

Along the Road

A Heritage Trail

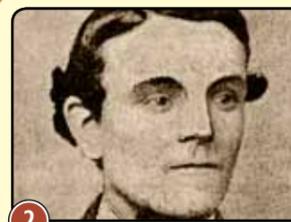
Following the route of the Geordie anthem *Blaydon Races*.



1 This is the centre of Newcastle in 1861.

The town was in the middle of a major transformation. Not only was it booming economically, but its appearance was changing as a result of the ambitious redevelopment schemes mainly led by the trio of builder and developer Richard Grainger, architect John Dobson and town clerk John Clayton. The Central Station, the Grainger Market, the High Level Bridge, Grey's Monument, and most of Grey Street including the Theatre Royal were among the creations of the period between 1830 and 1870.

At the same time, to the west, the peaceful semi-rural environs of Benwell, Elswick and Scotswood were being transformed into one of the foremost industrial areas in Britain.



2 George Ridley

George Ridley was born in Gateshead in 1835 into a mining family. His first job at the age of eight was as a trapper boy down a pit – a horrible job that meant sitting in the dark for hours on end, opening and shutting doors. After being seriously injured at work in his twenties, he embarked on a successful career as an entertainer until his tragically early death at the age of 29. The best known of his popular Tyneside songs are *Blaydon Races* and *Cushy Butterfield*.



3 "I took the bus"

Blaydon Races tells the story of a bus journey in 1862 on a rainy summer afternoon. A group of people travelled from Newcastle to watch the annual races in Blaydon. The vehicle they went in was an open-topped horse-drawn coach, and the poor condition of the roads would have made this a dirty and uncomfortable experience. Pictured here is a scene from the centenary celebrations of the *Blaydon Races* in 1962.



4 Balmbras Music Hall

Going to the music hall was the most popular leisure activity in the 1860s. There were several music halls in Newcastle, but Balmbras in the Cloth Market was the most famous. It was originally called the Wheat Sheaf Inn, and was also known as the Royal Music Saloon. John Balmbras was the manager. In 1862 the Old Town Hall would have stood opposite the music hall. This was demolished when the new Civic Centre was built in the 1960s, but Balmbras is still standing today.



5 Mosley Street & St Nicholas' Church

In 1862 St Nicholas' Church was not yet a cathedral. Dating from the 12th century or earlier, it was one of four churches in Newcastle along with St John's, St Andrew's and All Saints. It became a cathedral in 1882. Mosley Street was the first street in the world to be lit by electricity. Joseph Swan, inventor of the light bulb (made in Benwell), had his shop here on the west side of the street. This building, which is now Kelburn House, is marked by a plaque.



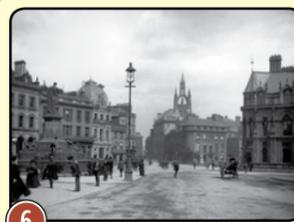
Local People: Local Heroes

This trail follows the route of the famous bus journey from Newcastle to Blaydon in 1862. Start in Newcastle city centre where you can still see several of the places mentioned in the song. Travel with us along the Scotswood Road by bus, car or on foot. Finally, over the water to Blaydon to visit the sites where the *Blaydon Races* actually took place.

This heritage trail was devised by St James' Heritage & Environment Group, a local community organisation based in the west end of Newcastle which is dedicated to exploring and celebrating the heritage and environment of this area.

To contact us:
Visit our website at stjameschurchnewcastle.wordpress.com
Write to us c/o Pendower Good Neighbour Project, 12 Sunnybank Avenue, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE15 6SD
Visit us at St James' Church, Benwell Lane, any Tuesday between 12-4.

The trail represents part of the "Along the Road" Heritage Lottery funded project to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the song.



6 Collingwood Street & Neville Street

Opposite the Central Station is the George Stephenson Memorial. Stephenson was one of Tyneside's most famous engineers, responsible for building the world's first passenger railway line using steam locomotives. His engineering works were behind the station. In June 1862 the memorial was in the process of being erected. The Central Station had been opened by Queen Victoria in 1850 but the portico was not completed until 1863, so the race-goers would have passed a building site.



7 The Infirmary

In 1862 the Infirmary (pictured here in about 1795) was at Forth Banks on a site now occupied by the Centre for Life. This was originally a lovely green area. The building replaced an earlier infirmary at Gallowgate, and was itself replaced in 1906 by the present day Royal Victoria Infirmary. Dr Gibbs lived and worked in a big house on the north side of Westgate Road near the junction with Grainger Street. The Dispensary was in Nelson Street. A plaque marks the location.



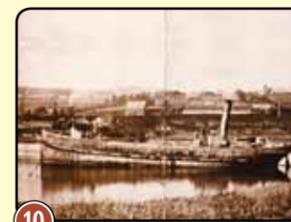
8 Scotswood Road

Before the housing clearance programmes of the 1960s and 1970s, Scotswood Road was at the heart of the community. It was a bustling street of shops and pubs, with dozens of streets of terraced housing running down the steep banks to join it. The Robin Adair, immortalised in *Blaydon Races*, was one of more than forty pubs along its length, many named after the adjacent industries, such as the Hydraulic Crane, the Forge Hammer, and the Mechanics Arms (above).



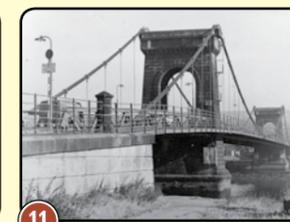
9 Armstrong's Factory

In 1862, stretches of the Scotswood Road were still quite rural. However William Armstrong had opened his first engineering works at Elswick in 1847. Originally building hydraulic machinery, it soon branched out to bridges, armaments and then ships. Pictured above is the arrival in 1861 of a massive anvil and hammer for making guns. By 1884 the 50 acre site could build and equip an entire warship from raw material to finished product. By 1895 it employed 11,000 people.



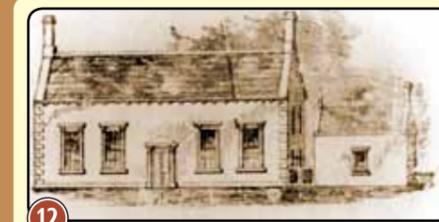
10 Paradise

Paradise is in the south of Benwell. Paradise Village consisted of Paradise Row with its Methodist Chapel. Next to it was Paradise House, a large dwelling with extensive gardens stretching down to the Tyne. Nearby there was a factory producing oils and pigments for paints and dyes. Just to the north lay a colliery and some pit cottages. Despite its proximity to the Newcastle-Carlisle railway, opened in 1838, Paradise would still have been quite a secluded spot in 1862.



11 Chain Bridge

The Chain Bridge was built in 1831. Designed by the north east architect and civil engineer, John Green, it was the first of its type. It consisted of a suspension bridge hung on chains from two stone towers. In 1862 it was a toll bridge, remaining so until 1907. The bridge was demolished in 1967 and replaced by the new Scotswood Bridge further to the west. This is a box girder construction and has required major strengthening works several times already.



12 Blaydon Mechanics Hall

The Mechanics Hall, which no longer exists, was on the opposite side of the road from Blaydon Railway Station. When the Races started in 1811, they took place on a site next to where the station is now, and stopped when the station was built. They were revived in 1861 on an island further west, until that site too was subject to re-development. The Blaydon races were started again in the 1880s, this time on Stella Haughs.

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Trail created by: Judith Green and St James' Heritage & Environment Group 2012
Inspired by 150th Anniversary Blaydon Races Guided Tour by Pat Lowery, North East England Blue Badge Guide and local historian
Images courtesy of West Newcastle Picture History Collection and Newcastle City Libraries and Information Service



