FG: Hello and welcome back to episode 14 of the Counties of England podcast! In this week’s episode we will be covering the county which holds a miner’s gala each year. The county which was the birthplace of mustard, and the county which has the world’s oldest surviving single-arch railway bridge. This week we will be covering the county of Durham.

FG: Durham is a county located in the North-West of England. It is bordered by 4 counties: Tyne and Wear and Northumberland to the North, North Yorkshire to the south and Cumbria to the west. The largest town in County Durham is Darlington, however the county town is the town of Durham. The population of Durham is 866,846 which puts it as the 23rd smallest county in terms of population. In terms of area, it is the 19th largest county, so in terms of population density, Durham is the 21st smallest county. Durham is split into 4 districts, those 4 being Durham, Hartlepool, Darlington, and Stockton-on-Tees.

FG: In Durham, the median salary is £28,250, which puts it below the UK average of £31,500. The unemployment rate in Durham is 6.325% which puts it well above the UK average, and this could be down to the fall of the coal mining industry, which I will talk about later in this episode. The average house price is £145,013 which puts it well below the UK average, suggesting it may not be one of the wealthier counties.

FG: Durham is divided up into 7 parliamentary constituencies. Of these, 4 are represented by Conservative MP’s and 3 are represented by Labour MP’s.

FG: The Durham miner’s gala is a festival held in Durham every year on the second Saturday of July. Its purpose is to celebrate Durham’s coal mining history. The Gala serves a political purpose, it also functions as a funfair. Many people consider it to be an unofficial brass band, and of course it owes the coal mining history in Durham. However, in recent years, people are concerned that it has just turned into an opportunity to get drunk. The people at the gala parade through the streets holding banners representing the historic miner’s lodges and still-thriving miner’s unions. In the past Dennis Skinner, former MP for Bolsover from 1970 to 2019 and strong advocate for miner’s rights, has been making speeches at the gala.

FG: Coal production peaked in 1913 and in 1923 there were 170,000 miners working in County Durham. In the 1960’s the number of coal mines in Durham halved. In 1984, even more were shut down, and in August 2020, the final coal mine, Bradley Mine was closed. This clip will explain a bit more. [Play Bradley Mine clip]The reason for the decline is that from the 1960s, the UK discovered cheaper sources of energy, such as north sea gas and oil. Also the nuclear power industry provided a new source of energy. With new energy sources, we became less dependent on coal. This clip will explain some people’s solutions to coal mining problems. [Play second Bradley Mine clip]

FG: Durham cathedral is often described as one of the most spectacular in England. The history of it is that the saxon followers of St Cuthbert, who is the patron saint of Northumberland. They discovered this site a century after the vikings chased them out of Lindisfarne. After that, the Normans arrived and built their own cathedral, and dedicated it to St Cuthbert to please the locals, and despite its magnificence, there is no admission fee. Durham cathedral is so spectacular that it has been used in the Harry Potter films.

FG: Another nice place of interest in Durham is the Beamish open air museum. I think I went there when I was very young so I don’t know very much about it, but from looking it up online, it looks very interesting. For example, at Beamish there is a 1900’s town, a 1900’s pit village, a 1940’s farm, a 1900’s colliery, an 1820’s pockerley and an Edwardian railway station. It looks very much like the Black Country living museum, I don’t know if any of you listening have been there, but essentially it is an open-air museum, which has these things from decades ago, and its aim is to educate people about life decades ago essentially.

FG: The flag of County Durham was registered on November 21st, 2013. The flag is based on the St Cuthbert’s cross, with the whole design counter-changed horizontally between the County Durham colours of blue and yellow.

FG: Facts about Durham include:

• Originally built back in the 11th century, Durham Castle is one of the best-preserved examples of Norman motte and bailey castles. For over 900 years, the castle has been in constant use and was once a key strategic landmark for the ruling Normans. It is also interesting to note that the castle is the only one built in the UK that has never suffered a breach. With such a rich and lengthy history, it is almost unsurprising that it is a part of one of the world’s first World Heritage Sites. The Durham Cathedral and Castle World Heritage Site was given its title around the same time as the palace of Versailles and the Taj Mahal.

• Neil Fingleton was crowned Britain’s tallest man back in 2007. At 7 ft. 7 inches he beat out the reigning Guinness World Record holder at the age of 26. Since that time, he played a few rather exciting roles in Hollywood movies including 47 Ronin, Jupiter Ascending and Avengers: Age of Ultron. Most recently he played Mag the Great in the award-winning TV series, Game of Thrones. Sadly, Neil died in February 2017.

• County Durham was the official birthplace of this much-loved condiment. Its story begins back in the early 1900’s, when one Mrs. Clements decided to grind up mustard seeds in order to get more flavour out of them. She developed a paste out of this process that quickly became popular all over the UK. After being passed down to her daughter, the family business was eventually sold to the Colman’s of Norwich.

• The Causey Arch was built back in 1725 and is officially the world’s oldest surviving single-arch railway bridge. Upon completion, its main purpose was to transport coal and empty wagons to the River Tyne. At its peak, the bridge saw more than 900 horses a day dragging carts back and forth to serve this vital British industry. It is interesting to learn that, upon its completion, the bridge’s designer committed suicide due to the fear he had that it would collapse. It would appear that his fears were rather unfounded as it has now stood for almost 300 years.

• The World Cup as we know it today was founded in 1930. However, back in 1910, Sir Thomas Lipton organised an earlier edition of an international football tournament in Italy. He asked the English Football League to allow him to recruit an English side to compete and they denied him. After a strange turn of affairs, he ended up selecting a team from West Auckland, which was made up of miners. They went on to win that tournament 2-0, beating out Juventus 2-0. Two years later, they returned and once again beat Juventus in the final. As of writing, the whereabouts of the tournament trophy is unknown as it has been missing since the late 1900’s.

FG: That is just about it for this week’s episode, and as usual I really hope that you enjoyed it. Stay tuned for the next episode coming on the 10th of April, and in that episode, I will be covering the East Riding of Yorkshire. So have a good week and I will talk to you again next Saturday.