

The Ouseburn Valley in 1891



Queen Victoria (1837-1901)



'Newcastle seems always over hung with a cloud of smoke, and the precipitous river banks are crowded with old tumble-down houses many of which, dreary, miserable tenements as they are, cluster up to the railway sides.'

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, 16 JULY 1887



Newcastle Quayside

The Victorian era – changing times in Britain

- 1847** Factory working conditions for women and children improved by law
- 1848** Public health improved through providing clean water
- 1851** The Great Exhibition in Hyde Park
- 1870** First FA Cup Competition
- 1884** Steam turbine invented
- 1891** Free primary education for all children
- 1895** First cinema opened

What was living in Newcastle like in 1891?

Victorian Newcastle was a city of contrasts. During Victoria's reign a substantial and prosperous middle class was established in new suburbs such as Jesmond and Heaton. Wealthy entrepreneurs and landowners like William Armstrong built fine mansions, taking advantage of all the latest inventions such as electricity and piped water. Lord Armstrong even had his own private parkland, Jesmond Dene, which he donated to the city in 1883.

But close by the Dene in that same year thousands of people were living in deep poverty and great squalor. In the Ouseburn Valley, for example, the Dowson family of eight lived in three cramped rooms with no indoor sanitation and little prospect of well paid work, despite government initiatives to improve public health and welfare.

What changed in Newcastle over Victoria's reign?

Newcastle's changing population: 65,892 in 1841; 246,905 in 1901

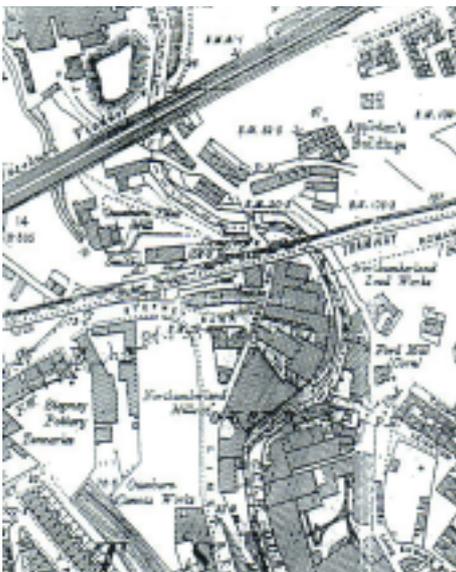
- Candles and coal fires → gas lights and electricity
(1880 Swan demonstrates the light bulb in Newcastle)
- Horses and carts → trams and the first 'horseless carriages'
(1879 trams introduced to Newcastle)
- Stage coaches and wagon ways → steam powered railways
(1839 new railway line between Newcastle and North Shields)
- Sailing ships of wood → iron steamships
(1852 first iron steamship built on the Tyne)
- Cholera epidemics → cleaner water
(1848 new reservoirs opened and first public baths and wash house built in Newcastle)
- Children at work → children in school
(new schools opened in 1870s e.g. Elswick, Byker)
- Dangerous conditions at work → government inspections
(1833 first factory inspectors employed)



The river from Ouseburn Bridge

'Slaughter houses, coal wharves and dwelling houses of not the most desirable appearance environ the burn... Just above the bridge the keels may be seen lying and delivering coal in carts while horses stand impatiently in the cold water. In the cold water too, we see ragged groups of people with baskets and bags, wading and groping with their hands for coals which has fallen overboard. Where Lime Street now is, on the right bank used to stand the lime kilns by the waterside, and opposite where the engine works are, used to be a little boat builders' yard, while a little higher up gardens ran to the quay wall of the burn and their trees hung over the edge.'

ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS, 16 JULY 1887



The Ouseburn Valley in 1895



Byker Bridge

What was living in the Ouseburn Valley like in 1891?

Ouseburn in the early years of Victoria's reign had already begun to develop as an industrial quarter. Down by the Tyne the glass industry established two centuries earlier was giving way to other industries able to take advantage of the tidal flow up the river and the proximity of ships off-loading ballast, consisting in many cases of useful materials such as flint and sand.

Further upstream, new industries established themselves as the century wore on, many of them dirty and dangerous but profitable, using inventions such as steam engines to power their machinery. Flax spinning and sail making gave way, as shipping changed, to industries such as flour milling and pottery making. Two lead works sprang up to produce white powdered lead, used to thicken paint. Linked by old Ouseburn Road winding through the valley to Jesmond, these concerns employed men and women desperate to work despite the dangerous substance they were handling. Others equally desperate worked in filthy tanneries or in the numerous stables and firms of carters used to deliver goods to and from the quayside. They must have watched in awe as first a rail and then a road bridge was constructed on the heights above them, connecting the eastern suburbs with the city.

Early in the new century a massive landfill project would cut off the lower valley forever and bury the Burn and the Ouseburn leadworks beneath the city's rubbish, presaging the end of the valley's dynamic growth. But before then Ouseburn would have its own famous names to boast of, from Maling's pottery exporting throughout the world to Maynard's toffee factory, one of several confectionary businesses established in the area. Some employers, like the Maling family, were enlightened; some cared little for their workforces. For as the census and maps of the time testify, there were plenty of men, women and children in the area's teeming tenements to take over from those moving on or away, for whatever reason.

What changed in the Ouseburn Valley over Victoria's reign?

Maling's first pottery established in 1815.

By 1900, 1,000 people employed in two new Maling factories.

- Crossing the river → crossing the valley
(1839 Ouseburn Viaduct, 1878 Byker Bridge and Glasshouse Bridge)
- Small boatyards → huge shipping wharves
(1840 New Quay built near Ouseburn mouth)
- Windmills to steam power
(1848 steam powered flax mill on Lime Street)
- Glasshouses → potteries, tanneries
(16 potteries in mid to late 19th century Ouseburn)
- Charity schools → state schools
(1893 Ouseburn School opened)
- Cottages → tenements
(1891 Cut Bank, Lime Street and Ouse Street densely populated)