

The Port of Tyne

A Snapshot of Past and Present

The term 'carrying coals to Newcastle' could have been invented specifically for the Port of Tyne, as it handled the majority of coal exports from the local mines in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

In the sixty years from 1952 to 2012, the Port has changed and diversified, handling all manner of goods for import and export, along with modern passenger facilities, to become a thriving business serving the North East.



The Past – 1952

From the Branch's inception in 1952, until 1968, the Port of Tyne was managed by the Tyne Improvement Commission (TIC) which helped lay the foundations of what was to become the modern day port of today.

Nationally recognised, the Port of Tyne was a major exporter of coal at the time, with some 9.4million tonnes exported in 1952 via five dedicated facilities: Whitehill Point, Jarrow, Howdon, Dunston Staithes and Tyne Dock. Although a reduction on pre-war exports, the Port was still seen as an important coal shipping centre.

In 1952 the Port was also the second largest ship builder and the largest ship-repairing port in the world – its dredged depths accommodated the majority of cargo vessels afloat.

Many cargoes were imported and exported from the Port. Just some interesting examples include: apples, bananas, bricks, butter, canned meat, canned fish, carpets, carrots, cement, chalk, cheese, cherries, chocolate, dates, dog food, dried eggs, electric cable, flagstones, flour, glass bottles, goatskins, grapes, grass seed, Iron castings, lemons, marble, nails, oatmeal, paper, prunes, rags, rock salt, rubber tyres, sand, sheep skins, soap, split peas, steel scrap, sugar, tea, teak, tobacco, tomatoes, treacle, wall paper, wax, wheat and wool.

The main activities at Albert Edward Dock on the north bank of the Tyne was the importing of timber, pit props and sawn wood, and the export of sulphate of ammonia and the shipment of motor vehicles to Scandinavia. An astonishing 220,426 pit props and 157,552 other timber items were handled at the dock in 1952. Its importance led to the Pyman Bell and Co Timber Yard at Albert Edward Dock and Jarrow being mechanised to expedite the handling of timber cargoes.

In 1952 a total of 126,000 passengers passed through the Port of Tyne – almost all travelling to or from Norway or Denmark. The Norwegian passenger and mail services were operated by Fred Olsen Lines and a Danish service to Esbjerg operated twice weekly during the summer months with passenger numbers in excess of 10,000. In addition the Cairn-Thomson Line operated a regular service from Newcastle to Canada.

Proverbially, the ‘carrying of coals’ to Newcastle was actually quite the reverse – the export of this commodity to every corner of the globe was Newcastle’s primary economic activity. In the 1930s 20million tonnes of coal was exported annually, though by 1952 this had reduced to 8.5million tonnes, along with 9,342 tonnes of beer, 17,578 tonnes of fresh fruit, 239,764 tonnes of grain and 699,120 tonnes of iron ore being handled by the Port.

The growing commercial importance of iron ore to the Port in 1952 brought about the construction of a dedicated import facility at Tyne Dock. Opening the following year, it initially handled over 1.4million tonnes of imported iron annually, the majority of which served the Consett Steel works.

From 1947, the TIC spent £175,255 on Capital and Major works as the Port went through a period of rapid progress. Many of the quays known today opened in the 1940s and 1950s and helped overall turnover swell to £1.4m in 1952.

Private enterprise was also making substantial contributions to local development, including the Rank Hovis Flour Mill and Spillers Flour Mill – the former closing in 1981 and transformed into the Baltic Centre for Contemporary Art in the late 1990s, while Spillers Mill was less fortunate, it finally being demolished in 2011.

PLAN OF THE TYNE COMMISSIONERS' DOCKS
 showing principal discharging and loading facilities

Tyne Improvement Commission
PLAN OF
NORTHUMBERLAND,
ALBERT EDWARD &
TYNE DOCKS.
showing principal features.



- A COAL SHIPPING STAITHS
- B COAL SHIPPING STAITHS
- C TYNE COMMISSION QUAY
- D QUAY EXTENSION
- E GRAIN WAREHOUSE QUAY
- F SOUTH EAST QUAY
- G HYDRAULIC ENGINE HOUSE QUAY
- H OIL JETTY
- I SUTHERLAND QUAY
- J TRANSIT SHEDS (MARKED IN YELLOW)
- K NORTH WEST QUAY
- L FACTORY QUAY
- M 30-TON ELECTRIC CRANE
- N DECKING QUAY
- O WAITING BERTH
- P COAL SHIPPING STAITHS WAREHOUSES



SCALE:—6 INCHES TO 1 MILE

Present Day - 2012

Sixty years on, in 2012, the Port of Tyne and its Tyne Dock estate are virtually unrecognisable. In fact, there is no Dock.

From its heyday and record coal exports in 1913 (totalling 7million tonnes in a single year) to dereliction by the 1960s, the four staiths leading coal to the dock were demolished in the late 1970s and the southern end of the dock subsequently in-filled to increase available development space. In 2010 the construction of the new Tyne Tunnel brought with it the opportunity to infill the remainder of the dock with spoil from the site – an innovative, cost-effective and sustainable engineering solution – creating 14 acres of additional land to facilitate further business development for the Port’s stakeholders and regenerate the regional economy.

The Port of Tyne is now one of the UK's major deep sea ports and an important trading gateway to Europe and beyond. Investment of over £100m in the past 10 years has created the infrastructure to deliver continued growth of the Port's diverse businesses. These include conventional and bulk cargoes, car terminals, cruise and ferries, logistics (containers, warehousing and distribution) and a portfolio of commercial property. A £5 million investment in 2011 to deepen the Tyne further made it possible for the Port to handle 83% of the world’s global fleet of cargo vessels.

Despite the industry’s highs and lows, coal has continued its intrinsic link with the region, and with 2.1m tonnes imported in 2011, most of it destined for the power generating companies, the Port of Tyne is currently the UK’s fourth largest coal handling port.

The Port’s three car terminals saw a record number of cars pass through it in 2012 – 667,000 in all – keeping its place as the UK’s number one



car exporter and the fifth largest in Europe. Demand for components at the nearby Nissan plant in Sunderland, along with rising consumer demand for retail goods, helped drive the number of containers to a record 71,000 twenty feet equivalent units.

This all helped the Port to a record turnover of £60m and profits of £9m, producing the best financial performance in its history. The critical role good transport infrastructure plays in delivering this success, not just to the Port but the region's wealth, cannot be over-stated. In 2011 the Port is estimated to have added over £467m to the North East economy and supported almost 9,500 jobs.

The Port of Tyne has transformed its business model to become more commercially responsive to changing market conditions. It is leading developments in renewable energy and, in 2010, commissioned Europe's largest wood pellet handling and storage facility. With its asset base and geographical location, it is well placed to meet the needs of the emerging offshore wind turbine manufacturing industry.

Further investment in new facilities, new markets, improving its rail infrastructure and strategic land acquisitions will secure the Port of Tyne as one of the UK's largest deep sea ports and enable further expansion in the years ahead.

Thanks to David McLaren of Port of Tyne for preparing this article. Further information can be found at www.portoftyne.co.uk