An Introduction

Birkenhead and its surrounding area has a long and rich history. There is much to learn about how the town started and how its population grew due to an increase in various industries, in particular ship building. In this study, children will gain an understanding of how Birkenhead became the place we know and love today.

What you need to know

The earliest settlers in the area date back to the late Neolithic Age, with evidence of various tools being found in the area. These groups would have moved a lot, choosing to utilise the River Mersey for fishing and trade. This continued throughout the Stone, Bronze and Iron Age.

Following this period, a small amount of evidence suggests that Romans lived in the area, with strong links to the nearby city of Chester. Stone used to build various structures and gravestones within Chester were found to originate from the Storeton Quarry, which is in Birkenhead. A Roman road leading into Birkenhead also hints at this important relationship between the two areas, suggesting trade taking place to and from Chester.

After the Roman departure from Britain, the Viking and Saxon era began and this led to a large invasion of the country. We know that Vikings arrived at what is now Meols in around AD 902. A Viking warrior named Ingimund established this port and from it, Viking settlers would have spread out across the Wirral, forming small hamlets and farmsteads. Two areas of importance, just near to Birkenhead, include Thingwall – a historic location where Viking leaders would meet to decide laws, and Thor's Rock – a religious site dedicated to the Nordic god Thor.

When the Normans arrived, a survey was completed (the Domesday Book) and Birkenhead was not mentioned, although several settlements did exist in the area surrounding it.

It was not until 1150 that the town's story began, with the creation of a priory. This was a religious site held by monks and a small settlement began to form around it. It was also the location of a ferry that over time, gained visitors as people travelled across the country to trade their goods – ending in Liverpool.

Years later, in 1536 – Henry VIII's dissolution of monasteries took place across the country and the priory fell into abandonment, but the settlement surrounding it remained. This stayed a steady settlement with around 100 inhabitants until the arrival of a man named William Laird. In 1824 he founded a boiler works and later a shipyard in Birkenhead and everything changed. Large amounts of people moved to the area looking for work, and soon the population grew to almost 3,000 people.

MERSEYSIDE

Birkenhead

William and his family made a huge impact on the development of Birkenhead as they continued to invest in its growth. The town benefited from some incredible town planning, with areas such as Hamilton Square and Birkenhead Park being created. New churches, hospitals and schools were built, and for the first time, Birkenhead was being seen as a perfect place to settle and start a life.

The Industrial Revolution in Birkenhead did not really begin until the introduction of the first steam ferry service between Birkenhead in Liverpool. This was soon followed by the railway that linked the town to Chester and the wider country. In 1886, the Mersey Railway Tunnel opened providing an even quicker link to Liverpool. Improved transport links and William Laird's shipyard helped accelerate population growth in the town.

During World War 1, many men from Birkenhead served in the Cheshire Regiment. Some also served in the Birkenhead Bantams, a special batallion for men who were shorter than the usual height required to serve as soldiers. One famous soldier, who had grown up in Birkenhead, was Wilfre Owen. His poetry was a powerful reminder of the terrible situation that soldiers were thrist into.

Birkenhead contributed to the war effort again in World War 2. People from the town served all over the world and worked in factories making important equipment. Onle local hero was Norman Tunna who prevented a huge explosion during an air raid on Morpeth Dock.

After the wars, like most of Britain, Birkenhead underwent change once again. New housing estates were built to replace older, cramped housing. Sites which had suffered bomb damage were repaired or rebuilt. The town's market hall became one of the largest in Europe and even saw the beginning of the famous Marks and Spencers.

Through redevelopment, the town still remembers it's past, making sure to honour its incredible history and heritage.

Resources

Our key enquiry questions, sources, PowerPoints, activities, and other resources will help to build children's understanding of their local area of Birkenhead and answer the question 'How has Birkenhead changed over time?'

Get in touch

Is there an area of local history you'd love to see on our Local History Hub?
Get in touch to learn how we can work together! Email
LocalHistory@tpet.co.uk
to find out more.

MERSEYSIDE

Birkenhead

Local History

Historic England and Teacher's Pet have come together to bring you a collection of free resources that you can use in your local history teaching.

Who are Teacher's Pet?

Teacher's Pet have been providing downloadable and playable educational content to early years and primary school teachers for over 14 years. We cover all areas of the curriculum and use a team of in-house teachers and designers to create engaging and memorable concepts, that the children will love.

Why local history?

At **Teacher's Pet** we want to empower primary school teachers by giving them the tools they need to deliver inspiring and thoughtful lessons about the local area and its history. We believe local history teaching has such an important part to play in a child's wellbeing – helping to give children a sense of pride in where they live.

Our Local History project is designed to provide teachers across the UK with everything they need to successfully carry out a full scheme of teaching about their local area, through key enquiry questions and source led activities.

Working with **Historic England** gives us access to archived maps and photos for resources and information from knowledgeable local historians, as well helping us to provide the content to you free of charge.

For more information about our Local History project or to find out more about Teacher's Pet Classroom Resources, please visit our website.