

RE INVENTING THE CITY

The title 'RE INVENTING THE CITY' is rendered in a bold, blocky font. The word 'RE' is positioned above 'INVENTING', and 'THE' is positioned to the left of 'CITY'. The letters 'RE', 'THE', and 'ING' are colored orange, while 'INVENT' and 'CITY' are white. The text is set against a dark grey background. A white security camera is mounted on a building that forms part of the letter 'I' in 'INVENTING'. The overall aesthetic is modern and industrial.

Part two

Reinventing the City: 1914 - 1980

“The times they are a-changin...”

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Introduction

In the ten years run up to the opening of the Tyne Bridge in 1928 NewcastleGateshead underwent major physical changes. New housing was built for the thousands of servicemen who were returning and the city suburbs grew. There was a rapid expansion in the public transport system to serve those suburbs and improvements to local infrastructure created greater access to utility supplies.

And there was social change. Women took advantage of new found opportunities opening up to them post-First World War. But the inter-war years also saw shipyards closing and up to 80% unemployment rates in the shipyard towns of Jarrow and Hebburn. NewcastleGateshead’s industrial base was being eroded, the coal trade was under pressure and even the great factory founded by Sir William Armstrong at Elswick was forced to merge with Vickers of Sheffield in 1928.

In Newcastle in 1929 The North East Coast Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art was an attempt to revive the region’s commerce and industry. It took place over a summer of sunshine from May-October 1929 and became a real showcase for local industries to promote their achievements and boost interest in the products they were manufacturing and selling. Four million visitors came along to be amazed and impressed with the range of exhibits. And gold watches were presented to each one millionth visitor. Newcastle Exhibition Ale was launched as the celebratory drink and the park which hosted the event earned itself a new name – Exhibition Park.

New buildings were erected to house the exhibits including a Palace of Engineering and even a full scale African village appeared. The Palace of Arts in its strong, steel framed domed building was particularly robust and offered just the right level of security to house valuable works of arts. Because the building was so very well built it survived the demolition process at the end of the Exhibition and in 1934 became the base for Newcastle’s Museum of Science and Engineering – the original home of Turbinia which is now housed in Discovery museum.

But one of the biggest changes in Britain was in the growth of car ownership. And in 1928 a new Tyne river crossing was opened to ease the burden of traffic congestion.

This new age of the motor car was to prompt another period of re-invention.

And it was to do so not once but twice within a forty year period.

Stop 1

Tyne Bridge / River Tyne

With its innovative design the Tyne Bridge of 1928 could not fail to impress. Opened by King George V and Queen Mary the bridge is shaped like a giant coathanger and was the first bridge to span the river without the need for any central supports in the water. Built of steel, the bridge was built from both riverbanks concurrently and, happily, both halves met successfully in the middle. The towers are built of Cornish granite and were originally designed as warehouses although never put to their original use.

The rumour that this bridge was the model for the famous Sydney Harbour Bridge in Australia is not borne out by the facts. Work on the Australian bridge started first in 1923 but the Tyne Bridge actually opened first. Dorman, Long and Co. is the real connection between the two bridges as it was the Middlesbrough firm who constructed both. The design of the Tyne Bridge was in the hands of Mott, Hay and Anderson.

One re-invention led to another. Increased vehicular use over this new high level route into the city centre demanded an upgrade of the street the Tyne Bridge led into – Pilgrim Street.

And in the 1960s, almost 40 years after the opening of the Tyne Bridge, Newcastle would still be re-inventing its city centre to take account of the age of the motor car.

Stop 2

55 Degrees North

The 55 Degrees North building stands marooned on a busy roundabout. Originally named Swan House and designed by Sir Robert Matthew this big, bold new-age statement of Modernist architecture gives us a window through which we can understand the re-invention of Newcastle in the 1960s.

Beneath ground level sinuous underpasses lead to Holy Jesus Hospital a late 17th century brick constructed architectural gem overshadowed by its towering neighbour.

What could possibly be happening in 1960s Newcastle to produce what a Modernist architect would refer to as “dynamic contrast”.

Across Great Britain the 1960s saw the advent of things now taken for granted: colour television; the arrival of pop groups on the music scene; oil beginning to replace coal as the fuel of the future; the first package holidays bringing foreign travel within the reach of many. But one of the biggest changes came in transport. Road traffic and vehicle ownership increased by almost 10% a year and motorways appeared across England’s green and pleasant land. And concrete was the favoured building material of architects.

The Newcastle Development Plan of 1963 focused on the problems of traffic congestion, economic decline and the perceived need for the modernisation of the regional capital after the deprivations of the post-2nd World War industrial decline.

How was Newcastle going to keep its head above water?

Where was its confidence now after the post-War period?

Was Newcastle falling behind the times?

In the past Newcastle’s architecture had reflected its prosperity. Was it now time for architecture to lead Newcastle out of its post-War slump. Instead of following where wealth and prosperity led could architecture actually lead to wealth and prosperity?

Was there someone out there with the vision to re-invent the city again?

“The city centre must cater to the maximum extent possible for car traffic”
(Wilfred Burns, Newcastle upon Tyne Chief Planning Officer - 1960s).

In the “swinging sixties” Newcastle’s priority was to create the right conditions for increased road traffic. To reach its goal of modernisation it was felt that a major re-think of car access into and through the city centre was needed. New routes were proposed which would create a network around the city’s commercial centre, including a link through the centre. Plans included a Central Motorway West (along the route of the present St James’ Boulevard) and a Central Motorway East. The former was never built and the latter became known as Central Motorway and with its southbound carriageway running under its northbound carriageway it became a double-decker motorway.

Traffic and pedestrians were to be separated and priority was given to smoothing the progress of cars around the city. Pedestrians navigated their way around a series of multi-level concrete walkways nicknamed “streets in the sky”.

More functional than handsome, definitely. But if the Central Motorway did not exist today it would be questionable whether pedestrianisation of some of the city centre streets in the 1990s could have happened.

Wilfred Burns plans as Chief Planning Officer was only one part of the story in the 1960s. There also had to be the political will in place to progress the plans.

Who would provide that political platform to guide Newcastle towards its goals?

Thomas Daniel Smith (1915-1993) was Leader of Newcastle City Council for five years from 1960. Popularly known as “Mr Newcastle” he earned a national reputation as a vocal supporter of urban improvements and no one could doubt his enthusiasm for ridding the city of its old industrial image. T Dan Smith was a fan of the Modernist movement of architecture characterised by simplicity of form and lack of ornament and unnecessary detail. Many thousands of miles away in the southern hemisphere a ground breaking architectural project had created a new capital city for Brazil designed along modernistic urban theories.

T Dan Smith had his vision. Why not bring those ideals to the city streets of Newcastle?

And so the idea of a “Brasilia of the North” was born with the aim of creating a beautiful city with new buildings leading to an economic rebirth. It was far removed from the Classical architecture of Richard Grainger’s 19th century redevelopments but Smith saw his re-invention of the city as a 20th century equivalent to that earlier masterpiece.

New ideas and new energy required new architects and T D Smith recruited the best known architects of the day both nationally and internationally. Sir Basil Spence, architect of Coventry Cathedral, designed the new Central Library (demolished 2008) and Danish architect Arne Jacobsen was approached to design a multi-storey hotel as part of the Eldon Square re-developments, although that part of the revamp never happened.

And for a time the idea of a “Brasilia of the North” captured people’s imagination. Parts of the

community accepted that in this march towards Modernism sacrifices had to be made, the most famous being the part-demolishing of elegant Eldon Square. Re-invention and redevelopment were prioritised at the expense of heritage.

What else would T D Smith have achieved if his political career had not fallen foul of the law? Pleading guilty to corruption charges in 1973 in relation to his dealings with architect John Poulson, Smith's political career came to a sudden halt.

Stop 3

Pilgrim Street / Market Street

Pilgrim Street takes its name from the medieval pilgrims who travelled this way to the shrine of Our Lady of Jesmond. With the arrival of a new, improved access into the city centre via the Tyne Bridge of 1928 this street underwent its own redevelopment during the 1930's.

The Central Police Station (with its blue lamp still hanging outside), Magistrates' Courts and Fire Station were completed in 1933 by the architectural duo of James Thoburn Cackett (1860-1928) and Robert Burns Dick (1868-1959). Prominent and prolific commercial architects they designed several large scale buildings including Spanish City in Whitley Bay and the Laing Art Gallery in Newcastle.

Completing this handsome set of buildings on the corner of Market Street and Pilgrim Street is Carliol House built from one of the best loved British building stones – Portland Stone. Famously used by Sir Christopher Wren when he designed the present St Paul's Cathedral in London the use of this stone for Carliol House (1924-8) creates a cosmopolitan feel right in the heart of the Grainger Town Conservation area.

Carliol House was built as the new headquarters of the North Eastern Electric Supply Company (NESCo). In the late 19th century the north east was a thriving, industrial powerhouse but its varied manufacturing base had one thing in common: a high demand for power. Those demands had to be met and met in a more economic fashion than had previously been the case. The establishment of an electrical supply grid provided the answer by offering economies of scale and the reassurance of a reliable supply of power.

In 1889 Dr Theodore Merz, whose work in the design of power stations is commemorated in the name of a building on the University of Newcastle's campus, helped to establish the Newcastle upon Tyne Electric

Supply Company. The company began a major programme of building coal-fired power stations which eventually was to see it supplying electricity to an area extending over many hundreds of square miles on both sides of the River Tyne. Manufacturing companies abandoned the idea of generating their own power and began to buy their supplies, more cheaply, from this new generating company. A name change in 1924 created the North Eastern Electric Supply Company (NESCo) and a new headquarters building planned.

Carliol House is an imposing building of the Art Deco period and neatly sums up just how far electricity had come from the days of Sir Joseph Swan's early experiments to the industry's pivotal role in the lives of local people in the early 20th century.

Stop 4

Tyneside Cinema / Pilgrim Street

In the 1930s NewcastleGateshead may have been experiencing a severe economic downturn but it didn't stop local people spending money entirely. Mass entertainment was popular and fifteen new cinemas opened their doors in Newcastle. And the world of communication was changing too. People had a thirst for knowledge especially if it was presented to them in a novel format, even if they had to pay for it.

And the news theatres of the 1930s were certainly novel. Showing news broadcasts in 1- hour long programmes these "midget theatres" satisfied a growing need for moving images which brought to life global events. Given the opportunity to see film of actual events rather than simply watch escapist films, people flocked through the doors.

In 1937 Newcastle's first News Theatre opened. Recently restored to its Art Deco splendour its Oriental décor was designed to immediately transport the viewer from the streets of Newcastle into a more far flung, exotic location. It is difficult to appreciate in these days of 24/7 news just how novel and exciting these newsreel theatres were and what an impact they would have had on the life of the ordinary citizen in the inter-war years. Newsreels may have stopped in 1968 but this theatre has recently re-invented itself and shows a mix of art house and main stream films.

Stop 5

Co-Op Department store / Newgate Street

In the inter-War years Newcastle's position as a leading industrial giant waned and its identity, and economy, began to morph into a service centre for the surrounding region. A retail boom led to an increased number of department stores and a migration of major retail names to Northumberland Street. One brand stood out from the crowd, however, refusing to move from the position in Newgate Street which it had occupied for years.

The Co-operative Wholesale Society (CWS) movement provided working class people with good quality food at affordable prices. Its proud boast was that it looked after people "from the cradle to the grave". Designed by the CWS house architect, L G Ekins in the Art Deco style so redolent of the 1920s and 1930s this building's geometrical shapes and linear proportions completely capture the style of the day.

The Co-op movement made use of symbols or emblems to embody the idea of co-operation and unity and the handrail of the interior staircase shows little human figures shouldering their shared burden as they climb upwards. A real "temple to modernity".

Stop 6

Eldon Square

The 1960s re-invention of Newcastle saw the demolition of two thirds of Richard Grainger's elegant Eldon Square (see Re-inventing the City: Part One). The Square's name honoured John Scott, an 18th century local man who eloped with famous Newcastle beauty, Bessie Surtees and rose to become Lord Chancellor of England with the title of Lord Eldon.

The Eldon Square Shopping Centre (1969-1975) which replaced the other two thirds of the Square has been a retail success story. At the time of its opening it was the largest indoor shopping centre in the UK and planned as part of the 1960s "vertical separation" of traffic and pedestrians. Today the Centre is undergoing a multi-million pound refurbishment and extension programme to satisfy the demands of modern shoppers.

Blackett Street follows the line of the old medieval town wall and was once a dirty, narrow street occupied principally by cow-houses.

Stop 7

Fenwick Department Store / Northumberland Street

Towards the end of the 19th century Newcastle reinvented itself as a regional shopping centre and

Northumberland Street grew to become "the Oxford Street of the North".

One of its flagship stores is Fenwick department store. John Fenwick was a young Yorkshireman who worked for a Newcastle draper. Poor pay, however, meant he was forced to moonlight to earn extra cash. He was fired from his job but fought for justice through the courts and finally won £1,000 compensation. With this he bought a doctor's house and added more property as time went on and eventually opened his store in 1882. But no ordinary store. Department stores were very new on the scene and John Fenwick was ahead of his time.

Close to the Fenwick building – and above head height – are four stone figures quietly gazing down on shoppers below. Boots the Chemist once owned this building and the company had a national policy of decorating their buildings with figures relevant to the history of that particular town. Representing Newcastle's past are Thomas Bewick the 18th century wood-engraver; Harry Hotspur the 14th century soldier and son of the first Earl of Northumberland; Sir John Marley, Newcastle's Mayor during the Civil War period and Roger Thornton, Newcastle's 15th century "Dick Whittington".

Stop 8

"Newcastle through the Ages" / Northumberland Road

A work of art on the wall of BHS illustrates the city's re-inventive past. Bridges, coalmining, steam locomotives, cranes, surnames.....and the Latin name of Pons Aelius.

Stop 9

Burt Hall / corner John Dobson Street/ Northumberland Road (opposite City Hall)

The NewcastleGateshead of recent times has been so successful in re-inventing itself that it is difficult to find any evidence in the city for the industry which shaped and re-shaped both people's lives and the landscape for centuries. Coal may once have fired the Industrial Revolution, gave birth to railways and promoted the region to the national stage but reminders of that industry are few and far between in the city.

One of the few reminders stands atop Burt Hall once the headquarters of the Northumberland branch of the National Union of Miners. The statute of a pitman carrying a pick over his shoulder recalls the work of Thomas Burt, MP for Morpeth in Northumberland for more than 40 years from 1874 and the first working miner to be elected to

Parliament. Burt began his working life down the pits at the age of 10 and as an MP achieved the admiration of both the Liberal and Tory parties of the day for his sense of duty, fair play and gentleness.

Stop 10

University of Newcastle / Barras Bridge

The modern University of Newcastle has its roots in the 19th century when Newcastle was carving out its place in a scientific world which was still on the threshold of a modern dawn. The School of Medicine and Surgery was established in 1834, two years after a group of young doctors working in Newcastle had begun to offer courses in medicine, surgery and chemistry. There was much demand for this kind of expertise in a region where the work force was exposed to the dangers of harsh industries.

Local captains of industry in and around Newcastle in the 19th century realised that compared to the international stage of the day England lagged behind other European countries in the delivery of training in the sciences. So in 1871 Newcastle gave birth to a second college specifically for teaching physical sciences. This newly formed Armstrong College (now Armstrong Building) was named after Sir William Armstrong and in the early days the first subjects taught included mathematics, chemistry, mineralogy and geology all of which reflected the needs of local industries.

These two colleges formed one college of the University of Durham, then merged to form King's College until in 1963 the break with Durham was finalised and the University of Newcastle became a separate institution.

In 1953 one of the most influential abstract artists of the time arrived in Newcastle to take up the post of Head of the Department of Painting at King's College, Durham University (as it was called then). A year after accepting the post Victor Pasmore (1908-1998) took on the job of Consultant Director of Urban Design for Peterlee New Town and in 1970 designed the town's Apollo Pavilion. At the time T Dan Smith was Chairman of the Peterlee Development Corporation. The Apollo – or Pasmore – Pavilion still exists and is a rare example of an early experiment to combine art and architecture.

The University in the 21st century is an integral part of the city centre combining a physical presence with a massive economic contribution to the local economy. Its teaching and research facilities puts it firmly on the map as one of the leading British

education institutions. To maintain that position the University of Newcastle is currently undergoing its own re-invention.

An ambitious and wide-ranging £200m redevelopment programme will reinforce the physical relationship between the University and the city centre.

Knowledge-based industries are now supplanting the old industries and the University sees knowledge playing the role coal once did – driving forward the economy on a regional, national and international stage. The University is “trying to reinvent the notion of a civic university and place it centrally with the knowledge economy.” (Professor Chris Bank, Vice-Chancellor, University of Newcastle).

That means new buildings, new infrastructure and new public areas. King's Gate is the glass fronted, five storey building on Barras Bridge facing the Civic Centre. An environmentally sound building – the design does away with the need for air conditioning - this new “front door” to the University campus will house new student and administrative services. Pedestrian routes through the campus will link the new buildings to the city and encourage more community involvement in the University and a sense of the two belonging together and dependent upon each other.

Stop 11

Civic Centre

This tour ends at a building which captures the spirit of what was going on in the Newcastle of the 1960s. Local politics, modernising architecture and supreme confidence all come together in the one building.

King Olav V of Norway opened the Civic Centre in 1968. As well as providing office space for all the various departments of the city council there are also committee rooms, a Banqueting Hall and the Lord Mayor's and Sheriff's Suites. The Office of Mayor is one of the oldest surviving civic institutions of Newcastle and dates from the early 13th century. Rich merchants dominated the post during the 15th and 16th centuries but today the position is usually offered to the most senior Councillor of the ruling political group.

Three times a year in a ceremony which takes place during the Christmas, Easter and Michaelmas Guilds, the Lord Mayor admits people who are entitled to become Hereditary Freemen of the city. A separate post of Honorary Freedom of the City is given to eminent individuals and is the highest honour the City can give. Their names are carved inside the Civic

Centre's Banqueting Hall and include historic figures as well as modern day (Nelson Mandela for one....).

On top of the Civic Centre tower three golden castles form part of the City Coat of Arms and represent the Roman fort, the first wooden castle built by the Normans and its stone successor. The sea horses' heads recall Newcastle's maritime heritage.

The very best of building materials was used for this all important building. There are 34 different types of marble for the interior and the Portland stone came from the very same quarry used centuries earlier by Sir Christopher Wren when he rebuilt St Paul's Cathedral in London.

The Civic Centre is the backdrop for works of art including the "Tyne God" sculpture by the artist David Wynne. Two thousand years ago the Romans believed that whenever a town was built on a riverside then the god of that particular river would offer protection to the settlement. The "Tyne God" is Newcastle's protection, rising up from the water.

Engraved glass screens by artist John Hutton decorates the doors beneath the colonnade and recall the Roman occupation of the north of England as well as some of the region's 19th century technological and scientific achievements. Railway engineer George Stephenson is represented by the steam locomotive, Sir Charles Parsons' by his turbine engine and Sir William Armstrong is represented by the gun.

And in the inner quadrangle is "The Swan" sculpture representing the five Scandinavian countries of Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Iceland.