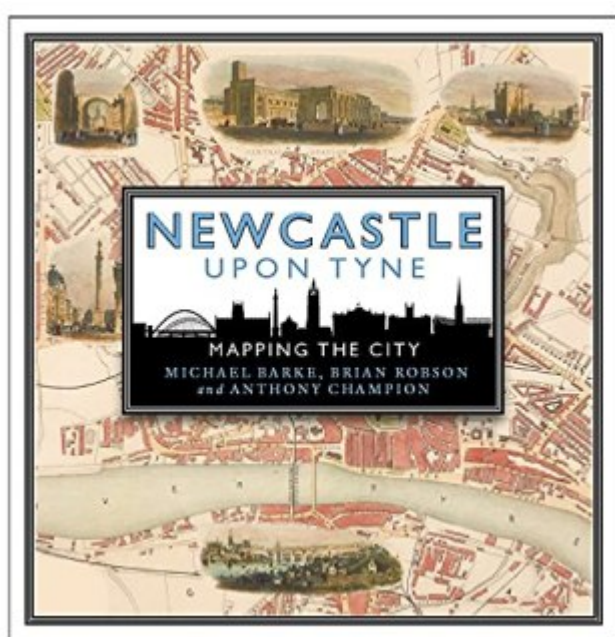




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Book Review of Newcastle Upon Tyne: Mapping the City

By Amy Swanson



Barke, Michael, Robson, Brian, and Anthony Champion. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Mapping the City. Edinburgh: Birlinn Ltd, 2021. 256 p. \$44.95. ISBN: 9781780277264.

This book sets out to tell the rich history and evolution of Newcastle upon Tyne through the interpretation of maps and plans of the city and surrounding area and a discussion of the broader social, environmental, and political contexts within which these maps were created. The book is laid out chronologically. It begins with the year 1255, discussing a fort and bridge built by the Romans, that provided a structural foundation for the city, and continues through the present day. Each of the 54 chapters focus on a specific year, discussing map(s) created at the time (and sometimes newer, related maps) to weave together a narrative about the development of the city and surrounding area. Every chapter is only a few pages long, making this book a fairly quick read.



The book is divided into three broad sections, the first of which discusses the earliest period in the city's history. During this time Newcastle upon Tyne was a "County of Conflict (p. x)," a turbulent area, constantly ready to defend against Vikings, Scottish armies, and raiders. The second section focuses on the rise of the coal trade and other heavy industries, such as shipbuilding, glass and iron works. The third period addresses economic decline in the area and the redevelopment of the city around new, more commercial, social, and academic endeavors. The authors emphasize throughout the book that the location, geology, and topography of Newcastle upon Tyne were instrumental in the city's development.

Topics consistently emerge in the book that makes the narrative feel more cohesive. These include the aforementioned growth of industry and trade, advancements in transportation, urban and suburban development and a burgeoning cultural and social life. The maps chosen to engage readers with these topics are both visually striking and informative. Maps make topics like transportation come to life, enhancing the text to show the progression of modes of transportation that made access to the city and its inhabitants easier. This discussion begins with sea travel and moves to wooden wagon ways and the Newcastle-North Shields Railway. The reader is then introduced to the Tramway of the early 1900s, the improved streets and roads constructed to meet the needs of pedestrians and motor vehicles, and the present-day Tyne and Wear Metro urban railway.

The maps contained within this text were carefully curated to show topics from various perspectives. For example, with the topic of urban and suburban development, several maps display housing for the working class, while, in contrast, others show the Georgian architecture and parks and gardens that were prominent in the nineteenth century. The last few centuries have seen Newcastle and Tyneside grow both commercially and culturally, with advancements in education and the opening of a music hall, shopping centers, and fairs and exhibitions. The city is also home to the Great North Run (the largest half-marathon in the world), and the beloved Newcastle United Football Club, with chapters dedicated to both.

There is a good balance of text and maps in the book. The authors' decision to intentionally show enlarged portions of some of the maps enhances the reader's experience by highlighting details uncovered during their research for the book. The discovery by the authors of a number of maps long hidden in archives and libraries gives the reader a sense of excitement as they experience each new map for themselves. I appreciate that the authors took the time to find maps not just



created by well-known cartographers, but some from those local and lesser known. My one criticism of the book is its division into so many different chapters, which distracted at times from the overall narrative. I wish that the authors had reflected more throughout or at the end of the book on the various topics discussed and the vast amount of history presented to the reader.

For someone completely unfamiliar with Newcastle upon Tyne prior to reading this book, it was a fascinating story that succeeded in being both engaging and educational. This book would find a good home in an academic library collection, of interest to scholars and map enthusiasts alike. I believe it is also accessible to the everyday reader looking to learn more about English history, cartography, and city development.

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