

# Are we singing the wrong words to the Geordie anthem?

**T**HE words of the unofficial anthem of Tyneside, The Blaydon Races have been engraved into the newly installed stone seating at the Bigg Market, as part of NE1 Ltd's Heritage Lottery Funded regeneration of the area.

Their presence has prompted debate about the lyrics and the difference between the engraved words and the words people sing on the terraces at St James' Park.

People would be forgiven for getting the words wrong as over the years the lyrics have been altered and adapted so much that today they are barely recognisable as the words penned by the song writer, George (aka Geordie) Ridley in the 19th century.

NE1 Ltd, the Business Improvement District Company for Newcastle City Centre and the company behind the redevelopment of the Bigg Market conducted painstaking research into the area's history and heritage before embarking on its plans to transform the area.

Thanks to a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, NE1 Ltd has been delivering its plan to regenerate the Bigg Market and restore the history and heritage of the famous market area, making sure it remains economically viable for the future.

As part of these plans, which are being delivered with support from Newcastle City Council and from businesses within the area, the Bigg Market has been transformed into three terraced platform areas with integrated seating as part of Phase One of the redevelopment of the area. It is as part



> One of the benches in the newly refurbished Bigg Market which has the lyrics of The Blaydon Races engraved on it – and, yes, they are the right lyrics

of this decorative seating that the words of the song, 'The Blaydon Races' have been engraved into the coping stones.

Alex Slack, NE1 Ltd Project Manager for the Bigg Market said: "Given the importance of the historic Bigg Market to the city we wanted to make the redevelopment meaningful and to introduce elements that spoke of the area's past and the history of the city while linking it to the present and the future.

"Clearly having Balmbray's in the Bigg Market made incorporating the Blaydon Races song into the design a must. Balmbray's is mentioned in the song and is thought to be where George Ridley first performed the Blaydon Races."

"We were extremely conscious about ensuring the authenticity of the lyrics given the evolution of the song over the last 150 years and the importance of the song to the people of Newcastle.

"We therefore enlisted the help of the conservation team at Newcastle City Council, who in turn led us to George Ridley expert, Dave Harker. Dave wrote

the book, 'Gannin to Blaydon Races The Life and Times of George Ridley' which contains the original lyrics.

The lyrics that are prompting debate feature in the song's chorus. Most people presume the lyrics are 'Gannin along' the Scotswood Road' whereas the original Ridley version states 'Ganalang'.

Dave Harker, author and George Ridley expert who has been studying the history of popular song and working-class consciousness in North East England for the past 50 years and has a PhD from Cambridge in the subject said:

"The song history of the North East of England is the richest I know in the English-speaking world, but so little is known about it and what is being passed on to future generations is largely corrupted or sanitised.

"We know that the words engraved on the seats at The Bigg Market are the correct ones and the debate over their veracity highlights what has happened over the years and the wider context.

"Mr George Ridley, the original songwriter, who described himself as 'a Gateshead poet and vocalist' sold the rights to his songs to Thomas Allan, a stationer and songbook publisher who made a lot of money from Ridley and other working class song writers by buying the rights to their songs and lyrics and making them more 'appropriate' and sanitized for middle class audiences.

"The lyrics as engraved on the seats in the Bigg Market today are the original Ridley version, those many people sing today are the adapted Catchside-Warrington version.

"For me, the debate highlights the need for Tyneside's history and heritage to be more widely celebrated, understood and taught to young people in schools."

## Radical plans, but common sense solutions

Newcastle city councillor JAMIE DRISCOLL is competing against council leader Nick Forbes in the race for Labour's nomination to be the first North of Tyne mayor.



Here, he explains how he'd tackle the job

**I**'VE been a Newcastle City Councillor since May last year. I never intended to be a politician.

I won't be the kind of Mayor who spends his time shaking hands with dignitaries or posing for photo opportunities in a high-vis jacket. But you reach a point where you can't stand by, and you have to step up.

I'm an engineer by profession. We need practical solutions to fix broken systems.

Britain's economy is too focused on financial services and the City of London. We have a cabinet of millionaires who barely know where the North East is. The Northern Powerhouse ministers change faster than a baby's nappy.

Since the bankers crashed it in 2007, wages have stagnated. Thousands in our region are using foodbanks. People are living in tents. Kids whose parents work are in poverty.

Workers don't know what hours they'll get next week, or how much they'll earn.

We've got ability, strength and kindness in our communities - like the fantastic work done by foodbank volunteers and homeless charities. But they're swimming against the tide of austerity.

For serious change we need a new government. That's why I backed Jeremy Corbyn and his policy platform from the very start. We need to tell the truth: austerity doesn't work.

To fix our broken economy we need to keep our wealth in our region. We can start now.

I'll set up a People's Bank. It will have a full range of services: mortgages, current accounts, savings, and business banking. Its customers will

own it - one member, one vote.

We'll have branches in community hubs and rural areas. It will lend only to people who live here and SMEs headquartered here. This keeps money recirculating in our local economy.

This is common sense. It stops our mortgage payments and credit card interest leaking out of the North East, passing through the City of London, and ending up in tax havens.

I'll use the Mayor's powers to end land-banking. I'll build genuinely affordable, eco-friendly homes. I'll build fair rent homes on a cooperative model. The people who live there will own them collectively.

This protects them from right-to-buy legislation and privatisation.

We can tackle energy price rip-offs with a local energy company. We'll invest the profits back into renewable energy instead of fat-cat bonuses.

We can change the way public money is spent. More contracts need to go local firms. All suppliers and contractors can be required to paying the Real Living Wage, on secure contracts.

It's a scandal that under 25s are paid less for the same job.

Preston Council have trail-blazed this approach. They became the most improved city in the UK. Part-time wages rose by £38 a week compared to the national average. All because they recirculate money back into their local economy instead of it leaking out to tax havens.

I've managed huge projects and been a company director. I know how to make things work. These are radical but common sense solutions.

> The Bigg Market is getting an impressive new look

