

A Brief History of Yarm

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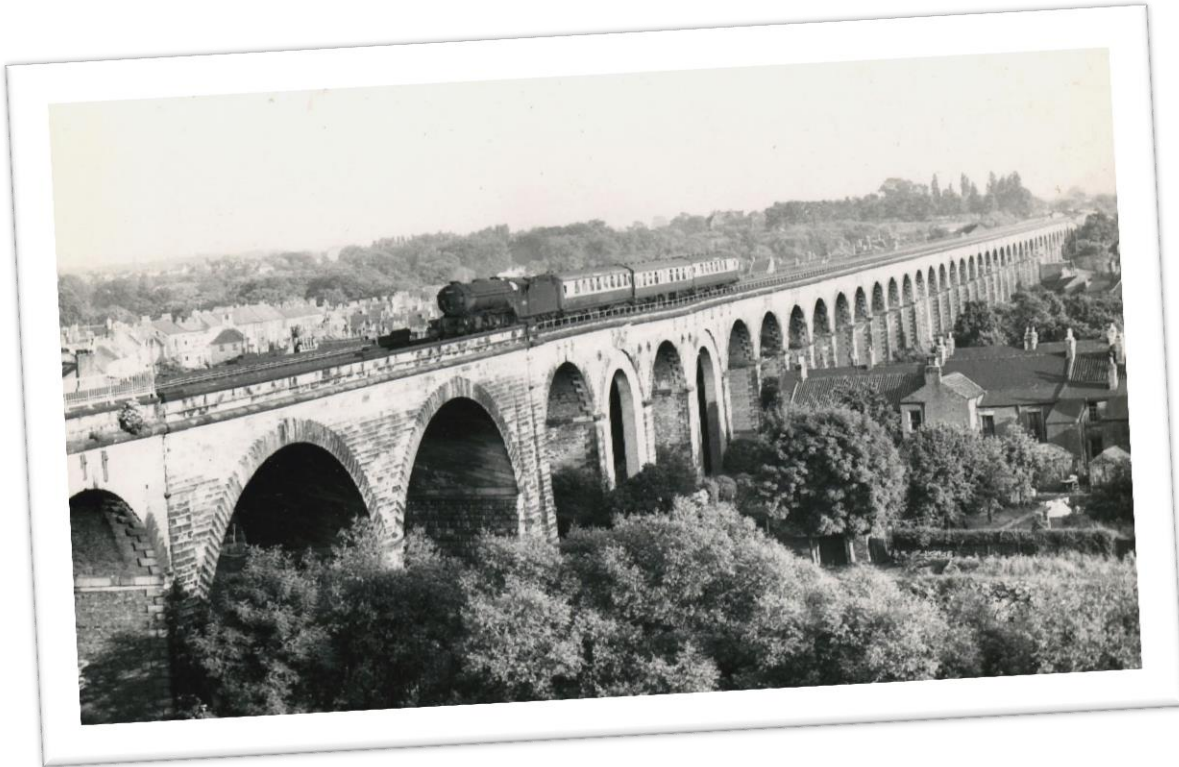
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Yarm Viaduct

Yarm Viaduct was built by the Leeds Northern Railway to extend the Leeds & Thirsk Railway Line from Northallerton to Stockton-on-Tees.

It was designed by Thomas Grainger and John Bourne, engineers from Edinburgh.



Construction began in 1848, and became a remarkable feat of engineering. All the building materials had to be hauled into position by teams of horses, and a pulley system as there were no mechanical cranes or excavators at that time. The viaduct was completed however in just over four years, at a cost of £44,550.



The viaduct is half a mile, or almost 695 metres, long and approximately 7 million bricks were used to build it.

It has 43 arches, two of which span the River Tees, and are 65 feet high.

The viaduct was officially opened on 15th May 1852

The viaduct carries the line from Stockton and Middlesbrough to Northallerton, Thirsk and York, and is used by both passenger and freight trains. There is a footpath along the river bank giving good views of the bridges at Yarm.



Three years after the opening, it was to claim the first of a number of fatalities. On an exceptionally dark wet night, a train overshot the platform and an unsuspecting stranger to the area in alighting from his carriage, stepped over the parapet and fell 74 ft. An inquest jury recommended that "some fencing be erected". Over the years there have also been a number of suicides on the viaduct.

Yarm Market and Fair

Over 800 years ago, King John awarded the Lord of Skelton, Peter de Brus, the right to hold a weekly market on Thursdays in Yarm. He also allowed Yarm to hold two annual, one-day fairs. The fairs were to be held on the Feast of the Ascension, and the Feast of St. Mary Magdalene, who is the town's patron saint.

In 1674, Charles II issued a new charter, which granted permission for 4 annual fairs each year, as well as the weekly Thursday market.

By 1867, the Thursday markets and 3 of the annual fairs had ceased to exist, leaving only the last fair, which is still held in October, and had been lengthened to last three days.

Originally, the October Fair was intended for the sale of horses and horned cattle on the first day, and sheep and cheese on the second day. When the third day was added, horses were from then on only sold on the first day, cattle on the second, with sheep and cheese being sold on the third day.

The local cheese sold at the fair was of very good quality, and was so popular that about 500 tons of cheese were brought to the fair. However, by 1880, the sale of the cheeses and other merchandise began to decline, and by the beginning of World War 2, with the introduction of rationing, cheeses ceased to be sold altogether.



Yarm Fair was also once famous for the sale of Cleveland Bay horses, and they were in great demand as they could be used as pack horses or coach horses, and also carriage horses.

Sales of horses and sheep mostly ceased in the 1970's.



In the early days of the fair, visitors were entertained by strolling musicians, travelling acrobats and jugglers, showmen with dancing bears and performing dogs, and fortune tellers.

However, in the last 100 years, these acts have gradually been replaced with modern amusements and mechanical fairground rides.

Nowadays, the travellers begin to arrive on a Tuesday in October to set up with the official opening on Thursday, with the main fair day being the Saturday. The Blessing of the Fair takes place on Saturday morning at 10.45 am, next to the Dodgems, with the Riding of the Fair at 11 am when a large eighteenth century horn is blown and horses are still paraded up and down the High Street.



Interesting Buildings in Yarm

Town Hall

Before Yarm had a Town Hall it had a toll booth. This toll booth had a bell that was rung to let people know if there was a large flood or a fire. In 1710 the toll booth was knocked down and the Town Hall was built by the Lord of the Manor. The bell was kept and moved to the Town Hall. On the ground level of the Town Hall there was a market space with eight open arches and above was a courthouse for magistrates to hear cases. In 1888 two of the arches were blocked up to make room for Yarm's weighing machine and later in the 1930s other arches were blocked up so that there could be toilets and a bus shelter.

On the south side of the Town Hall there are marked stones showing how high the floods were in 1771 and 1881. You can also find two plaques on this side of the Town Hall; one to honour the local members of the first railway committee and another to remember the men from Yarm who died during the Boer War.



Yarm Methodist Chapel, Chapel Wynd

Yarm Methodist Chapel was built in 1763 and was visited not long after by the famous Methodist leader, John Wesley. Even though John Wesley played a part in the building of fourteen octagonal chapels, Yarm Methodist Chapel was his favourite as he called it "by far the most elegant in England".

The Ketton Ox Pub

This is one of the oldest buildings on Yarm High Street and was named after an ox raised by a man called Charles Colling. Oxen at that time would only cost £20 but this ox was so special that somebody offered to pay £2,000 for it!



Hope House

Hope House is thought to have been built in the early 1600s, which would make it the oldest home in Yarm. When the railway viaduct was built part of the house had to be removed to make room for it.



The George and Dragon Pub

This pub is known as the birthplace of the Stockton & Darlington Railway as it was here that important men met to discuss setting up a new railway that would bring coal from the Durham coalfields to the River Tees at Stockton. This was to become the world's first passenger railway service.



The Friarage

In 1717 the (first) Friarage was built on the site of a Dominican Friary. When it passed to a man called Edward Meynell, he rebuilt it (sometime between 1770 and 1775) and this is the building that is there today. As well as building a new home, Mr Meynell also had new gardens laid out that had birch and fruit trees as well as currant bushes. In the early 1800s Mr Meynell opened his gardens so that anyone could come and walk there and this became a popular thing to do for both rich and poor Yarm people.



Up until the beginning of the First World War, **Yarm Gala** was held in the grounds of The Friarage at Whitsuntide (the eighth Sunday after Easter). Up to 26,000 people would come from afar to enjoy stalls, sideshows, races and swimming events in the river.

Now The Friarage is the home of Yarm School who moved into the building in September 1980.

Next to The Friarage is The Dovecote which is one of Yarm's oldest buildings. Built at the end of the Tudor times The Dovecote is an octagonal shaped building which would be used by the Tudors for keeping birds.

Yarm Castle

We have to mention the castle, although it is a model rather than an actual building. Built by David Doughty, who lived in Comondale House in the 1880's, on the wall of a house in West Street, it is quite an interesting attraction to visitors. A model of the Town Hall was later added by David's son.

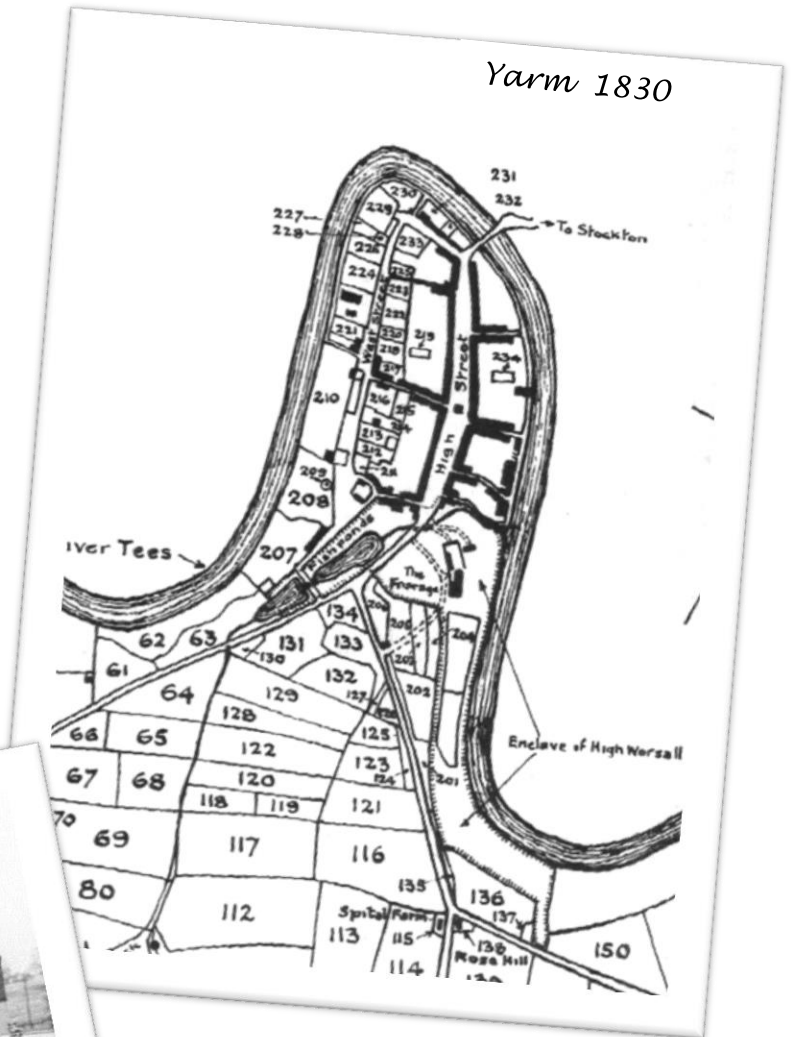


The Port of Yarm on the River Tees

Yarm was the first port to develop on the River Tees. It is situated in a horse shoe bend of the river. The banks of the river were low and perfect for the building of wharves which enabled ships to be launched. These wharves stretched from Silver Street to the skinnery on Atlas Wynd.

In the 12th and 13th century, farmers in the surrounding area brought their wool to Yarm where it was loaded on ships and sent to Scotland, France and Flanders. Those ships then returned to Yarm bringing wines from Gascony, Flemish cloth, and other luxury goods.

Corn was also a major export until 1841. Bacon, butter, cheese, paper, leather and coal were many of the other goods that made Yarm a prosperous port. Granaries and warehouses were built to store the goods until shipment was arranged. A tannery and a vinegar brewery both stood on the banks of the Tees at Yarm.



Wooden ships were built in Yarm at the shipyard on the north side of the river, not far from Yarm Bridge, near the Blue Bell Inn.

Only small ships were able to navigate the meandering nature of the river. As the river was tidal, water levels would rise and fall and ships often had to make a hazardous journey to the mouth of the river.

Yarm began to decline as a port when a canal was constructed at Portrack. Stockton was only four miles from the mouth of the river and larger ships were able to navigate the river much more easily.

Less and less trade came to Yarm and the port of Yarm could no longer compete with Stockton or Middlesbrough.

Today only small pleasure boats and the Teesside Princess sail up the River Tees to Yarm.



St. Mary Magdalene Church

The church of St. Mary Magdalene stands on the west side of Yarm, between West Street and the River Tees. There is evidence that a church devoted to Christian worship has stood on the present site for many centuries.

The church was re-built in 1730 after a disastrous fire in 1728. What is believed to be Saxon stone work was built into the inside wall of the choir vestry, and part of a Saxon memorial cross found at Yarm in 1877 is now displayed in the chapter library of Durham Cathedral.



The oldest window is on the south aisle and it depicts Moses delivering the law from Mount Sinai. It was the work of William Peeket of York, who also has windows in York Minister. Archaeologists have concluded that the Norman Church was a grand and impressive building.



The Churchyard contains many interesting graves including that of Tom Brown, Hero of the Battle of Dettingen. The south side of the churchyard was occupied by a grammar school built in 1590 by Thomas Conyers. This building was demolished to extend the graveyard in 1884 when a new school was opened.

Tom Brown – Hero of the Battle of Dettingen

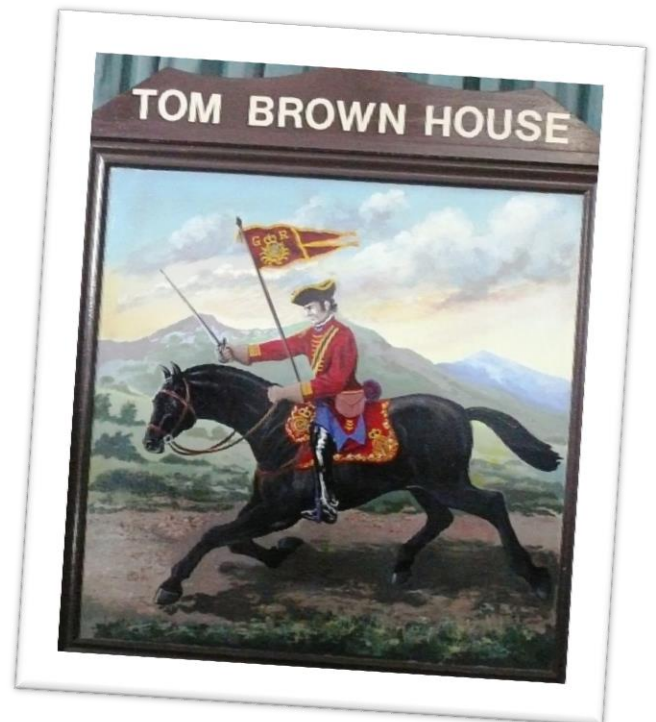
Local hero, Tom Brown, was born at Kirkleatham in 1705, and later moved to Yarm to become an apprentice shoemaker. Looking for adventure Tom joined the army and by 1743 he was a private in the King's Own Dragoons under the command of Brigadier Bland. It was whilst serving in the King's Own Dragoons that Tom's name became famous.



The Battle of Dettingen took place on 27 June 1743 in Bavaria, where British troops fought against the French. When one of the regiment's standards (flag) fell, Tom rushed to pick it up but an enemy soldier cut off two fingers from Tom's hand.

Now unable to control his horse, Tom was struggling to get back to his own troops when he saw a French soldier take the regimental standard. Knowing how important the standard was to his regiment, Tom bravely charged the Frenchman taking back the flag. Then holding tightly on to the flag Tom rode as fast as he could through the French troops back to his own lines. For his bravery he was immediately made a knight on the battlefield.

Unfortunately on the way back to his regiment, Tom had received many wounds, including cuts to his face, head and neck.



One cut was so bad that it sliced off Tom's nose. Later Tom had a silver nose made to replace his real one.

Tom returned to Yarm a hero, with a pension of £30 a year. He used this money to buy a public inn at 116 High Street (see the picture on the left) where he stayed until his death in 1746. He was buried in the parish churchyard.

Flooding

Yarm is situated on flat ground in a horseshoe shaped bend of the River Tees.

It has always been susceptible to flooding and over the years there have been several severe floods.

The greatest flood of all happened on the night of 16th/17th November 1771 .The River Tees burst its banks and Yarm suffered some of the worst and most destructive flooding on record.

The floods were caused by a sudden thaw of the ice in upper Teesdale, and a cloud burst over the Pennines. The rain began in the early hours of Saturday morning and continued heavily throughout the day and night without a break.

As the water in the High Street rose, to a depth of 20 feet on some stretches of the High Street, people were trapped in their homes. Nine of the townspeople lost their lives & property was destroyed and livestock lost.

By Sunday morning the whole of Yarm lay underwater, every building was affected. On the main street alone, six houses were completely destroyed and many more left uninhabitable.

One man who lived at the lower end of the High Street, a strong swimmer, distinguished himself by saving the lives of many of those in the homes around him. In the early hours of Sunday morning, hearing the screams of people living near his weavers shop, he dived from his bedroom window and swam to the windows of those around him, bringing as many as he could to safety.



Today, Yarm is encircled by 34 flood gates. The gates were completed in 1992, however after flooding in 2000, the height of the walls was raised another foot in 2002.

Since then, the flood gates have been successfully used at least 9 times.

The Frozen River Tees

In 1895 the River Tees at Yarm became so frozen that boats were trapped within the ice, and it was possible, although dangerous, to walk across from one side of the river to the other, and the river became a skating rink for young and old.



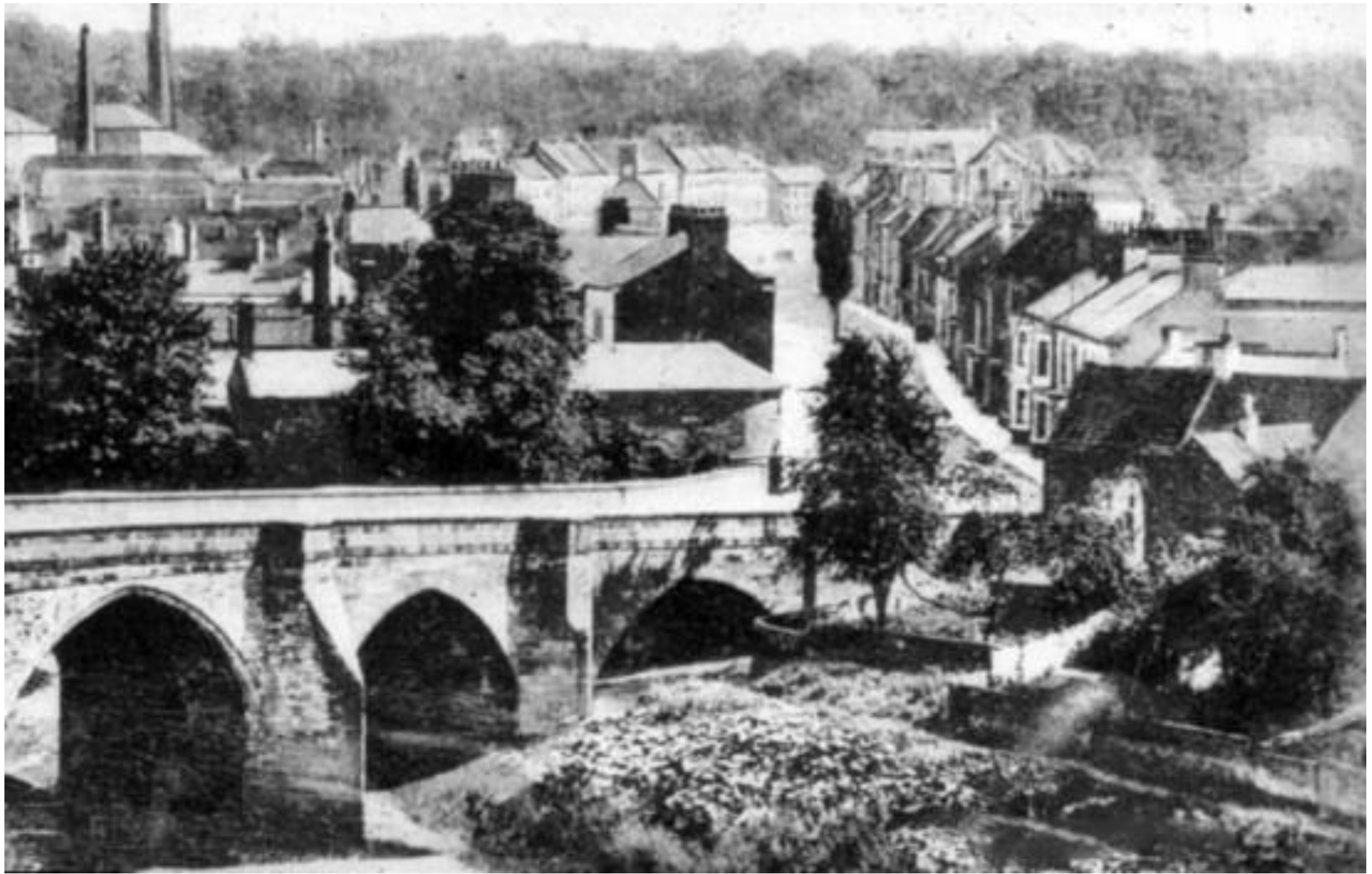
Today, the River Tees can still freeze over in extremely cold conditions, like the winters of 2008 and 2010. However, our knowledge of the dangers of ice means that it will never be used as skating rink again!













THE VIADUCT



HIGH STREET, NORTH



TOWN HALL



METHODIST CHAPEL & SCHOOLROOM



BIRD'S EYE VIEW

YARM-ON-TEES







Yarm 1900



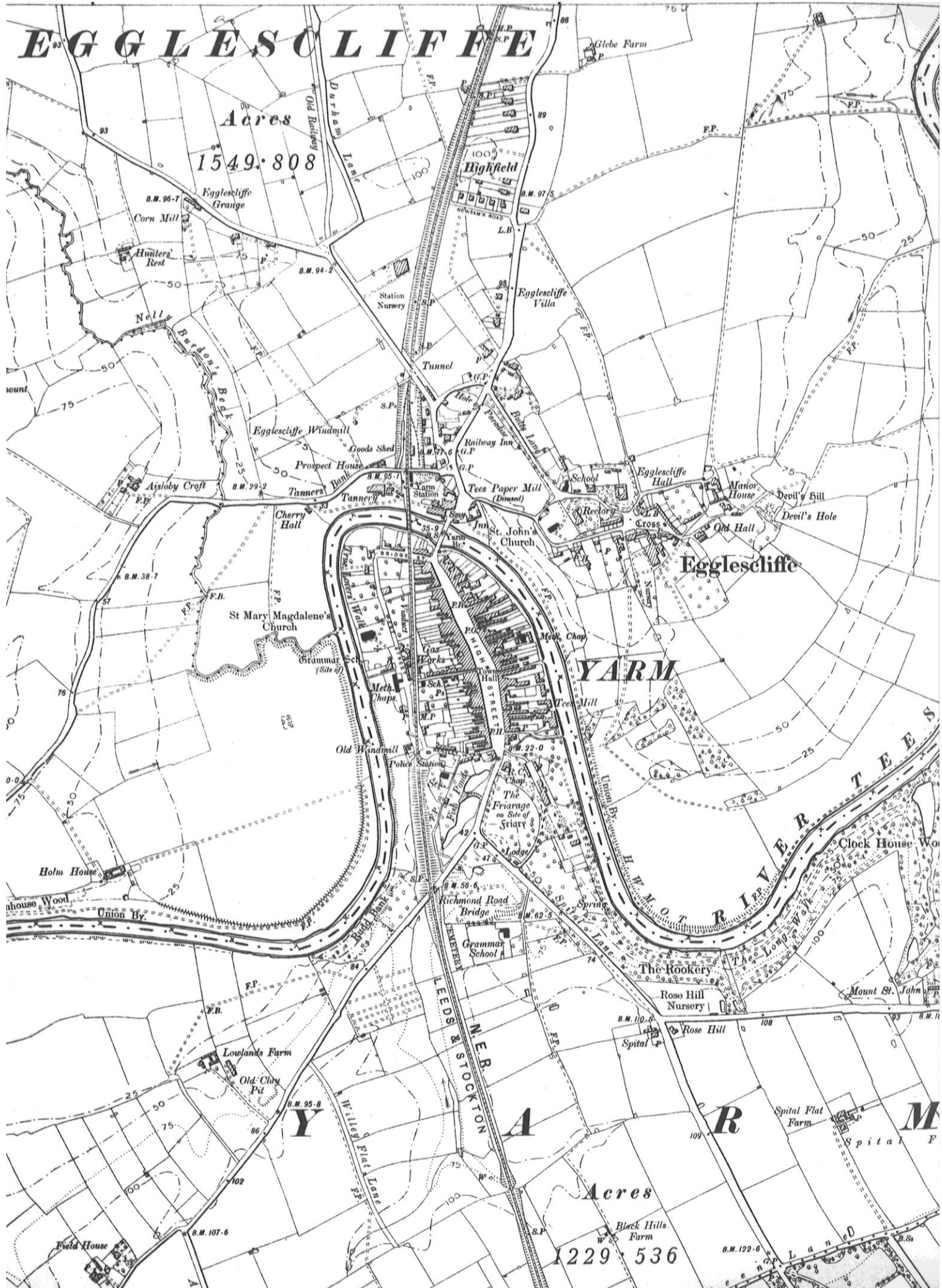
Yarm 1950s



E G G L E S C L I F F E

Acres

1549.808



Acres

1229.536

YARM. 1899