

Sunderland's East End Heroes and Villains



Location Points Information Booklet

Location Point 1 - The Donnison School
Charlotte and Elizabeth Green.

These girls were sisters who lived with their mother and father in Bishopwearmouth. The girls were the youngest of six children. Elizabeth was born 21st April 1882 and Charlotte was born 5th April 1884. Their father was a shipbuilder on The River Wear, he had a very good job and they lived very comfortably, until he died on Christmas 1891 aged only 47 years. The girls were only 7 and 9 years old when their father died. Their mother would have to work to support her family and to keep them from the workhouse, and to keep their family together. Fortunately the girls were accepted into the Donnison School where they continued their education until they were 15 years old. Sadly by this time they had been made orphans after the death of their mother.

Elizabeth Donnison was the benefactor who created the school for 36 poor girls 1798 for the education of 36 poor girls from the parish.

The girls were well educated, Charlotte at the aged of 15 years old, left The Donnison School, found work in service in Sunderland. The school was a rare provision for poor girls in Sunderland, whose families had fell on hard times.

Location Point 2 - Church Walk

Isabella Crozier

Sunderland's first parish workhouse for the poor was built in 1740 in Church Walk next to Sunderland Parish Church.

The Workhouse was built to house 90 people and Isabella Crozier was one of its most notorious "inmates".

Isabella would leave the workhouse every day to go begging door to door for work in the East End streets. Few people had the money to employ her, but one day a stone mason called Richard Thompson needed help because his wife was sick and couldn't look after their one year old daughter. He employed Isabella for 2 shillings a week. Shortly after she started working for the Thompson's, Isabella took the child to the shops but never returned. A few weeks later Isabella turned up at the Bishop Auckland workhouse with the baby but it was dead; its head had been caved in.

Isabella was later found not guilty of murder by reason of insanity and was sentenced to a lunatic asylum to be detained at "Her Majesty's Pleasure". The Sunderland Workhouse was built to house 90 "inmates", but 800 was the highest number of inmates that actually lived there.

Location 3 - Holy Trinity Church

Rector Robert Gray

Rector Robert Gray was the Rector of Holy Trinity, Sunderland Parish Church from 1819 to 1838. He was a devoted Clergyman who cared for the physical and spiritual well being of his parishioners. In 1838 another deadly disease swept the community. Typhoid swept across Sunderland and this new epidemic began to claim many more lives. Robert Gray refused to leave his calling and continued to make house visits to the sick and the dying. He was moved by the poverty and the suffering that he saw on a daily basis in the East End of Sunderland.

Sadly Robert Gray paid for his devotion to his parishioners and on 11th February 1838, he died after falling victim to typhoid fever. He was held in such a high regard that his funeral attracted around 30,000 local people from the Parish. His memorial stands in the central porch of the church, built by public donations and one of the few memorials in the building. His final resting place is in Sunderland Parish cemetery, amongst his parishioners.

Location Point 4 - The Sunderland Graveyard

Burke and Hare

Advances in surgery in the early 1800's meant that many trainee surgeons needed fresh corpses or dead bodies to practice on and they were not fussy about where the bodies came from! There were many criminals willing to plunder cemeteries to make a few pounds. Sunderland's Old Parish Church Graveyard was a very easy target because it was situated next to the Town Moor and not overlooked. Grave robbers could escape easily under cover of darkness and the fog that rolled in off the sea. According to records, a body could be buried in the afternoon and stolen by the evening. Legend has it; two of the most notorious "body-snatchers" practiced their trade in Sunderland. William Burke was hanged in front of a cheering crowd of over 25,000 on 28 January 1829 and put on public display. His body was donated to medical science.

Burke and Hare murders were a series of 16 murders committed over a period of about ten months in 1828 in Edinburgh, Scotland. The killings were undertaken by William **Burke** and William **Hare**, who sold the corpses to Doctor Robert Knox for dissection at his anatomy lectures.

Hare was released in February 1829 and escaped across the border into England.

Location 5 — Sunderland Orphanage Asylum
Robert Fredrick Mustard

Seaman Robert Fredrick Mustard attended the Sunderland Boys Orphanage Asylum as a young boy. He would learn the skills needed to be an able bodied seaman. It was while he was out at sea he wrote this touching message to his wife and children:

“Lost. Going down at Flamborough Head. SS Princess of Sunderland. Nov. 13, 1893. Should anyone pick this up, please to let my dear wife know – lives at 25 Lawrence Street. God Help Us. Going down every minute. Goodbye all; may God help my wife and little ones, may God forgive me all. “

Robert Mustard fearing the worst posted this message in a bottle. Four years after being thrown in the water it was recovered on the tenth birthday of his son Master Robert Fredrick, who was then one of the boys at Sunderland Boys Orphanage. The Orphanage was founded in 1853 for children of seafarers, the Sunderland Orphanage Asylum was built in 1861.

Queen Victoria admired the design of the site she gave £100 towards the building costs.

Location 6 - The Town Moor

Cast Iron Casey.

The East End was well known for the various characters that helped to give the area its unique atmosphere and character. One such man was Jack Casey, Sunderland's most famous boxer. Born in September 1908, both parents came from the East End and they returned here after his birth and lived on Church Street. He had a hard start in life and first came to the limelight as an Echo boy in bare feet, selling papers at the corner of Burleigh Street and High Street East in the 1920s. It was at this time at the age of 13, that he had his first fight in Holmeside Stadium. His first official fight was on July 1926 when he was only 18 years old. Jack had a total of 224 fights, of which he won 148 and 82 were clear knock outs.

Affectionately known as *The Assassin*, Jack was never knocked out throughout his career. On 12th December 1932 he fought for the British middleweight title at Newcastle, but lost on points. Jack could be seen around the East End filming local people and places; some of Jack's cine film of the east end still exists today and provides a rare glimpse of the area in the 1930's. Jack was the pride of the East End where he also lived for some time and his packed funeral service was held in Sunderland Parish Church, Holy Trinity in Church Street East.

Location 7 - Fitters Row

Edward Brown

Edward Brown was a coal fitter, who built his mansion in 1727 in the East End of Sunderland. As a coal fitter he made a great deal of money very quickly. He built a mansion along with a row of cottages for his workers, known as Fitters (Fitters Row.). This house and surroundings were renowned for its fine Georgian gardens and many would come from far and wide to visit this Grand and splendid home and gardens. The building of this development cost Edward the princely sum of £5,000.

Unfortunately for Edward, he was unable to hang onto this new found wealth and the mansion and workers homes he had built would be sold on. In a very short period of time his magnificent mansion would become tenement slums housing the poorest people of the East End community. This area became known as The Hat Case and Fitters Row, housing many migrant workers from Ireland. It is interesting that this one site reflects some of the dramatic changes that would take place in Sunderland's East End. It would later become the site of the first council flats to be built in Sunderland known as Harrisons Buildings in 1903. Edward unfortunately died a pauper in Cork, Ireland.

Location 8 - The Welcome Tavern

Robert Drummond

Robert Drummond was born in 1680 reportedly from a wealthy Scottish family. However he ended up in Sunderland and made his home in the East End of Sunderland.

He started up a business selling knives, combs, razors and jewellery which apparently was very successful. With plenty of cash in his pockets, he was no stranger to the local public houses and one of his favourite was on the edge of the Town Moor. This pub was popular because of a ravine which extended from the pub to the water's edge and was a popular route for smugglers. Drummond came to the attention of the authorities' after a series of burglaries hit the town. But more worrying was when masked horsemen held up the stage coaches on Durham and Stockton Road wielding pistols. These pistol wielding criminals were cause for great concern across the country.

He was finally arrested breaking into a local house, his death sentence was commuted to exile in North America. However this was not the end of Drummonds' criminal activities. He escaped and returned to England and became one of the most notorious and violent criminals, killing a stagecoach driver with one gunshot. On 17th February 1730 at Tyburn, the Sunderland highwayman went to the gallows showing no signs of remorse.

Location 9 - The Port

Harry Watt

Harry was born into a life of poverty in 1826 in Sunderland's East End. He was the youngest of five children and lived with his Mum and Dad, William and Elizabeth in Silver Street. At 14 years of age he made his first voyage out to sea and went to Quebec on the brig called Lena.

His first rescue was made only a few weeks later onboard ship when an apprentice fell overboard. Throughout his life Harry is believed to have saved 44 people as well as helping Sunderland Lifeboat and Life Brigade rescue a further 120 souls from shipwrecks along the north east coast. In 1860 Harry received a number of medals for this bravery over the years. Sadly a few years later these medals were stolen whilst on display at James Williams Street Christian Lay Church.

Kind-hearted Wearsiders rallied to replace the trinkets, but it was left to philanthropist Andrew Carnegie to financially reward Harry . He was provided with a small pension in his old age. He died at the age of 86 in 1913.

Location 10 — Fish Quay, Sunderland Riverside
Isabella Hazard

The first incidence of the deadly disease known as *Cholera Morbus* occurred in Sunderland on October 1831. A ship from the Baltic States entered the Port of Sunderland carrying the deadly disease and against the government quarantine regulations and recommendations at that time. The disease was without mercy and killed many across the town.

One of its first named victims was a young girl called Isabella Hazard who lived near the Fish Quay. Isabella suddenly fell ill and died within 24 hours.

The cholera disease is not spread by normal person to person contact, but is spread through water contaminated by the cholera bacterium. The families and communities of the East End would get their water supply from a communal pump. From Sunderland this deadly disease made its way northwards into Scotland and southwards towards London and thousands of lives were lost.

Sunderland became a national disgrace for not managing this deadly disease and preventing a national outbreak.

Location 11- Boddlewell Lane

Peggy Potts

Peggy Potts was born in 1798 on Low Quay.

She could be seen in the old indoor market where she would sell you fish and cheese. A local character of the East End with a reputation for smuggling illegal goods and alcohol and an ability to outwit the local bobby on the beat.

One well known tale of Peggy Potts is that she was caught carrying a keg of illegal spirits, probably brandy. As the Customs Officer was escorting her to the local police station and lock up on Boddlewell Lane she asked to relieve herself behind the bushes. While under cover of the bushes she emptied the keg of its illegal contents and filled it with her own urine, consequently the police were hoodwinked and she wasn't charged.

Peggy died at the ripe old age of 86 in 1875, she ended her days in the Sunderland workhouse.

Location 11- Pottery Bank - The Riverside

Jack Crawford

Born on 22nd March 1775 at Pottery Bank which was then known as Thornhill's Bank, Jack was a trained Keelman. The job of a Keelman was to ferry coal from the staithes on the river out to the coal ships waiting on the River Wear. They had a very important job and The Royal Navy could use them as reserves but only in times of national emergency.

Jack was a keelmen until 1786, when at the age of 11 -12 years he joined the crew of the "Peggy" as an apprentice. In 1796 he was press ganged and joined into The Royal Navy and served on the HMS Venerable under Admiral Duncan.

The Battle of Camperdown 1797

The HMS Venerable, under the command of Admiral Duncan was ordered to Holland in October 1797 to stop the Dutch joining forces with the French. A fierce battle flared between the British and Dutch fleets, known as the Battle of Camperdown, during which many were killed. It was at the height of the battle that Admiral Duncan's colours were shot down from the ship's mast, making it appear as if the English had surrendered. Crawford braved the smoke and bullets to scale the rigging and nail the flag back on with a marlin spike. The British eventually emerged victorious and when news reached home of what Crawford had done, the sailor was hailed as a national hero. Jack died in poverty in 1831 after he became the second victim of the cholera outbreak. Today he is still remembered with a statue in Mowbray Park.

Location 13 – Exchange Building

Mary Ann Cotton

Probably the most infamous female ***Mass Murderer*** of all time!

She was born in 1832 in the small pit village of Low Moorsley to a well respected church family. She arrived in Sunderland in the 1860's with her childhood sweetheart and first husband William Mowbray, but poor William wouldn't see Sunderland for long! He became her first victim in Sunderland!

Mary Ann made her home in Sunderland's East End on Ettrick Place and then Sussex Street whilst attending San Street Mission. She became a nurse at Sunderland Infirmary, ***The House of Recovery for the Cure of Contagious Fevers***. She married George Ward an engineer in St Peter's Church, Monkwearmouth. Unfortunately, he did not survive her *affections*! Once again foot loose and fancy free she married a Shipbuilder from Pallion called James Robinson. He would survive but tragically most of his children would fall under her evil spell. Her short bigamous marriage to Robinson would see the death of 5 children. She was in Sunderland for six years and murdered 10 people including husbands, children and her mother, all poisoned with arsenic. Mary Ann was finally brought to justice and after being found guilty was hung at the age of only 41 years in Durham Goal in 1873.

It is estimated she murdered possibly 22 innocent people.

Location 14 - High Street East

Thomas Fury

The grisly murder of Maria Fitzsimmons by sailor Thomas Fury took place in 1869, just off High Street East, at Baines Lane.

This story begins in February 1869 when Fury left his ship on the River Wear for a drinking session on shore. While he became familiar with the local pubs and taverns he met a woman described by the police as “a disorderly character”.

The pair continued to drink together along the High Street and finally went back to Maria’s lodgings on Baines Lane, an area that was being redeveloped for the laying down of James William Street.

The story is told that Fury was so drunk he collapsed at her lodgings ‘dead drunk.’ When he finally woke from his drunken stupor he found he had been robbed of this money and possessions. He accused Maria and demanded she returned his possessions. Something of an argument followed, then Fury attacked Maria fleeing the scene and leaving her to die. Fury then returned to his ship on the River Wear. Maria’s body was not discovered until the following night, by then Fury was long gone on his next voyage.

This murder would have remained one of the many unsolved murders, however he was arrested in 1879 for robbery in Norwich. During this period of incarceration Fury became ill and near to death. Apparently suffering nightmares worrying he would be going to Hell for his sins. Fury confessed his crime. Durham Magistrate in 1882, passed the death sentence, and 13 years after the deadly deed he was punished for his crime!

location 15 - Church Walk

Tommy Sanderson

Thomas Sanderson was born in Sunderland on 8th January 1808. He was a very eccentric character in Sunderland known for his umbrella mending, poetry and musical talents. From his home known as Metal Hall, an iron hut on wheels he sold all sorts of musical instruments but his main occupation was mending umbrellas.

He was evicted by the corporation from his home and pitch near Borough Road, which was near where the Museum is today. Tommy decided to leave Sunderland for a while. However, when he returned he became the Corporation Bell Man and Sunderland's Town Crier until his death in 1892.

A painting that belongs to Sunderland Museum, clearly shows Tommy in Church walk in the East End, calling out news and messages for the public to hear.