



Durham City Freemen



Curriers' Guild

DURHAM CITY FREEMEN

CURRIERS' GUILD

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Foreword

In 2016 the 'Freemen' established a History Group and embarked on a project to explore the history and heritage of their eight remaining guilds/companies, using a wide range of archive material, together with artefacts discovered and recovered from the bed of the River Wear beneath Elvet Bridge, by Gary Bankhead. The group comprised of both 'Freemen' and local people who had an interest and passion for the heritage of their city.

Their work does not purport to be an academic study, but has been created for the general public, with the aim of shedding light on the history of the guilds/companies, sustaining the heritage of the Durham City Freeman for future generations.

The trade guilds/companies and Freeman held power and influence and did much to shape the city and its heritage for over 300 years.

I hope you find the work of the History Group both interesting and informative.

Eric Bulmer
Chairman of the History Group

Acknowledgements

With grateful thanks to the members of the History Group and in particular, to David Hook and Phil Dyer for their major contribution in researching the Curriers Guild.

The creation and production of this booklet could not have been achieved without the support of the County Records Office, The Archaeology Department of Durham University, Palace Green Library and Gary Bankhead, for his guidance and access to artefacts he discovered and recovered from the bed of the River Wear beneath Elvet Bridge.

Finally, special thanks must go to Geoff Kitson the official photographer of the Freeman for providing images and John Booth, the Warden of the Butchers' Company and Freeman website manager, who assembled the research material for the production of this booklet.

Introduction

The guilds or companies of Durham City stretch back over 500 years and this year marks the special anniversary of the Butchers Company that was recognised with its right to trade in 1520.

There were historically 3 main types of guilds in the Middle Ages, merchant guilds, craft guilds and religious guilds, but only the craft guilds have survived. In medieval times groups of skilled craftsmen in the same trade formed themselves into guilds. A guild would ensure anything made by its members was up to standard and sold at a fair price.

The first Charter (granted to the citizens in 1179 by Bishop Hugh Pudsey) granting the citizens to be ‘free from’ in-tolls and out-tolls for their merchandise, hence the term ‘freemen’. The first recorded Charter granted to a guild was the Weavers and Websters in 1450 and by the late 15th century there were 16 guilds in Durham.

The two primary concerns for the guilds were with the trades, where they endeavoured to maintain standards of workmanship (now known as quality control) and keep a local monopoly of the trade for their own members, by control of the admission of apprentices.

An apprentice to a guild was trained by a guild member, who would expect to be paid for this by the boy’s parents. An apprentice could live with his master for up to 14 years, but seven

years was more common. The ultimate certification as a 'master of their craft' was the production of a 'masterpiece' at the end of his apprenticeship. Once an apprenticeship was over, the young person became a 'journeyman'. A journeyman continued to learn his craft but from different masters and was now paid.

All charters stipulated certain rules known as 'Ordinaries'. Common to all guilds was that, "*they must take part in the celebration of the Feast of Corpus Christi*" (1st Thursday after Trinity Sunday). The guilds, with their banners displayed, went in procession from the Market Place to Palace Green, where they enacted religious plays.

Another Ordinary stated that, "*no guild would permit a Scotsman to be an apprentice*", no doubt a reaction to the continuing conflict with our northern neighbour. This rule no longer applies.

Original 16 Guilds

The object of Guilds was to maintain high standards of workmanship through apprenticeships, and to engender good fellowship in society and religion. The following 16 Guilds were established in Durham:

Weavers & Websters (1450)

Cordwainers (1458)

Barber Surgeons, Waxmakers, Ropers and Stringers (1468)

Skinners and Glovers (1507)

Butchers (1520)

Goldsmiths, Plumbers, Pewterers, Potters, Painters, Glaziers and Tin Plate Workers (1532)

Barkers and Tanners (1547)

Drapers and Tailors (1549)

Merchants incorporating Grocers (1345), Mercers (1393),

Salters (1394), Ironmongers (1464) and Haberdashers (1467) (1561)

Fullers and Feltmakers (1565)

Curriers and Tallow Chandlers (1570)

Free Masons, Rough Masons, Wallers, Slaters, Paviours, Plasterers and Bricklayers (1594)

Blacksmiths, Lorimers, Locksmiths, Cutlers, Bladesmiths and Girdlers (1610)

Saddlers and Upholsterers (1659)

Carpenters, Joiners, Wheelwrights, Sawyers and Coopers (1661)

Dyers and Listers (1667)

Of these only the Barbers, Butchers, Cordwainers, Curriers, Drapers, Joiners, Masons and Plumbers survive.

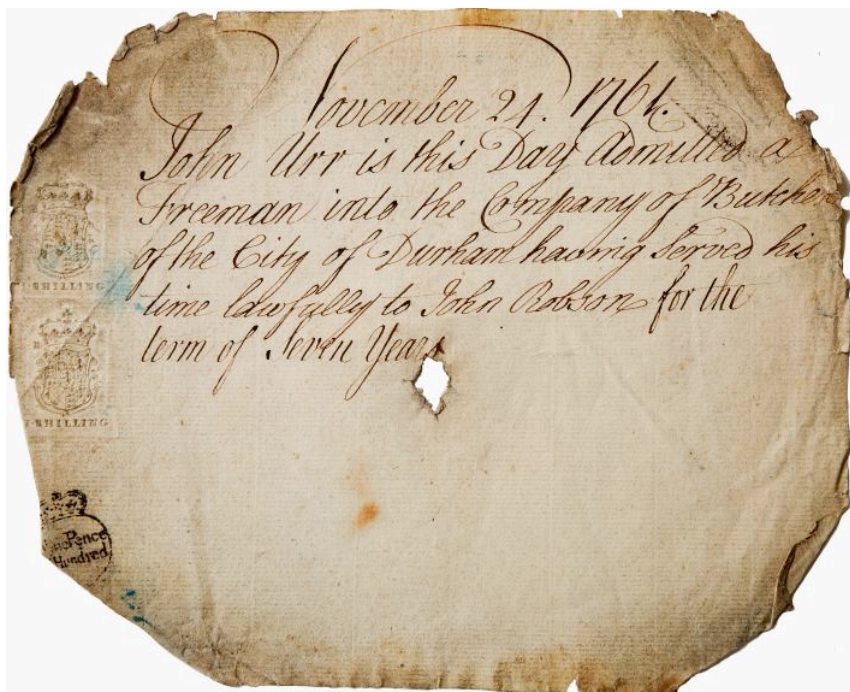
Early Admission as a Freeman

Initially, freedom (to become a Freeman) could only be obtained in two ways either by Servitude or Patrimony.

Servitude

Serving a 7 year apprenticeship (now only 3 years).

This was usually confirmed in a deed (written contract) by which an apprentice was bound by indenture to a master. Once he had completed his apprenticeship he was admitted to the Company/Guild of his craft.



Document dated November 24th 1761 confirming John Urr's admission as a Freeman into the Company of Butcher's after serving a seven year apprenticeship to John Robinson.

DURHAM CITY FREEMEN

HIS INDENTURE made the *20th* Day of *June* 1799
 in the *20th* Year of the Reign of our Sovereign Lord George the Third
 by the Grace of God of Great-Britain, France
 and Ireland King, Defender of the Faith, &c. And in the Year of our LORD, One Thousand, Seven Hundred, and ninety nine
 BETWEEN *John Nelson of the City of Durham, Butcher and Tobacco Seller of Gilesgate near the*
said City of Durham of the One Part, and *William Dixon of the County of Durham* of the Other Part, and *William Dixon*
 of the Other Part: WITNESSETH, That the said *William Dixon* hath of his own Free Will, and with the Consent of
 his Father *John Dixon* his Father and Son and himself Apprentice, to and with the said *John Nelson* and with them after
 the Manner of an Apprenticeship to Duell, Remain, and Serve, from the day of the date hereof
 until the Term of *seven* Years thence next following, a full Compliance and Fulfil. During all which Term the said Apprentice shall
 Master well and faithfully shall serve, he is - Secrets keep, he is - lawful Commands shall do, Fornication or any other filthy and unchristianlike
 to he is - said Master shall not do, or Consent to be done, but to he is - Power shall lett it, and forthwith he is - said Master further warn: Tarems, or
 Ale-houses, he - shall not Hunt or Proquest, unless it be about he is - Masters Business there to be done: At Dice, Cards, Tables, Bowls, or any other un-
 lawful Games he - shall not Play: The Goods of his said Master shall not waste, nor them Lend, or give to any Person without his Masters Licence
 Matrimony with any Woman - within the Term shall not contract, nor from his Masters - Service at any Time absent him self; but as a True and
 Faithful Apprentice, shall Order and behave him self towards his said Master - and all as well in Words as in Deeds, during the said Term: And as a true and just
 Account of all his said Masters Goods, Chattels, and Money committed to his Charge, or which shall come to his Hands, faithfully he - shall give at all Times
 when thereunto required by his said Master his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns. And the said *John Nelson*
 for himself, his Executors, Administrators, and Assigns, Covenant, Promise and Grant by these Presents, to and with the said *William Dixon* the Father and
 said *William Dixon* the Apprentice, That he - the said *John Nelson* his Executors, Administrators, or Assigns, shall and will Teach,
 the said Apprentice, or cause him to be Taught, Learned, and Informed in the Trade of *Butcher*
 now sixth after the best Manner of Knowledge that he or they may or can; with all
 Circumstances thereto belonging: And also shall find, provide, to and for the use and Apparel, sustent and encouragement of the said
 during the whole of the said Term
 And for the true Performance of All and Singular the Covenants, and Agreements, each of the Parties aforesaid do bind themselves unto the other
 in the penal Sum of Ten pounds each of lawful Money of Great Britain
 firmly by these Presents, in Witness whereof, the Parties above-said to these present Indentures, interchangeably have set their Hands and Seals, the day
 and Year above-written.
 The Indentures, Covenants, and Agreements, shall be kept to the Tenor Office, if in Lawness, or within the Week after the Execution; and
 shall be entered in Words or length, and the Day said to the Tenor Office, if in Lawness, or within the Week after the Execution; and
 if in the Country, and out of the City of Newcastle, within Two Months, as a Discharge of the Statute in this behalf made: otherwise the Indentures will be void, the Master and
 the said *William Dixon* the Apprentice be disabled to follow his Trade or to make Use,
 Signed, Sealed, and Delivered of the said
 (first duly stamped) in the presence of
John Nelson
William Dixon
Philip Wilson
Robert Dixon

Robert Dixon Indenture 20th June 1799

Indentured Apprentice to John Nelson (Butcher of Gilesgate
 near Durham for seven years.)

Patrimony

Conferred on the eldest son of a Freeman (today all sons and since 2010, daughters can also be admitted).

Customary Freedom

Occasionally individuals (who do not qualify as above) are invited to become Freeman whose influence on behalf of the guilds is worth having.

During medieval times and until 1835, the Freeman had authority and power. They were the only citizens that could vote for or be elected as Mayor. The Great Reform Act (1832) and the Municipal Corporation Act (1835) extended electoral franchise, removing the power of the Freeman overnight.

Although stripped of their authority, the Freeman have retained three historical privileges;

- To erect a stall in the marketplace free of charge.
- To graze their livestock on the Sands.
- The use of the Guildhall free of charge.

The functions of the Freeman and guilds today are largely ceremonial, notwithstanding their continuing support for the community and charitable causes.

Medieval Guilds

In medieval times groups of skilled craftsmen in the same trade formed themselves into guilds. A guild would ensure anything made by a guild member was up to standard and sold at a fair price. Membership of a guild was an honour as it was a sign the person was a skilled worker.

Some guild members were chosen to check others were working up to a standard. Those not up to standard would be fined or made to do the work again, but the worst punishment was expulsion from the guild as it meant the member could no longer trade in the town. A guild would look after its members if they were ill and would help families of dead members.

An apprentice to a guild was taught by a guild member who would expect to be paid for this by the boy's parents. An apprentice could live with his master for up to 14 years, but seven years was more common. During his apprenticeship a boy was expected not to get married or go to the inn.

Once an apprenticeship was over, the young person became a journeyman. A journeyman continued to learn his craft but from different masters and was now paid. He also worked independently on his '*masterpiece*', which was a project to show his ability. Once he had proved his skill (and played the politics), he could become a master and open his own shop and train apprentices.

One of the guilds was the Curriers' Company.

Curriers' Company

The Curriers Company was part of the Curriers and Tallow Chandlers. The company was first recorded as a trade organisation in London in 1272 and was granted commercial autonomy in 1415.

The date of incorporation is unknown but they received a charter from Bishop Pilkington about 1570 at the request of Richard Stevenson, the warden. As with other trades, the Guild regulated membership and apprenticeships (of seven years), and enforced trade standards.

Nationally the earliest rules were recorded in 1300 and 1485 and an Act of Parliament to improve standards in the leather industry was passed in 1559.

The coat of arms together with its crest and supporters was granted to the Company in 1583. It illustrates the currier's shave.



The Curriers' Guild Coat of Arms



The shield of the Durham Curriers' is shown in the Town Hall roof.

Durham Guild Orders

The Durham Guild of Curriers and Tallow Chandlers was chartered by the City's aldermen and burgesses in 1568.

Included in the rules of the Durham Charter were:

- Assemble yearly and elect one alderman and two wardens.
- Fines for non-attendance without lawful reason – 12d to the bishop, 12d to the trade.
- No Scotsman or person not a subject of the Queen shall be taken on.
- Only work with hide leather and calves' leather. None shall colour horse or sheep leather.
- Setting up business within the city or suburbs requires the agreement of the bishop, alderman and wardens and fees of 20/- to bishop and 20/- to craft.
- Apprenticeship had to be at least seven years.

Further orders were made from time to time:

- None shall withdraw his brother's customers from him (fine 3/4)
- Four quarterly meetings per year (1630).
- Minimum fees (1638)
- On admittance of any freeman, he shall pay 12d towards the banner (1707)
- Only time served apprentices or eldest son of a freeman shall be admitted – fine £10 (1709)
- No one shall be admitted a freeman without paying one guinea. (1772)
- One meeting a year to choose an alderman (1774).

- On admittance of a freeman, the warden to receive 2/6, the steward 2/-, the clerk 5/- (1800).
- All sons of every member to be admitted same as eldest sons (1800).

In 1649, the Curriers took out a suit against traders not conforming to “statutes and orders of the company”.

Guild Records

A 1668 catalogue of the names of “Freemen of the Curriers” lists thirty names. Smaller numbers of curriers are listed in 19th century trade directories with some prominent names including Blagdon and Darling. Various members of the Darling family were prominent from at least the 1740s. Ralph Darling signed the Mayor’s Book to accept the orders and byelaws of the trade in 1745. By the 1760s there were a number of apprentices listed – for example five in 1761 – which seems to indicate a growing trade.

The Guild records go on to list admissions to Freemen and the byelaws applicable to the guild, which they would have to follow. The Darling family continue to feature in the records from the mid-eighteenth century in to the nineteenth. Members include Robert Darling, his son Ralph, Thomas Darling and his son William, John Robert Darling and his son Ralph and Henry James Darling, who took an apprentice in 1850. By this time the involvement of Darlings in the trade was waning and there was none listed by the 1870s.

WANTED IMMEDIATELY,
A JOURNEYMAN CURRIER.—Any
sober Man, who is a good Workman, may meet with good
Encouragement, and constant Employment, by applying to Ralph
Darling, Currier, in Durham.

A cutting from the Newcastle Courant 6th October 1764

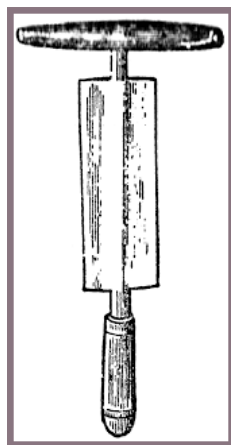
R U N A W A Y, Feb. 26, 1773.
From his master's service, at the city of Durham,
F FRANCIS WEYBIDGE, Apprentice to Ro-
bert Darling, in Durham, Currier; he is about
five foot six or seven inches high, stoutish made, with
long brown hair, wore in general tied behind; supposed
to have on when he went away, a dark-brown coat and
waistcoat with white buttons, and a pair of doe-skin
breeches little worse than new; is thought to be gone
to the North.—Any person that will give information
to his said master in Durham, or the Printer of this
paper, on his being apprehended and brought to justice,
shall receive One Guinea reward; and any person em-
ploying or harbouring the said apprentice, on informa-
tion being made, they will be prosecuted as the law directs.

*This cutting from the Newcastle Courant 13th March 1773 may indicate
that Robert Darling was a hard taskmaster!*

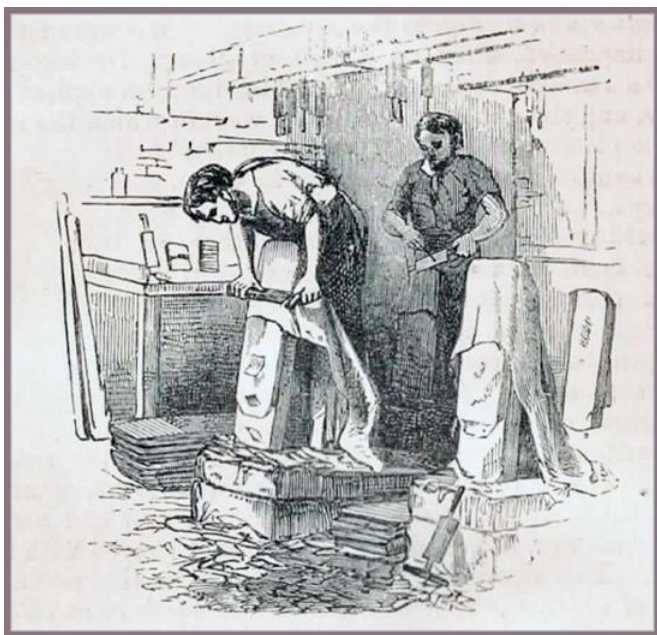
Currying

A Currier is a specialist in the leather industry and is one of the ancient and essential leather processes.

After, or as part of the tanning process comes currying (curing leather). The leather is stretched and then cleaned and scraped using short bladed knives, or “sleekers”, before being massaged with equal quantities of beef tallow and cod liver oil. The curried leather may then be waxed or coloured before moving to Cordwainers, Saddlers and other trades.

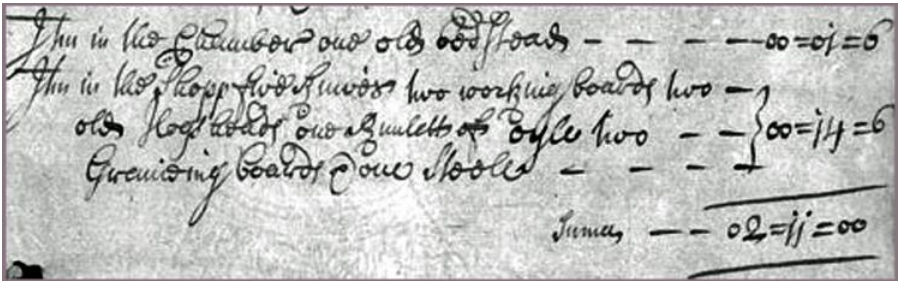


A sleeker



A sleeker in use

The final three lines of the inventory of the 1698 will of Henry Cliffe, a currier, mentions some tools of the trade:



“items in the shoppe” five knives two working boards two old Hogsheads one Runlett of oyle two Graineing boards and one stoole”.

Note: *A hogshead and a runlett are casks of varying capacities. Graining is removing hair from a skin or softening or raising the grain of leather.*

Where they lived and worked

In the latter part of the 18th century, many curriers lived in Silver Street. Meetings were held in the house of a member or a member’s widow. Some companies marked an annual meeting with a breakfast or mid-day dinner; the Curriers always held a supper, and not always with the head meeting. In his notes, Whiting lists meetings, between 1772 and 1818, at the homes of Cuthbert Marshall (Haunch of Venison), Robert Darling (Golden Fleece), Martin Brown, Thomas Greenwell (Round of Beef), John Stuart (Goat), Robert Ovington (Red Lion). The signs may not all necessarily have been attached to public houses as not only innkeepers had sign boards. Robert Darling was an alderman and innkeeper.

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Silver Street is also mentioned in the 1748 will of Thomas Vasey (currier):“.... *my freehold messuage or tenement with the appertances situate in Silver Street in said City of Durham ...*”

The 1793 will of Thomas Darling, currier, leather seller, of Silver Street in the City of Durham, shows that he has other interests. He bequeaths to his wife Margaret “.... *all stock of cheeses and other groceries and all the wooden or clogg shoes and clogg soles in his shop and ware rooms in Silver Street*”, and, in trust to his father“....*all my freehold houses in Silver Street and the several workhouses and shops adjoining or belonging to the same*”.



Silver Street 1883

The 1827 Pigot and White Gazeteer lists five curriers in Durham City. These are Thomas Caldcleugh and Robert Hall in Silver Street, Thomas Clark and William Darling in the Market Place and Robert Hoggart in Claypath. In 1834 they are joined by John Blagdon in the Market Place.

**J. R. THURLOW,
CURRIER AND LEATHER CUTTER,
SILVER STREET, DURHAM.**

IN returning thanks to my Friends and the Public generally for the past favours conferred on me, while conducting the business at the foot of Silver Street, I beg most respectfully to inform them I have entered upon more commodious Premises lately occupied by Mr THOMAS CALDCLEUGH, No. 8, Silver Street, soliciting a continuance, which it will ever be my study to deserve.

In the Durham County Advertiser on 13th October 1843, James Thurlow of 9, Silver Street announced he had acquired "more commodious premises at 8 Silver Street" which had previously been occupied by Thomas Caldcleugh.

There are nine curriers listed in the 1848 Slaters Directory.



Map showing most Currier premises in 1850

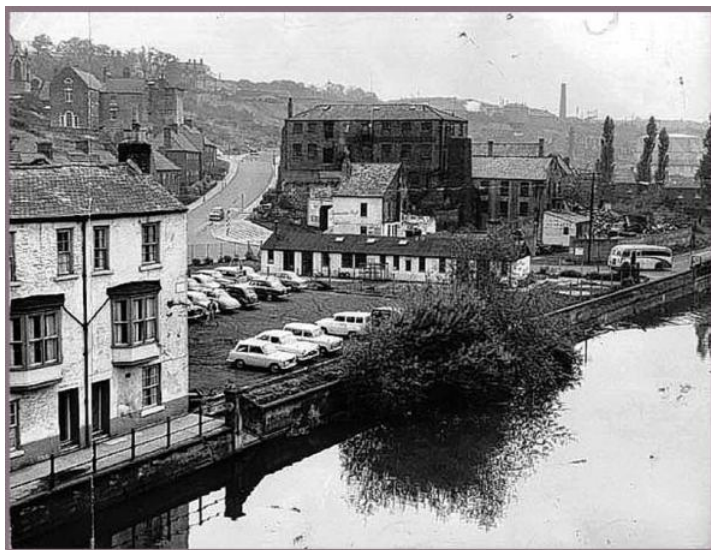
In Silver Street there are Thomas Clark, Mark Story and Robert Thurlow at numbers 1, 3 and 9 respectively and William Darling,

CURRIERS' GUILD

at 26 Market Place. John Blagdon has moved to 4, Claypath, while his brother George, with an apprentice, is in Framwellgate. Others are in Claypath and South Street. By 1855 the number is down to seven.

From about 1850 and the arrival of the machine age, the number of curriers starts to reduce and some curriers change trades. James Thurlow had been apprenticed as a currier to Mark Story in 1839 but in the 1870s he abandoned the trade and became a brewer and maltster and the owner of the Wear Brewery on Framwellgate waterside. He died in 1897.

Kellys 1890 Directory lists only four curriers and leather sellers in Durham City and in 1914 the only remaining one is George Blagdon.



Millburngate riverside in 1960 showing Blagdon's Leather Works in Framwellgate

In the view of the Millburngate riverside, above, taken in October 1960, we can see the rather dark-looking Blagdon's Leather Works at the centre. To the right, near the bus, is Hanratty's scrapyard and beneath the leather works is the Riverside Cafe. The long single-storey white building was a short-lived nursery school. The white buildings in the foreground next to the river were known as Lambton Walk and were among the last parts of Millburngate to be demolished. The large Blagdon works in Framwellgate was demolished in the 1960s.

The road at the centre is Framwellgate and alongside are some of the council houses built just after the Second World War. In the top left hand corner of the picture can be seen the railway station, St Godric's Church and a neighbouring school. These are the only buildings in the picture that remain today.



Staff at Blagdon's leather works, 114 Framwellgate, c.1913.

Second from the left is Mr Ernest Young of 3 Kieper Terrace, Gilesgate. The leather works closed in 1967 and the property was one of the last to be demolished in the lower Framwellgate area.

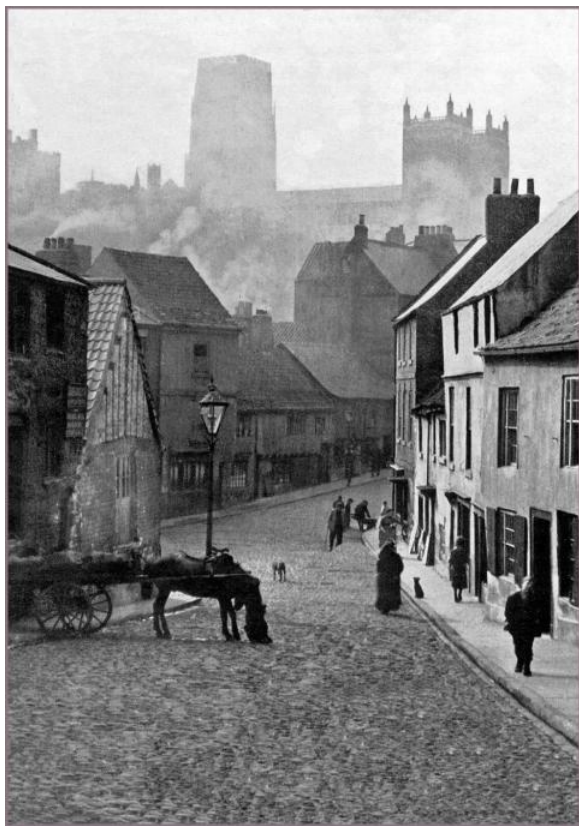
CURRIERS' GUILD

For most of their history, the ancient streets of Framwellgate and Millburngate were part of the main road from London to Edinburgh, known as the Great North Road.

The two streets formed an area known in medieval times as the "Old Borough" and traced their origin to the construction of Framwellgate Bridge by Bishop Flambard in 1121.

Framwellgate took its name from an ancient well that stood nearby and Millburngate from a stream that now flows in a culvert beneath North Road.

Millburngate has gone altogether, with its site now occupied by the Millburngate Shopping Centre. It was a short street terminating near the river, where an offshoot called Horse Hole led down to a ford across the Wear.



All of the houses in Millburngate and Framwellgate were demolished in the late 1930s, despite outcries from building conservationists concerned with their preservation.

Further Reading

C E Whiting: The Durham Trade Guilds. Notes for historical study of the eight surviving Companies. (Vol IX (1939-43) of Architecture and Archaeological Society Transactions

Durham University Library Special Collections: DCG 5

Durham University Library Special Collections: North East Inheritance Database (pre 1858 Probate Records)

British Newspapers On Line

Parson and White: 1827 History, Directory and Gazetteer – Durham City

Pigot and Co.: National Communal Directory – Durham City

Slaters Directories: 1848 and 1855 Durham City

England Census: 1841, 1851, 1861, 1871, 1891, 1901

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