

# THE BUTTERFLY BRIDGE CROSSING THE GENERATIONS

## DERWENTHAUGH COKE WORKS

Through much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Derwenthaugh Coke Works dominated the lower Derwent valley's landscape, producing coke, a fuel derived from coal, mainly used in blast furnaces making steel. The site, which was developed by the Consett Iron Company about three quarters of a mile downstream of the Butterfly Bridge, enjoyed a plentiful supply of coal, had access to the river water to the east and was serviced by the company's existing railway line to the west. The planning for the construction of the works started in 1927, and a state of the art plant was ordered from a German manufacturer who supplied this and many of the technicians to build and commission it by 1929.

The plant comprised 66 ovens complete with bi-product recovery equipment; in 1936, 20 more ovens were added. By that time, the plant daily's throughput was 1,714 tons of coking coal which produced 21 million cubic feet of gas, 1,310 tons of coke and bi-products that included tar, sulphate, naphthalene and crude benzole. Coke products were shipped from Derwenthaugh Staiths near Swalwell and the gas supplied to the Newcastle and Gateshead Gas Company via a pipe line to the gas holders at Redheugh. The plant's principal output, 'Consett Coke Nuts' was an internationally renowned product.

In 1948, on nationalisation, the ownership of the plant was vested in the National Coal Board. At this time, coal for the ovens was provided by Chopwell, High Spen, Marley Hill and several other collieries in the area. In 1951 an underground, narrow gauge railway was built to transport coal from Marley Hill to the coke works, via Clockburn Drift, close to the Butterfly Bridge. From there it was transported across the river, over a purpose built bridge, to the screening and washing plants within the coke works. Waste from the coking process was transported by rail and tipped on to Goodshields Haugh, the low-lying land upstream of the Butterfly Bridge.



The Derwenthaugh Coke Works and the rail line  
along the route of the New Western Way

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In December 1985, 56 years of coke production ended when the plant closed; at that time 85 ovens were in operation and 256 workers were employed on site. Site clearance and remediation began the following year. By the mid-1990s, the landscape had been fully restored from its industrial use. The resulting Derwenthaugh Park accommodates sporting facilities and countryside walks, as well as woodlands, ponds, wild flower meadows and an abundance of wildlife. Nature is once again in ownership of the valley, which now shows only a few scars of its industrial past.



Derwenthaugh Coke Works 1963



Derwenthaugh Coke Works at night c.1970

**The Butterfly Bridge – Crossing the Generations** was a joint initiative between the five local history societies (in Sunnyside, Swalwell, Whickham, Winlaton and Winlaton Mill), located respectively on the east and west banks of the River Derwent, that collaborated to deliver this project. Building bridges between societies around the work of telling the story of the Butterfly Bridge.

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For more information: [www.butterflybridge.co.uk](http://www.butterflybridge.co.uk)