built of stone from Binchester Roman Fort, and is one of Northern Europe's finest examples of early Christian architecture. Visitors wishing to enter the Church can obtain a key from nearby residents - the key holder's address can be found on a notice by the church. From the Church, the path leads towards the river. The gravel pits support a wide variety of wildlife, and the path along the river offers some fine views. The walk returns through some lovely meadows with views of the County Durham countryside.

The George Pit

There is little evidence in Escomb that a thriving colliery ever existed; yet a century ago it dominated the village. Durham County has a long mining history. Coal is mentioned in the Boldon Book (11th and 12th Century). A passage reads "A toft and croft of four acres was held by a collier on condition he provided coal for the cart-smith of Coundon". This is probably the first recorded evidence of coal mining in the country. Whellan's 1894 directory of County Durham states that the output of the George Pit was about 700 tons per day, which was almost entirely turned into coke, giving employment to over 500 men and boys. Mining was ever a dangerous occupation, and the records for the George Pit show 48 fatalities.

The pit closed in 1920. When coal mining was its peak, there were 150 pits and 47 cokeworks in the Durham Coalfield. As they closed they were often abandoned and became eyesores in need of reclamation. The colliery site and pit heap in Escomb were handed over to the local Parish Council by its then owner Sir Henry Stobart in the form of a trust, which stipulated that the land was to be used for recreational activity. Following reclamation, there is no visible sign of the George Pit in Escomb.

A swing bridge was built across the River Wear to help miners working on the north side of the river to get to work. It was built by a colliery blacksmith. The bridge fell into disrepair in the 1930's and the foundations on the Escomb side were finally washed away in the late 1980's.

Look around you:

1. We recommend you visit Escomb's Saxon Church before walking towards the lakes formed from gravel pits.
2. Look for orchids on the paths down to the River Wear. As you reach the river, turn left and follow it toward "Paradise".
3. Enjoy the riverside views, and look out for kingfishers.
4. Peek through the trees at the river as it tumbles down the weir.
5. Heading towards Witton Park, the path takes you back towards Escomb via some lovely meadows. Look out for the wonderful flowers and grasses.
6. The walk through the meadows offers some fine views. Watch out for a small black moth - "the coal-sweeper" - aptly named for this former mining area.

Kingfisher

