

A Brief History of Lesbury Parish

The parish of Lesbury has a long and varied history. Bronze age and Roman remains have been found and there is evidence of a pre-historic camp just east of the railway station. From Saxon times there has been a stone built church in Lesbury. The village's early name, Laece Burg meaning 'the town of the leech or physician' is from this period. The church was rebuilt and extended incrementally from Norman times and in the 13th century its importance was demonstrated by the churches of Alnwick, Longhoughton and Alnmouth being 'subordinate chapelries'. Lesbury continued to be the principal township in the area for a further hundred years.



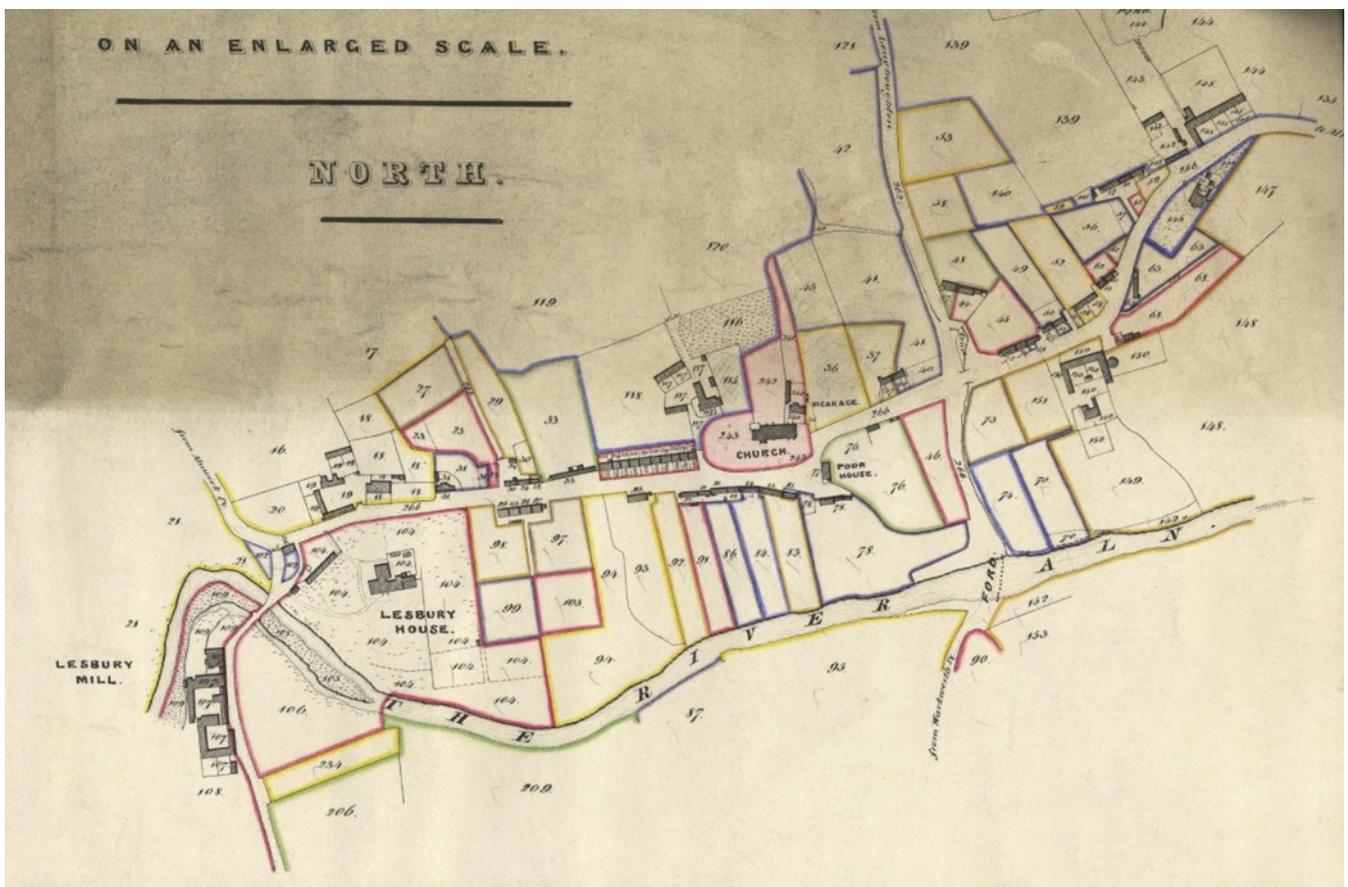
Until the 1800s the parish depended on its position within fine fertile agricultural land for its economic survival and farming is still today an integral part of the local economy. Even within the lawless times in the 14th and 15th centuries dominated by raiding Border Reivers and Anglo-Scottish wars the area was less affected than others in the region. From 1352 there have been water powered flour mills within the parish. The last, adjacent to Lesbury bridge, fed by a race which employed a 60 foot long aqueduct to cross the river survived until 1964. Agricultural life from the 16th century carried on as much as ever. The Reformation and the Commonwealth may have changed the power dynamics of the church and local government but had little impact on the farming community.

During the 1700s neighbouring Alnmouth became a major grain exporter. For example in one month in 1760 eleven ships carrying up to 140 tons of grain left the port. Lesbury was on the turnpike road from Hexham to the harbour. Archives show that a surprisingly large tonnage of grain and other merchandise passed along this route. Gates at the north end of Lesbury's 15th century bridge were used to collect tolls for what must have been a continuous stream of horse-drawn carts and wagons.

In 1847 the railway reached the parish on its way from Newcastle to Berwick and Edinburgh. A viaduct was constructed to carry the line across the River Aln and the subsequent branch line to Alnwick (1850) with its junction and associated railway engine servicing facilities in Hipsburn became both a major employer and gateway to the seaside at Alnmouth. Some of the cottages built to support the railway employees survive to this day.

Good communications and its attractiveness made the parish popular with the developers of country estates. In the early 1800s both Bilton and Lesbury Houses were built. The latter, initially the home of the mill owner was occupied by such as the chief constable of Northumberland. The 10th Duke of Northumberland and his family lived there during the second world war. The Percy family (The Dukes of Northumberland) owned (and still own) much of the land within the parish. The club house at the golf course at Foxton was once one of the family's homes. Because of the then shortage of burial space at St Michael's church in Alnwick and because of Lesbury church's status, the 7th Duke of Northumberland, his wife and eight of their children are buried in the church's graveyard.

This rich heritage, good links with major cities in England and Scotland and the natural beauty of the land with its proximity to Alnwick and the coastal Area of Outstanding National Beauty made the parish important in attracting visitors to the area. This remains the case today. With the development of the heritage railway restoring the railway link between the parish and Alnwick and the increasing popularity of Northumberland, tourism plays an essential role in supporting and extending facilities that will sustain the economy and vitality of the parish for many years to come.



Tythes Award map showing Lesbury village in 1844.

References:

- The History and Development of Lesbury and Alnmouth: J. C. Hickes
- Alnwick Castle - The Home of the Duke and Duchess of Northumberland: James McDonald
- The Alnwick Branch: Bartle Rippon
- Around Alnmouth: The Lesbury Township: John Yearnshire