

X

THE MAKING OF MODERN NEWCASTLE

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THIS IS the last of the series of papers on the history of Newcastle offered to the Society in commemoration of the 900th anniversary of the building of Robert of Normandy's New Castle here in 1080. A suitable starting point for this last chapter is provided by a poem published in the *Newcastle Weekly Magazine* in 1777—

Above me stand the towering trees,
And here I feel the gentle breeze,
The water flows by chance around,
And green enamels all the ground,
Which gives new splendour to the scene,
And adds a grace to Pandon Dean.

So it may well have seemed to those who chose to stroll down from the rustic Barras Bridge along the verdant valley of the Pandon Burn, with its copses and gardens. The old town had already seen many changes over the centuries, but nothing perhaps to equal the scale of the transformation it was to experience within the next few generations.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the first census credited Newcastle with a population of 28,294. By 1851 the census recorded a population of 87,784, and this was to leap ahead to 215,328 in 1901 and 286,255 in 1931. Similar changes of scale took place in the size of the distinctively urban area. By 1801 the town had already begun to develop beyond the area of the medieval perimeter walls, and in the fifty years from the 1760s onwards large stretches of these obsolete defences were removed in order to accommodate the needs of the growing town. As with the growth in population, the growth of the urban area accelerated markedly in the second half of the nineteenth century; at mid-century the building explosion had only begun, and a local guide book could describe as "the pleasure abodes of the affluent" peripheral areas like Barras Bridge and Brandling Park. By 1901, however, the development of extensive suburban areas had greatly expanded the built-up areas, whilst communities once enjoying separate existence—Byker and Heaton in the East, Elswick and Scotswood in the West, and Jesmond to the North—had been effectively swallowed up by the growing city.

The principal cause of this remarkable growth within the space of a few generations was the unprecedented economic development of the region which Newcastle served. Newcastle's experience was, of course, only a small part of a much greater

story. The spectacular expansion of industry and commerce which marked the period was much more than a north-eastern experience; the increase in the volume of international trade, from which this region benefited so much, was not only a British achievement. The region's growth, however, was not simply the enjoyment of benefits automatically conferred by external developments, for the opportunities had to be grasped and exploited. In none of our major industries did the region enjoy anything like a monopoly, and the north-east's successes had to be won in competition with kindred regions in other parts of Britain and elsewhere.

Economic development affected the town of Newcastle in several different ways. The town itself became a major industrial centre, and the Tyne harbour became one of the world's greatest ports. In addition, however, the development of the productive capacity of the surrounding region added to the demand for a wide range of supporting services for which Newcastle was the natural centre. These included commercial and financial activities, a complex network for the supply and distribution of foodstuffs and a wide range of other goods, and much more extensive and complicated facilities in such fields as administration, education and recreation.

The development of the town's own industries was already well under way when the nineteenth century began. Powerful influences encouraged a considerable concentration of early industry either in the old town or very close to it. One factor was the presence of extensive tracts of inalienable old common land, such as the Town Moor, adjacent to the town, which blocked off some possible avenues of expansion. More compelling were the limitations on available transport facilities, which enhanced the importance of the key river route, and discouraged development away from the established residential area. A good account of the town's early industries can be drawn from Thomas Oliver's *A New Picture of Newcastle upon Tyne* of 1831. The early nineteenth century saw the creation of important enterprises sited in accordance with these influences. In 1817, for instance, Robert Hawthorn, whose father, another Robert, served as an engineer at Walbottle Colliery for more than 50 years, set up a small engineering workshop at Forth Banks.¹ The original workshop employed four men, but this had grown to 34 by 1820, when William Hawthorn entered into partnership with his brother. The number of workers rose to 185 by 1830, 550 by 1840, and approached the thousand mark by mid-century. A few years after this enterprise began, the locomotive building and engineering works of the Stephenson's was founded nearby, and it too saw similar growth in the second quarter of the century. These firms continued to expand during the second half of the century, but they were overtaken in scale by the more spectacular rise of Armstrong's Elswick works to the west of the town but still within the key riverside belt. By the end of the century Armstrong's provided something like 20,000 jobs on Tyne-side.

Such striking success stories are well known, but provided only a minority of the growth story, for Newcastle's growth, unlike that of some other towns in the region, contained many diverse elements. If engineering in various forms provided some of the most distinguished enterprises, they did not stand alone. Glass, pottery, brewing, chemical manufacture, printing, paper-making, to name only a few, made

contributions which if smaller individually yet cumulatively amounted to much. When Gladstone visited Newcastle in 1862 he said²

I know not where to seek, even in this busy country, a spot or district in which we perceive so extraordinary and multifarious a combination of the various great branches of mining, manufacturing, trading and shipbuilding industry.

East Newcastle could offer no prodigy on the scale of the Elswick works, but the accumulation of many smaller enterprises brought about a total industrial development of comparable proportions.

Not only did this range of industrial development within the town contribute to the surge in population, but it also provided large numbers of jobs which were in comparison with the experience of earlier periods well-paid. At the same time other effects of economic development multiplied the range of goods available to many working families, and enhanced recreational facilities. For example, polling at Newcastle in the general election of 1886 was "delayed to avoid coincidence with the annual workmen's outings to London".³ The development of spectator sports, first in rowing and later in football, was another facet of this trend. It was not by any means the case that everyone in Newcastle enjoyed a higher standard of living and opportunity in this great period of expansion, but we ought not to forget the many thousands who did.

The role of Newcastle was also enhanced by the wider economic growth within the surrounding region, which greatly expanded the town's function as a centre of business, commerce and finance. The prodigious growth of the coalfield involved ramifications which stretched far beyond the collieries themselves. Apart from local sale for a wide variety of customers, the rapidly growing scale of coal shipments both coast-wise and abroad made growing demands for trading and shipping services for which Newcastle became the principal base. By the early years of the twentieth century the Tyne alone was shipping out something like 17 million tons of coal each year, two-thirds for export, and the administration of this great trade brought further employment and income to the city which was its centre.⁴ The other local industries all made their own claims on supporting services, making Newcastle one of the world's major trading centres. Such functions saw sectors like banking and insurance flourish, marked by such events as the opening of the Newcastle branch of the Bank of England in April 1828, and the foundation of the Newcastle Stock Exchange in 1845.⁵

Parallel developments associated with the rise of the industrial north-east made similar demands on the services of the regional centre. In the eighteenth century there had been for a time a flourishing export trade in agricultural produce from the region, but by the later nineteenth century massive population growth had inspired the development of a very considerable import trade in foodstuffs, together with a rapidly growing distributive and retail sector. Before the end of the nineteenth century, for example, the old provision market in the Bigg Market each Thursday and Saturday was drawing supplies of eggs from Ireland, Scotland, Hungary, Germany, Denmark,

Italy and France.⁶ In the twenty years from 1863 the Tyne saw the following increases in food imports⁷

	1863	1883
Butter	32,242 cwts.	332,120 cwts.
Flour	12,214 sacks	334,384 sacks
Wheat	87,995 quarters	224,070 quarters
Cheese	18,911 cwts.	30,160 cwts.

Of course not all of these swollen quantities was consumed in Newcastle itself, but the increases further expanded the town's role in commerce and distribution.

Industrial and commercial growth led to expansion in other services too. The work of the post office provides a good example of this. In 1824 Newcastle had one postman. By 1839 there were 23 postmen and 16 clerks attached to the town's post office, and by 1885 the staff had grown to 572. In this last year 370,451 letters were delivered in one week, while the year 1885 saw not far short of 200,000 parcels delivered in Newcastle. In 1857 one week saw 68,449 letters and similar small items posted in Newcastle; an equivalent figure for 1885 was 363,672. By this latter year the number of telegrams handled each year was rising towards the two million figure.⁸

All of this accumulated growth brought about dramatic changes in the town's size and nature.⁹ When Armstrong founded the Elswick works in 1847, the first workshops were established in what had been open fields. By 1851 the growing suburb of Elswick had a population of 3,539, which grew to 14,345 by 1861 and 51,608 by 1891. The housing pressure on the area near the river saw the tide of building spread further north. Benwell had a population of 4,736 in 1881, growing to 18,158 by 1901 and 27,049 by 1911. On the east side of the town Byker began to grow rapidly from the 1870s, population rising from 10,704 in 1871 to 45,460 by 1901. A little further from the riverside belt, Heaton took off about a decade later than Byker, rising from a mere 1,446 in 1881 to 16,007 in 1901 and 21,912 by 1911. Even in these new suburbs the extraordinarily high rate of population growth meant high levels of density and a good deal of overcrowding. The level of overcrowding in this region's towns was in general very high by national standards, worse even than that experienced in other areas of massive industrialization. The reasons for this are as yet only imperfectly understood; little is known in detail about such relevant factors as the nature of the local building industry and patterns of popular priorities in expenditure. It is though worth noting that the overcrowding is not simply a phenomenon of urban or industrial areas within the region, for the figures from the towns are paralleled by many mining villages and even by such extensive rural areas as Norham and Islandshire in north Northumberland. This seems then to be a regional phenomenon, rather than a peculiar characteristic of life in Newcastle and the other booming towns of the region.

The story of Jesmond's development is rather different. If Elswick possessed groups of much more expensive housing among its massed terraces of workers' housing, the bulk of the housing provided in the four suburbs already mentioned existed in rows of two-storey houses, very many of them in the form of the typical Tyneside

flats.¹⁰ Jesmond's development began with the intention of serving a different market, with large terrace houses and a few villas built during the twenty years after 1851 as a select suburb; population there rose from 2,089 in 1851 to 3,068 in 1871. Thereafter building operations accelerated, but the housing provided became much more mixed, with terraces added of differing size and cost. Population doubled by 1881 and reached 15,364 by 1901.

The factors which had tended towards inner concentration early in the nineteenth century had markedly weakened by the end of the nineteenth century, with the development first of suburban railway lines and later trams. During the century after about 1850 improvements in transport and increases in income made it increasingly easy for those working in Newcastle to live either in extended suburbs or even in such relatively distant places as Benton, Tynemouth, Whitley Bay and Ponteland.

Meanwhile the story of the residential areas in the old town centre was a very different one. As suburbs grew, and commuting became easier, the pressure on the residential capacity of the old town centre diminished, after reaching a peak in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Between 1861 and 1901 the population of St. Nicholas parish fell from 7,487 to 2,608, that of St. John from 7,730 to 3,250, and that of All Saints from 30,647 to 25,838. St. Andrews parish, to the north, with more room for expansion and development, reached its peak as late as 1891, but there too there was a drop from 19,637 to 17,520 in the last years of the century.

Before then, however, the teeming old town centre had seen some of the most appalling social conditions to be found anywhere in Victorian Britain. Even in the 1820s Eneas Mackenzie had been scathing in his account of the old riverside chares¹¹

The almost universal want of sewers, to communicate between the houses on the Quayside and the river, affords a striking proof of the little regard paid to cleanliness in former times . . . Most of the chares may be easily reached across by the extended arms of a middle-sized man, and some with a single arm; but a stout person would find it inconvenient to press through the upper part of this lane. It is very properly termed Dark Chare, for the houses at the top nearly touch each other.

When the *Newcastle Chronicle* published its *Inquiry into the Condition of the Poor of Newcastle upon Tyne* in 1850 conditions had markedly worsened, under the impact of the concentration of growth in the old town and the immigration of the famine-stricken Irish of the previous few years. One passage from this publication may give some indication of the situation

A cow-feeder's premises were contiguous to the house I have just been describing, and separate from it only by a wall. In order to collect the liquid refuse, a hole was rudely knocked through the wall, to let it run into a barrel that was sunk in the ground outside the poor man's door, and which not only diffused a peculiar odour through the house, but, when it overflowed, which was not seldom, discharged itself into the yard; and no arrangements having been made for carrying off the stream, it found its way into the stable, and from thence leaked through into the room where they lived, and this it has done for three years.

If the pressure on population in such areas diminished somewhat in the later nine-

teenth century, many problems still remained to be inherited by the new century. In 1896, for instance, the city's medical officer of health made this report on the state of the Ouse Burn¹²

At low tide the deposit is visible. When under water it is recognizable in the sunshine by bubbles of sulphuretted hydrogen, the result of its decomposition, which rises and breaks on the surface. The hands which are at work during the night (at Messrs. Liddell, Henzell and Co., Glass Manufacturers) say that the smell at low water especially during the warm weather was very bad indeed. The work people engaged during the day, particularly the women, complain that it causes nausea and sometimes vomiting.

Apart from the increase in population and urban industries, other factors also contributed to the areas of squalor within the town. The increased demands for meat and milk, for instance, and the enormous dependence upon the horse, complicated the city's sanitary problems. By the early 1880s the town contained 145 slaughter-houses and triperies, less than half of them equipped with suitable "garbage receptacles".¹³ In 1895 Newcastle possessed 73 cow-houses with 628 cows, including six in Prudhoe St. alone.¹⁴ The leather industry made a significant contribution of smells and nasty residues.

To understand how such conditions came to exist it is necessary to understand something of the economic and social causes which brought them about, and something also about the nature and resources of the town's government. In the early nineteenth century Newcastle was very far from having a sophisticated range of local government services, and there was little appreciation of the possibilities for social improvement which expanded municipal activity might possess. For many years the town's corporation had been dominated by a close local oligarchy, in which the cumbrous chartered constitution of the borough was manipulated in ways which effectively limited the key offices of a close-knit group of the town's leading families, such as the Claytons, Bells, Andersons, Cooksons and Brandlings.¹⁵

Thus, in 1817 Nathaniel Clayton was Town Clerk; he had held that office since 1785, and was to be succeeded in 1822 by his son, John; his brother Robert was mayor and Robert's son, William, was sheriff; in the following year, although Robert and William were out of office, Henry, another son of Robert's, was sheriff.

Of this unreformed corporation Professor W. L. Burn wrote that

its members do not appear to have been personally corrupt by the standards of their age or very seriously at fault by ours. . . . It possessed sufficient sense of public obligation to devote, between 1780 and 1832, some £95,000 to "permanent and productive improvements", and by the early 'thirties at least it was taking some elementary steps towards the repair and scavenging of the highways. It did not disappear by reason of its own corruption, passivity or incompetence.

It was not, however, the old corporation which had to face the brunt of the social problems caused by massive population growth in the old town. Such oligarchies were out of fashion in the Britain of the 1830s, and the unreformed corporation was already faced with a vociferous local opposition from radical leaders effectively excluded from the close circle of local power. The old corporation fought a prolonged

rearguard action until in 1835 the Municipal Reform Act gave Newcastle a drastically amended municipal constitution. At the first elections to the reformed council only eight of the old members returned to the council of 42.¹⁶ The victorious liberals continued their clean sweep, appropriating to themselves the whole of the new aldermanic bench. The sitting mayor, Lionel Hood, declared that "nothing half so exclusive or organised", as the preliminary closed faction meetings at which the victors decided in advance their nominees for aldermen and the membership of committees, had ever taken place during the old regime. Hood himself was replaced before the expiry of his original term as mayor, and complained that

he was disqualified from performing the duties of the office, because it was not probable that he would become the tool of a faction.

Newcastle's council was now reformed, in the parlance of the day, but this did not mean the descent upon the town of a crusading corporation engaged in expensive municipal adventures into social improvement. Instead the new regime was little less oligarchic in practice than the old, and if anything less willing to levy substantial rates for municipal activity. "Cheap government", so powerful a cry in other areas of Victorian government, was powerfully entrenched in the views of the town's new councillors. One of their first acts of economy was to sell off the Mansion House and its contents, not very competently.¹⁷

there has probably never been a sale in Newcastle at which collectors' items fetched as little as they did on that occasion ... an insensate and wasteful piece of vandalism.

Certainly the new corporation was less willing than its predecessor to spend money for purposes of improvement. The Municipal Reform Act of 1835 had given the reformed corporations only limited functions, and for many years Newcastle's corporation displayed little liking for ventures beyond them. Even where the Act prescribed municipal expenditure this was accompanied by a good deal of grumbling. One stipulation had been the obligation to create a borough police force on the Peelite model. Radical councillors constantly complained at the cost of this new item of local expenditure. W. A. Mitchell, for instance, editor for many years of the radical *Tyne Mercury* and a member of the new council and its Watch Committee, denounced the existence of this "Austrian-like force" in a town "remarkable for its good behaviour". Police records show 1,327 cases of "disorderly conduct" within the town in 1835.¹⁸

It must be remembered that the extended use of official intervention for purposes of improvement did not seem anything like as obvious then as it may do in the twentieth century. In early nineteenth-century Britain, government was not highly regarded, nor were the agencies of central or local government noted for any particular efficiency. There was no great reservoir of skilled and trustworthy personnel to call upon, and the task of building up satisfactory staffs for both central and local government was a long and difficult one. There were very few professional administrators. Two men who held the key post of town clerk in this period illustrate this point. John Clayton combined his official post with a large and important private

law practice, as well as a very wide variety of other business interests of his own. His successor, Ralph Park Philipson, also served as secretary to a variety of other bodies, including local public utilities, and was in addition a coalowner and director in a number of companies. Nor should we suppose that in adopting policies of economy in local government spending councillors were out of touch with public opinion. The ratepaying electorate which elected the council extended over wide ranges of the town's inhabitants, and by no means all of the ratepayers were rich. Instead of any sustained and widespread demand for increased municipal expenditure, ratepayers were alert to denounce anything which could smack of unnecessary spending, and councillors who voted for such measures could expect a hostile response at the polls.

This situation had changed markedly by the end of the nineteenth century, and by 1900 Newcastle's corporation was administering a local government machine which would have astonished their predecessors of 1850. There were a number of reasons for this important change, which paved the way for more extensive innovations in the present century. The impact of national reforming legislation played some part, but probably less than the extended powers which the corporation acquired by a series of local Acts which it devised. As early as 1846 a local act allowed the corporation to forbid the keeping of pigs in houses within the town, and fine recalcitrant pig-owners who refused to accept the prohibition.¹⁹ By 1870 things had gone much further, and a local act of that year conferred upon the corporation wide powers in connection with the planning of new streets and houses.²⁰ These powers were not always exercised with any great degree of thoroughness in early years, but there was a distinct tightening-up as time went on.

Another cause of increased council activity was a by-product of that other major feature of Victorian society, the accelerating accumulation of surveys and reports, chronicling in an unprecedented and unmistakable way the social ills which existed. In part this information explosion was due to official reports of royal commissions and select committees, inspectors and health investigators. Newcastle came out badly from some of the postmortem enquiries on the great cholera epidemics at mid-century. However, private pressures mounted too. We must remember that if the local oligarchy did little for many years to combat social problems by official machinery, the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century were, in Newcastle as elsewhere, a great period for the creation of philanthropic institutions. For example, Newcastle's eighteenth-century infirmary and dispensary were improved and extended, and special institutions for the care of the blind and the deaf and dumb were established by unofficial agencies in which the local oligarchy played leading roles in their private capacities. Before the creation of the board schools after 1870, there were similar improvements in the unofficial provision of education. There was then something of a social conscience in existence, and widespread charitable activity, but it was not until late in the century that it became widely appreciated that the municipality was a key agency in the work of social improvement. However, among the principal inhabitants of the town there were groups who campaigned with some effect for extended municipal exertions, though their task was not easy.

Another element in the growth of the town's local government was technical—technical in two senses, one the improved comprehension in such areas as public health engineering, the other the slow and painful emergence of a local government profession with adequate standards of competence, training and reliability. If the ratepayers were less than anxious for higher spending, they tended to be watchful for any derelictions in the behaviour of those whom they paid, and in the more intimate atmosphere of a Victorian town failures in office were not often easy to conceal.

However, there is another key factor here, and one which is not always appreciated. Until well into the twentieth century most local government expenditure had to be met directly from the rates, a local tax levied on property. If the town's economic growth had been the cause of enhanced social problems, it was equally clearly the creator of the resources with which those problems were eventually tackled. The building of factories and workshops, shops and offices all added to the town's potential revenue. If the rateable value of the town's property increased, then the council's income would show sizeable increases without increasing the actual level of the rates beyond the limited tolerance of a ratepaying electorate. During the 1850–1941 period the rateable value of property in Newcastle was rising even faster than the town's population. The rateable value of property in Newcastle was assessed at £171,000 in 1850, £449,000 in 1870, £1,614,000 in 1907, £2½ million in 1927.²¹ It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this factor of increased income in the growth of local government resources during the late Victorian period. Social improvement has to be paid for, and the increase in available resources due to economic growth was absolutely cardinal. It is unlikely that enlightenment alone could have effected anything like the transformation which occurred.

The late Victorian corporation was much more willing to spend money than its predecessors had been. In addition to extending their own activities, they increased their interests in the activities previously carried on by unofficial philanthropic agencies. For example, the Newcastle Institution for the Care and Prevention of Contagious Fevers had been established as a charity in 1804; in 1873 its work was taken over by the corporation, which went on to build a new Hospital for Infectious Diseases in 1885 at Walker. In 1889 only 15.6% of the recorded cases of notifiable diseases in Newcastle had been admitted to hospital, but by 1892 the figure was 34.9%.²² In 1873 the council's sanitary committee was in reality merely a sub-committee of the town improvement and streets committee; by 1911 it was a standing committee with eight sub-committees of its own and a membership of 26, regularly including some of the council's most influential members.²³

Some of the most striking changes came about in the size and complexity of the corporation's staff. Two examples may suffice here. In 1882 the establishment of the town's own health services consisted of the medical officer of health himself, a chief inspector and four assistant inspectors of nuisances, a chief inspector and one assistant inspector of provisions, and two clerks. By 1907 this had grown to the medical officer of health, an assistant medical officer of health, a chief inspector and 19 assistant inspectors of nuisances, a chief inspector and two assistant inspectors of provisions, six health visitors, a superintendent of midwives, and six clerks, not

counting the extensive staffs in the city's own hospitals.²⁴ In 1850 the town's main streets were spasmodically swept by a handful of scavengers. By 1911 the city's cleansing department employed well over 500 men and boys. For this function the city was divided into four districts, each controlled by an inspector; each district was divided into eight sub-districts with a foreman in charge of each, and these were further sub-divided into smaller units of organization. The tiny band of early Victorian scavengers would have been astonished by the scale and complexity of such an organization; their councillor masters could scarcely have anticipated that in March 1907 the skilled professional who headed Newcastle's cleansing staff would be discussing his work with fellow experts at the quarterly meeting of the cleansing superintendents of Great Britain and Ireland.²⁵

By the early twentieth century the corps of professional administrators employed by the city had attained a size and a degree of skills and coherence which was quite unprecedented; the nature of the change is exemplified in their own printed journal, the *Newcastle upon Tyne Municipal Officer*, which contains a wealth of illustration of the ways in which the city's local government machine had been transformed over the past half century.

Although by the end of the nineteenth century much had been done to equip the corporation with greater resources and functions, much still remained to be done. A start had been made in clearing up the uglier elements inherited from the unforeseeably rapid and largely unplanned growth which the previous few generations had lived through, but the problems which remained were great. In the Newcastle of 1900, a Salvation Army officer could still look over some of the old slums, and reflect bitterly on their significance²⁶

I stood by the dead body of a child in a third floor room of a miserable house, in a congested Newcastle slum, and from the window looked down upon a mass of ugly houses, with broken roofs and leaning walls, many of them in ruins, an unlovely picture of squalor and decay. In such a room the heirs of all the ages, the joint owners of the Empire on which the sun never sets, live and die unconscious of the heritage acquired at their expense.

If late Victorian Newcastle was capable of providing for the majority of its people advantages which their predecessors had never known, the experience was not shared by everyone. Yet in noting the condition of those who suffered, we must remember and give due weight to the very much larger numbers who had benefited significantly from the economic growth of the previous century. Factors like the availability of equipment and furniture for the home, more varied diet, increased literacy, reliable water supplies and domestic gas, more sophisticated provision for recreation, more extensive and varied retail facilities, were genuine improvements in the life of the great majority of the city's inhabitants, when compared with the experience of earlier generations.

The twin processes of economic growth and the extension of the city's administrative machinery continued to grow in the early years of the twentieth century, and by the outbreak of the first world war Newcastle had been transformed within three or four generations into a great modern industrial city, which had experienced

overall a development not very common in human history—a vast increase in population coupled with overall social improvement.

Newcastle suffered as so much of the region suffered during the depression years of the inter-war period. The psychological impact of the depression within the region was particularly intense because much of the impact was felt in a handful of major industries which had in the recent past enjoyed halcyon years of expansion, success and prestige. Some local communities were peculiarly dependent upon a single industry or a narrow range of industries and this made them peculiarly vulnerable. Newcastle's economy, however, was a more varied one, and this in some degree cushioned the city against the most catastrophic experiences of the worst depression years. Many of the city's complex functions had to be carried on even in hard years, and the city's rate income held up better than that of more hard-hit communities. Newcastle's role as a centre of services and a major commercial and financial base had involved the development of a social structure which differed markedly from that of mining communities or nearby towns like Gateshead or Jarrow. Newcastle held a considerable proportion of the area's better-paid groups, and a relatively small share of those employed in the key Tyneside industries which suffered most in the depression years. In the 1930s, of all the Tyneside local authorities, only Newcastle, Gosforth and Whitley Bay held a larger share of the area's rateable value than they did of its population, and this too had some cushioning effect in hard times.²⁷

Moreover, it ought to be remembered that the 1920s and 1930s, however scarred by the region's economic difficulties, were also a period of remarkable social improvement in many respects. By 1939 the area's social services were very markedly better than they had been in 1918. Housing also saw considerable improvements. Newcastle corporation had built a total of 454 homes between 1890 and 1920; during the 1920s it built 5,549 houses, and the figure jumped to 8,130 for the 1930s. This programme, encouraged by the increased availability of grants from central government, was not enough to solve the city's inherited housing problems, but at least it was much more than had ever been done before. During the 1930s a total of 22,160 new houses was added to the city's stock, with the municipal element an important though not a dominant contribution.

The city's health also continued to improve. Newcastle's general death rate, which had averaged 28.8 per thousand in 1871–5, was down to 12.8 per thousand during the hard years of 1931–5. The death rate from tuberculosis had been 2.18 per thousand in 1881–5, but averaged 0.95 during 1931–5. Between 1890 and 1910, the percentage of cases of scarlet fever, diphtheria and enteric admitted to hospital in Newcastle had risen from 21.3 to 83.0; by 1938 98.1% of such cases received hospital treatment. The city's hospitals were among the principal beneficiaries of the embryonic regional policies of the 1930s; the R.V.I. received £180,000 in grants and the Princess Mary Maternity Hospital £141,000.²⁸ The General Hospital admitted 3,048 patients in 1930, but 6,695 in 1936, and during the same period the number of operations carried out there rose from 596 to 2,722.²⁹ The city spent £8,815 on school medical services in 1920–21, £18,783 in 1938–9; the figures for spending on maternity and child welfare were £14,116 in 1920–21, £47,232 in 1938–9.³⁰ These examples are only part

of the continued growth in social services which marked the inter-war period. The social statistics for Newcastle during these years show the city always ahead of neighbours like Gateshead or Jarrow, although collectively the north-east towns still lagged behind most of the rest of the country in such matters as housing and health.

By the mid-1930s there was already evidence that Newcastle was emerging from the trough of the depression. For instance, in 1935 the Newcastle postal services handled 11.8 million more letters than in 1934, and 2½ million more telephone calls; wireless licences were also up by 10,500.³¹ The Newcastle-based chain of shops established by J. W. Brough saw its profits slump to only £25,000 in 1932, but profits were up to £52,000 in 1937 and a record £82,000 in 1939.³² When the Housing and Building Exhibition was held in Newcastle in 1936 its catalogue could claim thankfully that

it is under much happier and prosperous industrial conditions on Tyneside that the second annual Building Exhibition makes its appearance.

By the end of the 1930s recovery had been substantial in Newcastle, and some of its service functions had seen further growth. The development of the cinema, for example brought further trade to Newcastle, while the inter-war development of the region's bus services provided much easier access to Newcastle's multifarious facilities for many people in the surrounding districts.

The twentieth century has seen a considerable shift in the city's patterns of employment. Its role as a major centre of services—for example, administration, the retail sector, recreation—has become relatively more important than its primary industrial components. This is very much in line with national trends in the growth of employment in various kinds of service occupations. The relative decline in the city's old industrial base has not, however, been accompanied by a decline in the standard of living of the city's inhabitants. It is still not difficult to find elements of poverty and hardship within the city's boundaries, but it would be difficult to maintain that the city's inhabitants are in general markedly poorer in the later twentieth century than they were say a quarter of a century ago. Indeed a strong case could be made out for the argument that the reverse is very definitely the case. This is not to say that anything like perfection has been attained, and modern times have seen some continuance of differential patterns long since established, but even here there has been a considerable narrowing. In 1954–8, for example, if we instance the statistics for male deaths, taking the U.K. figure as 100 Newcastle's figure was 115 (Gateshead's was 121) while such places as Canterbury, Oxford and Bath hovered around the 90 figure.³³ Such matters are not to be disregarded, but it remains generally true that in the later twentieth century the city's inhabitants enjoy a condition of life which is, in many ways if not in all, strikingly superior to that experienced by any of their predecessors, while technological developments have in the twentieth as in the nineteenth century continued to make available equipment and facilities which, at least in the opinion of the vast majority of people, represent valuable improvements in the conditions of life.

The story of the making of modern Newcastle is a very complex one, and many

aspects of it have inevitably been neglected in this short paper. Yet the general outlines may be seen as reasonably clear. Economic growth provided the means to support a much larger population with in general a much higher standard of living; these enhanced resources also provided the necessary base for an accelerating provision of official machinery which increasingly provided valuable social services, including help to the weaker sectors of society on a scale much greater than that of any earlier period. In our contemporary society there is an irritating tendency to fasten on things in the past which have gone awry, and to do much less than justice to the very remarkable achievements evidenced in places like Newcastle over the past couple of centuries or so. When, however, we note the blemishes which impair the modern history of our city, it is foolish to adopt the "let's pretend" attitude of supposing that those parts of the past which we do not like ought not to have happened, and that something very different should have happened instead. If we regard the story in its entirety, "warts and all", it is reasonable to conclude on balance that the gains and the improvements outweigh the losses and the hardships. To sigh now for the green banks of Pandon Dene is a romantic delusion; we cannot have a different past, if we could the eighteenth century was very far from offering a pre-industrial paradise, and when we understand the achievements of the past two centuries we will not consider them the least fruitful period in Newcastle's long history.

NOTES

¹ *Historical Sketch of Forth Bank Engine Works*, anon. (Newcastle 1887). Appendix I gives figures of the work force from 1817 to 1874.

² *Newcastle Chronicle*, 11th November 1862.

³ E. I. Waitt, "John Morley, Joseph Cowen and Robert Spence Watson: Liberal Divisions in Newcastle Politics" (Manchester University, Ph.D., 1972), p. 299.

⁴ For the history of coal shipments from the Tyne, see N. R. Elliott, "A Geographical Analysis of the Tyne Coal Trade", *Tijdschrift voor Econ. en Soc. Geografie*, April 1968, p. 85 *et seq.*

⁵ For the history of Newcastle Banks, see M. Phillips, *A History of Banks, Bankers and Banking in Northumberland, Durham and North Yorkshire*, (1894). J. R. Killick & W. A. Thomas, "The Stock Exchanges of the North of England", *Northern History*, vol. V (1970), p. 121.

⁶ J. Collingwood Bruce, *Handbook to Newcastle upon Tyne and District* (1889), p. 43.

⁷ *Notes on the Leading Industries of the River Tyne*, anon. (1886), p. 8.

⁸ Collingwood Bruce, *op. cit.*, pp. 101-2.

⁹ I am grateful to Mr D. J. Rowe for much detailed census material. For more information on similar matters, see N. McCord & D. J. Rowe, "In-

dustrialisation and Urban Growth in North-East England", *Int. Rev. Soc. Hist.*, vol. XXII (1977), Part 1, pp. 30 *et seq.*

¹⁰ I am grateful to Mr. Colin Taylor for information on the mixed nature of Elswick's development.

¹¹ E. Mackenzie, *A Description and Historical Account of the Town and County of Newcastle upon Tyne* . . (1827), vol. I, p. 163.

¹² Town Improvement and Streets Committee, Newcastle Corporation, "Report as to Tyneside Sewage Disposal" (1958), pp. 177-8.

¹³ H. E. Armstrong, "Report on the Recently Increased Death Rate of the City" (1883), p. 10.

For interesting discussion of the role of the horse in Victorian society, see F. M. L. Thompson, "Nineteenth-Century Horse Sense", *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd Ser., vol. XXIX, no. 1 (1976), p. 60 *et seq.*

¹⁴ H. E. Armstrong, "Report on the Milk Supply" (1895), p. 6.

¹⁵ W. L. Burn, "Newcastle upon Tyne in the Early Nineteenth Century", *AA*⁴, vol. XXXIV (1956), p. 3.

¹⁶ I am grateful to Mr. F. Hand for this information.

¹⁷ W. L. Burn, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

¹⁸ Newcastle Watch Committee Minutes, Tyne & Wear Record Office, 5 May 1836, 4 March 1837.

¹⁹ 9 & 10 Vict., cap. 121, XCVI.

²⁰ 33 & 34 Vict., cap. 120, e.g. sections LIV–LIX.

²¹ W. J. Noble, *The River Tyne. What it Was and Is* (1927), p. 5. *Free Trade and the Industries of Newcastle upon Tyne* (published by Free Trade Union) (1909), pp. 14–15.

²² J. Hadfield, "Health in the Industrial North-East 1919–39" (Sheffield University, Ph.D. thesis, 1977), pp. 27–8. This thesis contains a wealth of interesting material on the inter-war conditions of the region.

²³ Institute of Cleansing Superintendents, Report of 14th Annual Conference, Newcastle, 1911, p. 67.

²⁴ J. Coote Hibbert & W. H. Wells, "A Sketch of

the Sanitary History of Newcastle upon Tyne", *J. R. Stat. Soc.*, vol. XXVIII (1907), no. 4. p. 174.

²⁵ Inst. of Cleansing Superintendents, *op. cit.*, pp. 51–5.

²⁶ I owe this reference to an article in *The County Monthly* (1901), p. 151, to Mr. John Noddings.

²⁷ D. M. Goodfellow, *Tyneside: The Social Facts* (1940), p. 68.

²⁸ Hadfield, *op. cit.*, pp. 233, 268, 285, 430.

²⁹ Newcastle General Hospital, *Nurses' League Journal* (1937), p. 3.

³⁰ Hadfield, *op. cit.*, p. 386.

³¹ Tyneside Industrial Development Board, *Tyneside: the Natural Centre of Industry* (1935), p. 3.

³² P. Mathias, *Retailing Revolution* (1967), p. 89.

³³ Hadfield, *op. cit.*, p. 233.