

THE EASTERN SUBURBS

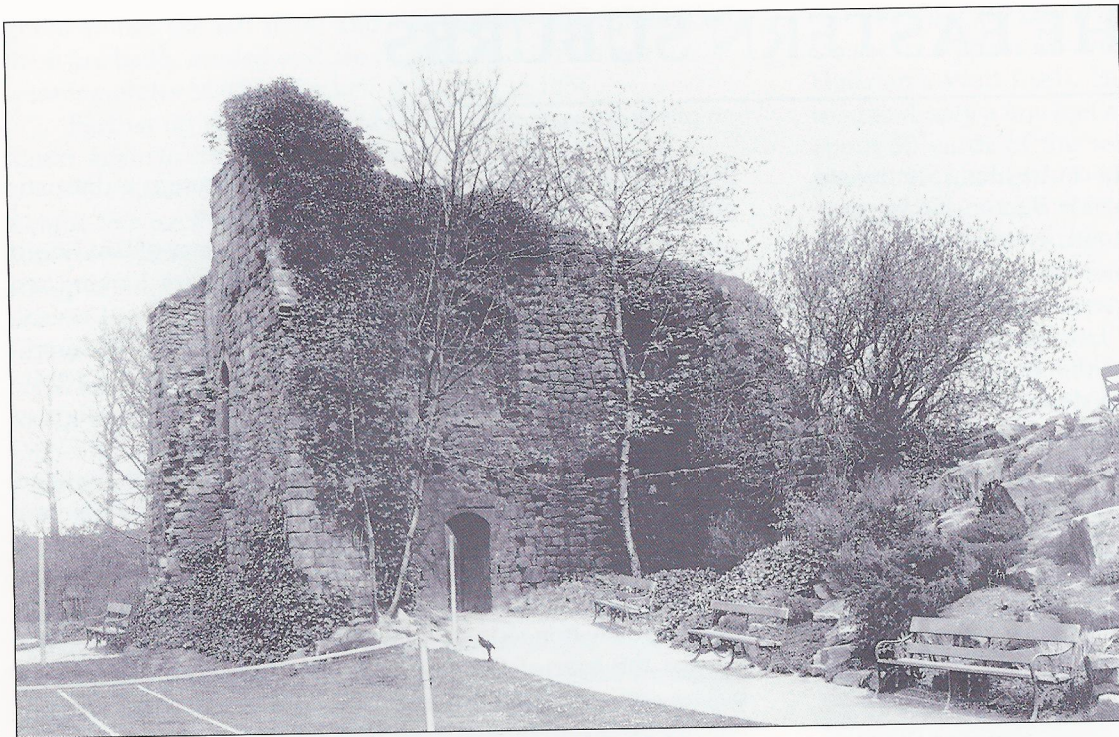
Heading eastward from the city centre along Sandyford road, there is a bus stop outside Benton House near the corner with Portland Road. A small shrubbery surrounded by a low brick wall stands close behind, and set into this wall at just above pavement level are some old dressed stones bearing the legend "Lambert's Leap". These stones are relics of an old stone bridge that once stood nearby, straddling a small stream, in a deep dene, which has been long since covered over. As would be expected, this unusual inscription has a fascinating old tale behind it. In September 1759 young Cuthbert Lambert, a customs officer and the son of a famous Newcastle physician, was riding his horse along Sandyford Lane. As he approached the bridge, his mare suddenly took fright at something and bolted towards the bridge parapet. Unable to halt his panicking steed and finding it impossible to dismount, the hapless Lambert had no alternative but to cling to his mount. To his horror, the horse appeared to take the parapet of the bridge to be a fence, and proceeded to jump over it, plunging thirty feet into the stream below. Luckily for the rider, his fall was broken by the projecting branch of a tree, and he survived the fall relatively unharmed. The unfortunate horse, however, had been instantly killed by its fall. The story of "Lambert's Leap" and his miraculous survival became an instant sensation. People flocked to the scene of the accident to marvel at the drop he had survived, and in due course, the legend was carved into the coping stones of the bridge. The story was told and retold many times in print, and appeared in broadsheets as far south as London. Twelve years later, another rider suffered the same ordeal and survived to tell the tale. In 1827, however, the last such accident of the kind caused the death of a Newcastle surgeon named Nicholson. The legend was popular until well into this century, a nearby public house bearing

the name Lambert's Leap, and having as its sign a dramatic portrayal of Mr Lambert's miraculous descent.

A few yards away from here, on the corner of Sandyford and Portland Road, stands a perfectly ordinary looking red Post Office pillar box. Closer examination of it will reveal, however, that the royal insignia on it reads "E VIII R", marking it as a very rare example of a post box erected in 1936 – the one solitary year of the short and troubled reign of Edward VIII.

Further to the east, across the leafy valley of Jesmond Vale, lies the suburb of Heaton. Dominating the skyline here is the tower of St Gabriel's church on Heaton Road. Viewed from Armstrong Bridge in high summer, the ornate gothic tower of this 19th century parish church is the only thing visible on the Heaton side, peeping over the tree canopy. Were it not for the roar of the traffic on the coast road only yards below, one could almost be in rural Northumberland. Newcastle is particularly well endowed with such tantalising vistas such as this, and it is easy to imagine that, had Capability Brown been a town planner instead of a landscape gardener, the parks that run the length of the Ouseburn through Jesmond and Heaton are what he would have come up with. Passing on to Heaton Road itself, a closer inspection of St. Gabriel's church tower shows that the decorative carving of the stonework includes a motto in old-fashioned lettering around the four sides near the top. These are the words of *The Sanctus*: "Holy Holy Holy Lord God Almighty, Heaven and Earth are Full of Your Glory".

To the south along Heaton Road is Heaton Park, gifted to the city by Lord Armstrong in 1879. Hidden away in a leafy glade only yards from Heaton Road, is a ruin nearly as old as the Keep itself. The House of Adam of Jesmond was built in the early 13th century as the fortified manor house of the then



'King John's Palace', Heaton Park, c.1890

Sheriff of Northumberland (as this area then lay well outside the boundaries of Newcastle). The earliest reference to this structure is in the Patent Rolls of King Henry III from 1267, when it is referred to as "the camera [ie private residence] of Adam de Gesemuth". Adam had been a highly unpopular Sheriff from 1262-64 and in 1267, and was later to leave his home never to return when he went on the seventh and last Crusade in 1270. These ruins have for many years been known as 'King John's Palace'. There is no known reason for this, nor is there any evidence to suggest that this most unpopular of monarchs ever visited this area, or indeed that this fortified house had been built as early as his reign (1199-1216). There is evidence, however, of a later royal visit which

also indicates that the house contained a chapel. Edward I came to Newcastle at Christmas in 1299, and witnessed the ceremony of the boy bishop, as is recorded in the King's Wardrobe Accounts for that year under the heading "Episcopus Puerorum" (The Boy Bishop):

"On the 7th day of December, paid to a certain boy-bishop saying the vespers of St Nicholas before the king in his chapel at Heton near Newcastle upon Tyne, and to certain boys coming and singing with the aforesaid bishop out of the alms of the king by the hand of Lord Henry the almsgiver, to be divided amongst the aforesaid boys, 40s."

The 'Palace' had collapsed into disuse and disrepair by the 17th century, and all that remains today are two sides of a square tower with two round-arched

windows and a pointed-arched doorway. The association with King John still persists in the area, as the names of two nearby streets in Heaton bear witness.

An unusual commemoration of a widely appreciated writer can be found in the streets to the western edge of Heaton. On the gable-end of the terrace of South View West is a huge head-and-shoulders portrait of William Shakespeare in coloured brickwork. The neighbouring streets to this curious monument to the Bard of Avon all have names with Shakespearian connotations including Stratford Road, Hotspur Street, and Bolingbroke Street.

In nearby Byker, the old village has largely disappeared with most of the old riverside slums replaced by the 1970s showpiece Byker Wall development – though even this contains a few hidden reminders of the past, with the names Dunn Terrace and Byker featured in the brickwork, and the ornamental 18th century gates of the old Jesmond Manor House erected across Headlam Street. The most curious and striking building that still survives from the 1890s is the old Ouseburn School building in Albion Row. Looking like an oriental temple, with towers surmounted by triple-tiered octagonal eaves and topped off with cones, this magnificent edifice was the subject of a painting by L.S. Lowry.

Down Byker Bank from here, we find that the Ouseburn itself has surfaced as it nears the river. This area was once a beehive of industrial and commercial activity, and many relics survive including the old Cluny Whisky warehouse with a redundant chimney stack beside it. Within what is now Byker City farm, there is an original wall plaque reading “Northumberland Lead Works 1871” marking the former site of what was once a considerable industrial concern. Downstream, the Ouseburn takes on an almost continental air, with a marina of boat moorings. This secluded and unfrequented haven is home to a variety of small craft, and is a veritable sun trap during the summer. Its resemblance to the French Riviera is limited, however, by the unmistakably northern presence of numerous gaily-painted pigeon crees on the banks above.



The Ouseburn, looking south c.1907, while culverting was underway: a piece of Newcastle becomes hidden.

