

River improvement, landscape perceptions and identity in Tyneside, northern England, 1750-1900

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The Tyneside area in the Northeast England has for centuries been a coal-producing region. This coal was shipped from Newcastle on the banks of the River Tyne to London where it was used for heating and industrial purposes. Over time the volume of coal exported increased gradually but the river was capable to handle the relatively small ships. That all changed during the industrialisation of Tyneside during the 19th century when the volume of shipping and the size of ships increased sharply. The river was not capable to handle these ships because it was too shallow and winding and something had to be done. After a lot of discussion and failed attempts this resulted in the Tyne Improvement Act of 1861 and by 1872 the Tyne was declared the 'most noteworthy example of river improvements within the bounds of the United Kingdom'. This was the beginning of an improvement of the river on an unprecedented scale that would affect the industrialisation of the region as well as the perceptions of the river Tyne and the attitudes to its landscape.

This paper explores the changing perceptions of the River Tyne and the surrounding landscape and how it helped reinforce a local sense of identity. In addition the paper will suggest that the industrialisation of the Tyne also led to the rise of a local conservation movement that, amongst others, advocated parks and green zones in the urban area.

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