

RE INVENTING THE CITY



Part three

Reinventing the City: 1980 - 2009

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way...”

Part Three

Reinventing the City: 1980 - 2009

“Where there’s a will, there’s a way.....”

Introduction

The River Tyne does not divide one settlement into two halves. It unites two settlements into one. Two settlements sharing 2,000 years of history and linked by seven iconic bridges.

To build even one successful river crossing requires two settlements to liaise closely together. Newcastle and Gateshead demonstrated partnership working not once but seven times over centuries of bridge building.

So how long would it be before two became one?

How long would it be before the “and” between the two became redundant?

In the 1980s “urban regeneration” was the new catchphrase throughout Britain. Ways and means were explored of enticing private sector investment involvement in reinventing the run down urban areas. But the private sector had lost confidence in the inner cities during the 1970s and early ‘80s. Before anything could improve, the public sector had to show its willingness to take the lead. By putting its money where its mouth was and co-ordinating the efforts needed to create much needed confidence both Newcastle and Gateshead councils began to work more closely together to provide the right platform for the private sector.

T Dan Smith had faced the same questions in the 1960s.

And what goes around.....comes around.....

In the 1980s derelict land littered both sides of the River Tyne. The three key industries of heavy engineering, coal and shipbuilding were lost and their demise had left ugly scars on both sides of the riverbanks. But in the early 1980s Gateshead begins to make use of resources which became available following the break up of Tyne and Wear County Council. Major projects began to take shape: Gateshead International Stadium was born; the first, and still the largest, out of town shopping centre in Europe – Gateshead Metro Centre – turned once derelict land into a prime retail area; the Gateshead Garden Festival in 1990 incorporated works of art drawing the interest and admiration of visitors and locals. Plans were hatched to open up riverside vistas, establish a network of footpaths and cycle

routes and replace the riverside industrial base with mixed use developments.

Previously, NewcastleGateshead’s industries had proved the driving force to change. Post-industrialisation it became more an effort of will. It was essential that the public and private sector worked together.

Art and culture were identified as the new catalysts to drive regeneration, create new opportunities and take a revitalised “NewcastleGateshead” forward into the future.

The River Tyne was about to be re-invented. A river renowned for its past creativity in ship building and heavy engineering was about to provide the background for a different type of creativity.

Stop 1

Gateshead Millenium Bridge / BALTIC Square

The key to the cultural regeneration on the south bank of the River Tyne, Gateshead Millennium Bridge demands attention. Designed by architects Wilkinson Eyre this is the world’s first tilting bridge and a triumph of imaginative design and creative engineering. Moving it into place in November 2000 required the use of the world’s second largest crane, Asian Hercules II, and when the bridge officially opened to the public on 17 September 2001 it did so to instant acclaim, quickly establishing itself as a work of art as well as a functional, stylish way to cross the river.

Commissioned by Gateshead Council the bridge was designed to unite both riverbanks at water level and to carry only pedestrians and cyclists across the river. The shape complements the other bridges and the view of those neighbouring structures is unimpeded. But the Gateshead Millennium Bridge had to do more than just look good. It had to be designed in such a way that it could open to allow river traffic to gain access up the river.

The winning design team found a way around the problem. Inspired by the shape of the human eye and particularly by the way an eye blinks open and shut, the engineers came up with a bridge which tilts open to provide the necessary clearance for ships to sail beneath.

The world’s first tilting bridge uses hydraulic machinery to produce the cost-effective energy which turns the structure on pivots to form the famous “gateway arch”. The hydraulic rams are synchronised on both sides to

avoid buckling the bridge through uneven pressure. And for the designers it was quality all the way: all the finishings for the bridge had to be very high class to achieve uniformity of colour and it was manufactured with precision to a tolerance of just 3mm. Any litter dropped on the bridge automatically rolls into special traps at each end when the bridge begins to tilt. And there is as much of the bridge below water as soaring above it: the foundations reach down 30 metres to safely anchor the structure to the river bed.

Four and a half minutes of sheer joy as it elegantly glides open and only £3.60 in terms of energy efficiency. And viewed at night with a bluish computer-generated light playing across the steel arch the Gateshead Millennium Bridge adds drama to the river landscape.

Stop 2

Art on the Riverside

A Lottery funded arts project to help revitalise the riverbanks and add visual interest the Art on the Riverside project consists of several striking pieces of sculpture scattered along the Quayside near Gateshead Millenium Bridge.

The bronze River God stands on top of a steel column with his cheeks puffed out as he blows as hard as he can. He faces a flight of stone steps at the top of which, etched into the sandstone, are the words of one of Newcastle's most famous songs "The Keelrow". This area is known as Sandgate and in the 18th century was the residential area for the keelmen who rowed the boats carrying the coal down the river. They traditionally wore short blue jackets, yellow waistcoats and blue bonnets and their story is ingrained in Newcastle's cultural past.

A golden globe sits atop the Swirle Pavilion and inside the sculpture are the names of the destinations of ships which departed from the Tyne during its industrial heyday. Swirle is simply the name of a small stream which flowed into the Tyne near this point.

The Blacksmiths' Needle is different again. Divided into six horizontal segments the observant viewer will see an ear. Then an eye. And a nose. The theme? The five senses. So why the extra segment? To represent the sixth sense.....

It's almost impossible to picture how this area looked in the past. The smart new offices of today's commercial enterprises occupy an area once dominated by run down workshops, quays

and warehouses. Quite different from the views enjoyed today by the residents of the Mariners Wharf apartments.

Stop 3

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art

BALTIC Centre for Contemporary Art is housed in one of the largest brick structures on Tyneside. For thirty years until 1981 it functioned as a grain warehouse, as opposed to a grain mill, and was built by company Joseph Rank which had mills in other industrial cities including Hull and London. All were named after famous oceans of the world and this one was named Baltic to reflect the River Tyne's trading links with Scandinavia and the Baltic area.

In 1994 architect Dominic Williams won the competition to re-invent the old industrial building and the concept of an "art factory" for contemporary art was born. The old honeycomb of square concrete grain silos were scooped out and gradually five new floors were installed. Lime washed Scandinavian pine boards from slow growing forests in northern Sweden were used to create a spacious, simple design which works well with the other building materials of riven slate, pre-oxidised steel, frameless glass and stretched fabric ceilings. Out of sight is a huge heavy-duty goods lift capable of installing huge pieces of art.

Stop 4

The Sage Gateshead

An international music venue designed by British architect Sir Norman Foster and a worthy addition to its classy neighbours.

The building's steel and glass roof reaches twice the height of the Angel of the North and if laid out flat would equal the size of two football pitches. Like an umbrella the roof sails over the top of the three free-standing buildings which shelter beneath its dome and the weight of the steel frame is carried at the edges of the building on four separate points. Ribs support the "bubble" roof.

And very cleverly, the building has been designed with a vapour barrier. The outer skin of the roof is not entirely waterproof and rainwater is therefore allowed to drop through to be captured on a waterproof membrane beneath. The water is then transferred to hidden gutters at ground level and this helps control the build up of condensation.

But The Sage Gateshead has been designed primarily around acoustics which was given one of the highest priorities in the early stages of the design process.

All kinds of music is performed at The Sage Gateshead and the acoustics therefore had to be sufficiently flexible to support performances of classical, jazz, folk, sung, amplified and unamplified music. In Hall 1 a complex roof structure includes moving panels which can be raised higher to control loudness for large symphonic works. Or set lower to create greater intimacy and clarity for the human voice or for piano recitals. And all the halls have acoustic curtains which can be used to reduce loudness and increase clarity for amplified music and for speed. Even the seats have been designed so that an empty seat will function acoustically the same as a seat which has a person sitting in it.

Stop 5 **Gateshead Heritage @ St Mary's**

St Mary's church is a familiar landmark on the skyline and has undergone its own re-invention in recent times. When a living place of worship the church had a recorded history stretching back to the 13th century and possibly earlier. Until 1825 it was the only Anglican church in Gateshead hence its recognition as the "mother church".

An exploration of the headstones in the churchyard reveal the professions and trades of Gateshead people of the past.

Three times the church suffered from major fires. Three times it has re-invented itself and its recent rebirth as a heritage centre devoted to exploring Gateshead's past is proving popular with locals and visitors.

But re-invention of a place can come about through a variety of reasons. And In 1854 St Mary's church was caught up in the Great Fire of Gateshead which forced its own re-invention on both Gateshead and Newcastle.

In the mid-19th century the south bank of the River Tyne was a dense development of mills and warehouses with a warren-like maze of homes and tenement dwellings stretching up the hill behind. On 6 October 1854 a fire broke out in a worsted manufacturer's warehouse and the blaze was soon fuelled by oil which was stored in the building where it was used to treat the cloth. A quick spreading fire like this, in a building standing in the midst of a heavily populated area was serious enough. But worse was to come. The neighbouring warehouse stored sulphur and nitrate of soda. Intense heat from the first building caused the sulphur to ignite and "a cataract of fire" flowed out.

Spectators flocked to both sides of the riverbanks to view the extraordinary scenes. The inevitable massive explosion which followed killed more than 50 of those unsuspecting spectators and left scores seriously injured. So massive was the explosion that coalminers working in a pit more than 20 miles away returned quickly to the surface fearing a mines explosion.

And the fire was not contained on the Gateshead side of the river. Burning debris rained down on 100 metres of Newcastle's river frontage. Newcastle and Gateshead's history became tragically entwined.

Stop 6 **Hidden Rivers / Side**

There is a great belief in NewcastleGateshead that art belongs in the city streets and not just on the walls of art galleries. Tributary is part of the Hidden Rivers art work which leads from Leazes Park in the north of the city via the Civic Centre and David Wynne's Tyne God sculpture (see Re-inventing the City: Part Two).

Transforming the road surface of Side the art work traces the route of the Lort Burn. Different types of brick and granite form a subtle part of the fabric of the street. Changes in texture suggest a series of weirs and the quickness of the flow of the unseen water is suggested by sections set close together giving the impression that they are cascading downhill.

Stop 7 **Central Square / Orchard Street / South Street**

Here are three reminders, in close proximity to each other, of NewcastleGateshead's reinvention down the centuries.

The 21st century is represented by Central Square, an innovative and stylish use of a former industrial building. To create a modern working environment the architects produced a very human space full of light and energy. Environmentally friendly, the design focuses on an interior open staircase which encourages a sense of shared community amongst everyone who works there. Outside the building is the robotic-looking modern work of art "Vulcan" sculptured by Sir Eduardo Paolozzi. In the Roman world Vulcan was the god of fire and patron of blacksmiths and metalworkers but this 7m high bronze work is as much a reminder of Tyneside's powerful industrial past as well as being a symbol of the region's current strong creative spirit.

The Stephenson Locomotive Works in South Street was the world's first purpose built locomotive factory and represents the progress of 19th century industrialisation. (See Re-inventing the City: Part One)

And the remains of the medieval town wall recall Newcastle's early role as a garrison town fortified against attack with a town wall conceived to protect its growing mercantile prosperity.

Stop 8

Centre for Life / Times Square

A tour which explores how NewcastleGateshead has consistently re-invented itself comes to a close at a building which represents NewcastleGateshead's future.

In 2004 Newcastle was designated 1 of 6 English Science Cities with a Government remit to develop future prosperity from science. Businesses, scientific, educational bodies and research institutions will come together over the next decade to create a new impetus towards economic growth.

The Centre for Life embodies those ideas. For a true hands-on, minds-on, hearts-on approach to science the Centre is hard to beat. Designed by internationally renowned architect Sir Terry Farrell, graduate of the School of Architecture at Newcastle University and shaped, when viewed from above, like a human embryo this building physically captures the story of the human body and especially DNA. Even the letter "f" in the building's name is a chromosome shape and the bright colours of the exterior walls represent some of the primary colours used in genetic coding.

But the Centre for Life is much more than just a fun place where the complexities of science are made accessible for all. There is serious scientific research going on in The Institute of Human Genetics which is one of the largest of its kind in Europe. This is where the world's first cloned human embryo was created in 2005 and where groundbreaking stem cell research continues.

The Bioscience Centre? Think vertical science park. And think success. Many couples experiencing fertility difficulties have had their dreams fulfilled here through the science of reproductive medicine and 2,000 new additions to the population are the result.

The eye-catching steel sculpture in the middle of Times Square is The DNA Spiral. The double helix formation is the structure of DNA and was discovered by Nobel prize-winning researchers James Watson (current Patron of the Centre for Life) and Francis Crick working in Cambridge in 1953. DNA is the "building block" of life itself and the double helix can literally "unzip" to produce copies of itself. On the sculpture's surface are etched the names of chemicals in DNA.

The Centre for Life has successfully brought education, fun, business and serious scientific research together for the first time on one, inner city site.

Re-invention? That's nothing new in NewcastleGateshead's case...