

SOMEONE once told Rob Shepherd that Grangetown was “without history, uninteresting and merely somewhere on the way from Sunderland to Ryhope.” It is a statement, however, the GP is keen to challenge – and he has penned a trilogy of books packed with facts, figures and fascinating village stories as proof. “How far from the truth it is!” he said. “I have been both captivated and fascinated by the rich and diverse heritage of Grangetown during my research.” Rob has devoted the past few years to delving into the history of the 19th century village, gathering together maps, documents, old tales and archive photos. And the fruits of his labours have just been published in three weighty tomes – Just Like It Was Yesterday – A History of the Village of Grangetown, Volumes One, Two and Three. “Ordinary people, living ordinary lives in ordinary times forged Grangetown. It is anything but an ordinary village, however, as my books show,” said Rob. Volume One of his trilogy tackles the early history of Grangetown, tracing the medieval farming roots of the area – and even dipping into its “plausible Roman heritage.” Indeed, although Grangetown only emerged in the latter part of the 19th century from the larger township of Ryhope, Rob believes its origins could be far more ancient. “Grangetown’s cemetery was built on land known as Chester Stones,” he said. “This name would suggest the remnants of a walled or defended settlement. Perhaps a Roman fortlet. “Certainly its position would be strategic, built on higher ground and on a main thoroughfare – a precursor of a later ancient trackway which became Ryhope Lane and thence Ryhope Road. “The old Roman coastal road was also said to have crossed the settlement. Many of the old field names, countless Anglo-Saxon, some Norse, would also infer an earlier forgotten legacy.” Many centuries later, during the time of the Act of Enclosure in the mid-1600s, the land that would one day become Grangetown was toiled by tenant farmers. Two of the principal farms to evolve were Ryhope Grange and Hendon Grange, each with their own windmills. But no fewer than 12 farmsteads once worked the land. “Many of the names are still familiar in living memory – such The Grange Dairy and Hemming Street Dairy,” said Rob. “Yet many more have long since been forgotten – Utterdipe, Sunderland Roads Farm, Mill Field Farm, Halfway House Farm, Wall House Farm, to name but a few.” Ryhope Grange Farm was perhaps the foremost farm of the district, and once comprised of two farms east and west of Ryhope Road – as well as a dairy farm. “The west farm became Ryhope Grange,” said Rob. “It was run by the Lee family for many years, then later through marriage by Tom Clark. Eventually it became known as Clark’s Farm. “The Grange, which was originally the east farm, was farmed by the Lee family too, and the Grange Dairy was managed by Tom Clark’s brother Joe for many years. “The farmhouse at Ryhope Grange is said to date from the late 18th century and is now a listed building, although sadly the buildings of the other farms have long since gone.” The windmills which once dominated the Grangetown skyline have also disappeared – although old photographs remain as a memorial to the work they once carried out. “Hendon Grange Mill was said to have been removed from George Street, near Coronation Street in the old East End, in around 1798, before being erected in Grangetown,” said Rob. “By the turn of the 20th century it was no longer in use. Much of the wooden structure was stripped away during the difficult days of the General Strike of 1926 and the Great Depression.” Known locally as The Stob Mill, it originally boasted four wands – until two were blown off. It was eventually demolished in the 1930s, during the construction of the St. Aidan’s Estate. “Ryhope Grange Mill served the community for a far shorter time, and was certainly no longer being used by the 1880s, yet remained within the landscape the longest,” said Rob. “It served as a landmark for sailors navigating the treacherous North East coastal waters, but would finally be demolished when St. Aidan’s Estate was enlarged.” Residential development may have obliterated the historic mills, but it was industrial endeavour which would ultimately change the tranquillity of the rural land for ever. “Although

Ryhope Colliery was eventually sunk further to the south, prospecting occurred throughout the district – including the area that was to become Grangetown,” said Rob. “Other industries soon spilled into the area, too. Halfway House limestone quarry was one of the first, and supplied much of the raw material for the construction of Hendon Docks. “Then there was Hendon Paper Works, which became the largest employer in the vicinity, as well as glassworks, smithies, an iron foundry and the Spelterworks of Candlish and Hudson. “In later years there was a cabinet works and a clothing factory too. There were also many small holdings, allotments, market gardens and piggeries.” As thriving industries developed, so too did the village of Grangetown. Streets and lanes were laid out, together with shops, pubs and cottages for the many labourers and artisans. “Much of the early character of Grangetown is owed to a builder and contractor called George Moir, who is regarded as the founder of the village,” said Rob. “He built a great many properties in Grangetown, as well as in Ryhope and Sunderland, and was known as a great authority of rights of way, local history and events.” Indeed, many of the street names provided by Moir were based on local history or characters now long since forgotten, as Rob has discovered during his research into the village. “Take, for example, Hemming Street. Who today would know that this street was named after a former landowner and chemist called Robert Hemming?” he said. “Stratford Avenue, on Grangetown’s northern boundary, was named after Henry Stratford – a former miller at Hendon Grange Mill and farmer at Chester Stones. “And Margaret and William Street were both named for members of the Moir Family – the wife and son of George. This gave a very human side to Grangetown.” Further details on Grangetown’s early farms, mills, streets and factories are provided in great depth within Rob’s first book, with old maps and photographs used to document his evidence. “From its Roman heritage, through to medieval subsistence farming and the formative years of industrial endeavour, I have tried to capture the story of Grangetown,” he said. “The story of this village through poverty, hardship and depression, years of sacrifice and two World Wars is both captivating and compelling.”

Articles on Rob’s two other volumes of Grangetown history will be featured over the coming weeks. The books, which are hardback and full colour throughout, have been produced on a not-for-profit basis and are available as a limited edition at £25. Further information is available from Rob on 0191 548 2040 or via email at robsshepherd1974@gmail.com

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