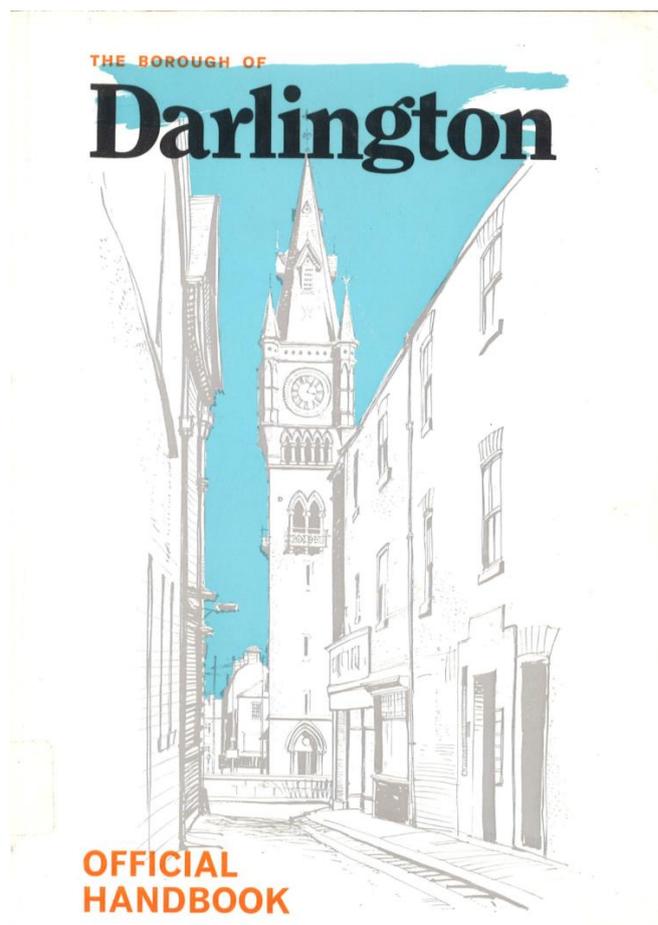


Official Handbooks of Darlington.

These guides were published by the Corporation, (the Council) as a way of promoting the town, its history, cultural features and businesses. They form a useful resource for anyone interested in researching or referencing aspects of the town's more recent past. The adverts (sometimes these are indexed) for local businesses are particularly popular with enquirers looking at family or local history. The photographs are also fascinating in the way they offer a snapshot in time – various housing estates just being newly built, for instance. We have a collection of these invaluable volumes in the Local Studies room, dating from 1945 up to the 1970s.

One thing that stands out as a constant is the sense of 'Pride in our Town' communicated in the text of these publications. There is inevitably a certain amount of repetition, as paragraphs extolling the railway and engineering history are cut and pasted from year to year – but it is cheering to read that when Darlingtonians, if asked where they lived they were emboldened to declare, 'the Hub of the Universe'!

Amongst other features, one can track the population fluctuations, statistics about public transport, the various anniversaries we were celebrating – Darlington's Golden Jubilee, or 100 years of The Northern Echo for instance. A certain nostalgia is inevitable – how things have changed, how quaint the streets looked when less populated by traffic. The Handbooks must have been ideal for new residents, with street-maps and all those useful names and numbers collected in one place – where to go for a bowling green (six options), or a dance hall (two), the schools and churches, hotels and cinemas (there were seven in 1952). There is a little paragraph about the Library itself in each Handbook, with an update about the stock, the opening of new branches, the resources available – do you remember that Storytimes used to be illustrated with an epidiascope? This was a kind of projector which could have shown images from the book or other drawings for the children to look at while the story was being told.



Some of the Handbooks contain quite detailed information about local firms, Cleveland Bridge, Whessoe, Paton and Baldwins, the Chemical and Insulating Company, the Steel Mills and so on. Others contain one-off topics of interest, such as a guide explaining the iconography of the town Coat of Arms, or the history and symbolism of the Mayoral Insignia. Some editions have the text reproduced in French and German – another sign of the self-confidence of earlier decades, and perhaps with the growth of ‘Town Twinning’ in the 1950s, when the administration could boast, from edition to edition, of the town that was ‘famous throughout the modern world’.