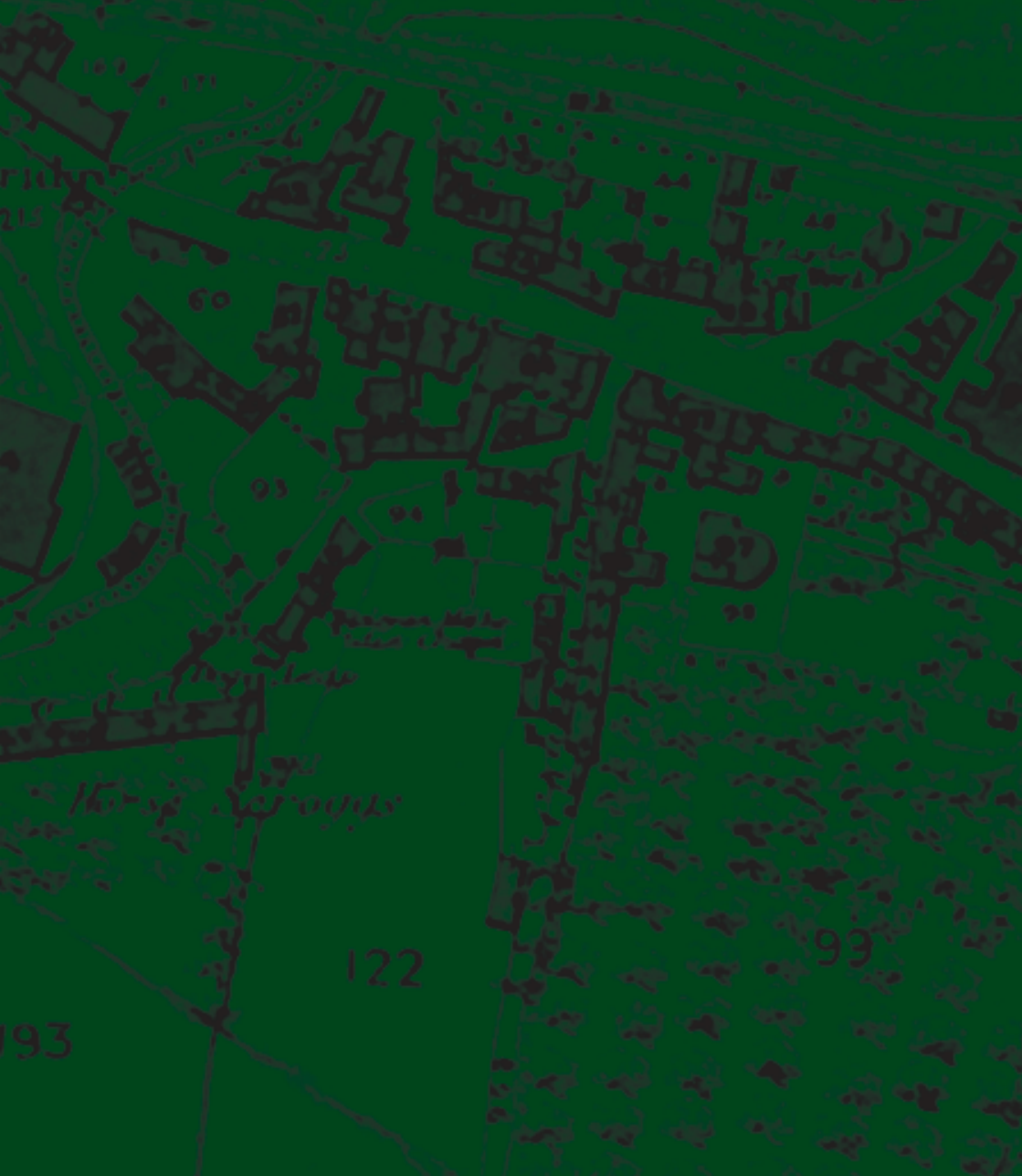


# THE BLAYDON RACES HERITAGE TRAIL

9TH JUNE 1862



Local Heritage *initiative*

Price  
£1.00



PRODUCED BY THE BLAYDON RACES FESTIVAL COMMITTEE

*This booklet tries to put the song Blaydon Races in its historical context.*

*The song tells the story of a Victorian day on Tyneside, Whit Monday on the 9th of June 1862. It is about a bus trip from Newcastle to Blaydon to go to a race meeting held on Blaydon Island.*

*All the geographical details mentioned in the song relate to places that did exist.*

*All the characters mentioned were real people. The maps used are taken from the 1859 series Ordnance Survey and give a very good idea of what the area looked like at that time. The prints or photos that are used are as near to the period as possible.*

*The words of the song in this booklet are the ones which were first published in Allan's book of Tyneside Songs in 1862.*

## THE BLAYDON RACES HERITAGE TRAIL

The booklet is produced by the Blaydon Races Festival Committee, edited by Elsdon Watson, and published with the help of a grant from the Local Heritage Initiative. The maps north of the Tyne were copied from masters in Newcastle Library, those south of the Tyne from Gateshead Library.

Photos and/or prints were from the archives of the above libraries or Winlaton and District Local History Society.

*The main references used were:  
The Blaydon Races by Joan Gale;  
Historical notes for centenary  
programme in 1962 compiled by  
W. Tynemouth, Deputy City  
Librarian, Newcastle upon Tyne.*



*Above*  
George Ridley as 'Johnny Luik-Up'

*Above Right*  
George Ridley in costume for  
'The Bobby Cure'

*Right*  
George Ridley

*The above illustrations are taken from  
'Allan's Book of Tyneside Songs', held in  
Gateshead Library.*



# George Ridley

Geordy Ridley was born in Gateshead at Grahamsley Street on 10th February 1835. He died in the same house on 9th September 1864 and is buried in St Edmund's Cemetery.

He started work as a trapper boy in Oakwellgate Colliery when he was 8 years old. He moved to the Goose Pit where he worked for 10 years and then moved to Hawks, Crawshay and Company as a waggon rider. His job was to ride the coal waggons which ran down to the Tyne. One day he was riding down a steep incline when the train of waggons got out of control. He jumped clear but was severely injured. After that he was no longer fit to work in the pits.

He had to depend for his livelihood on his gift as an entertainer. He had a good voice, a natural wit and a talent as a writer of Tyneside dialect songs.

He is now remembered for two classic Tyneside songs: Cushy Butterfield, the Tyneside fish lass who liked her beer and the now world famous Blaydon Races.

Blaydon Races – Tune “Brighton”

## Verse 1

*Aw went to Blaydon Races, 'twas on the ninth of Joon,  
Eiteen hundred an' sixty two, on a summer's efternoon;  
Aw tyek the 'bus frae Balmbra's, an' she wis heavy laden,  
Away we went along Collingwood Street, that's on the  
road to Blaydon.*

The song recounts a trip from Newcastle to Blaydon to see a race meeting. The race meeting was actually held on the day mentioned in the verse, although all the verses with the exception of the last were written before the 9th June. The song was actually performed for the first time at Balmbra's Music Hall on Thursday 5th June at a concert in aid of a testimonial to the famous Tyneside oarsman, Harry Clasper.

Balmbra's was the Wheatsheaf Inn, 3 and 4, Cloth Market. It took its name from the innkeeper, John Balmbra who held the post for nearly 25 years from 1840 to 1865. The Inn was renamed Balmbra's during the 1962 centenary celebrations.



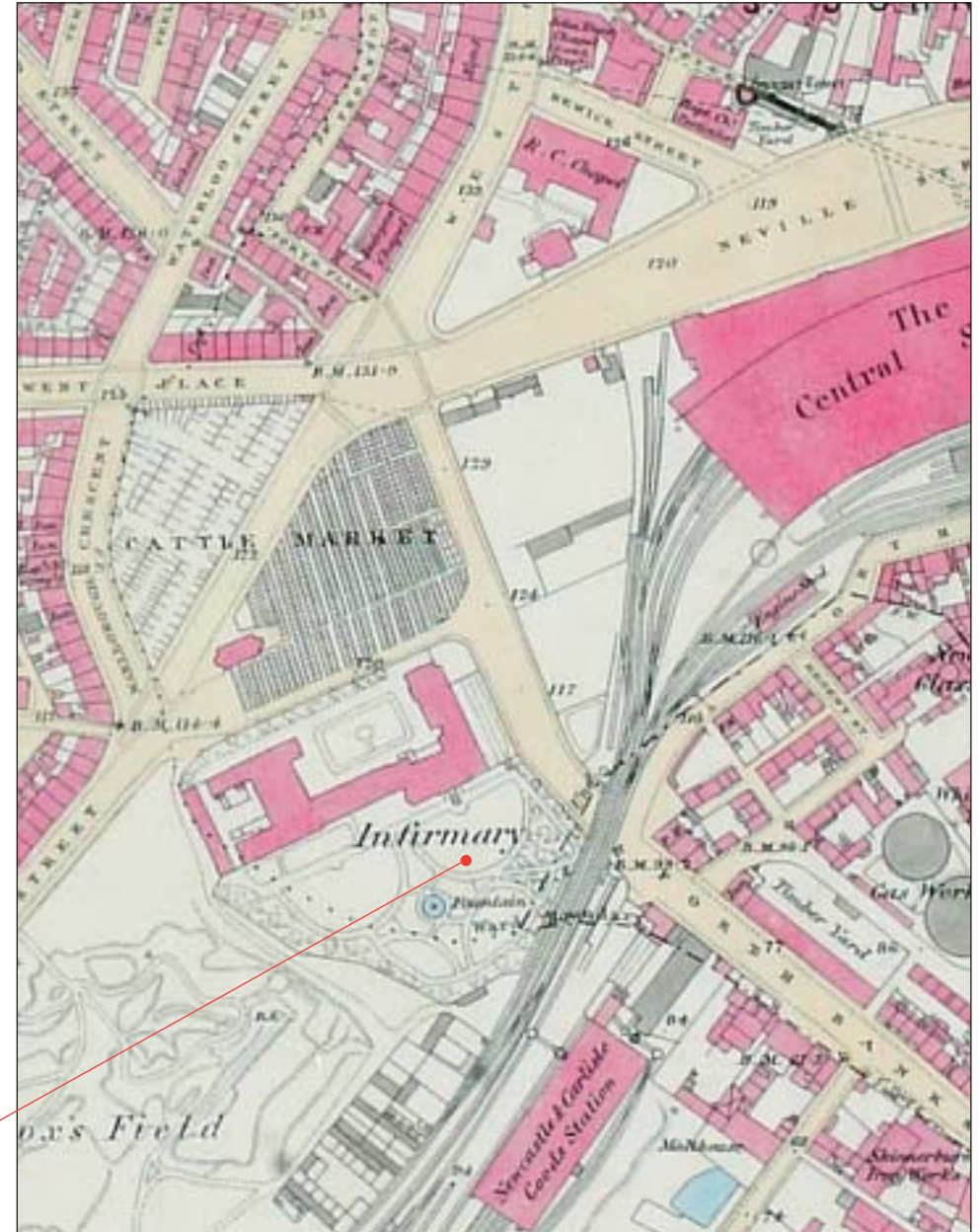
## Chorus

*O lads, ye shud only seen us gannin',  
We pass'd the foaks upon the road just as they wor  
stannin',  
Thor wes lots o' lads an' lasses there, all wi' smiling faces,  
Gawn along the Scotswood Road, to see the Blaydon Races.*

The bus went along Collingwood Street and then Neville Street on its way to Scotswood Road. It would pass the Stephenson monument under construction. The monument was officially opened on 2nd October 1862.

This would be quickly followed by Dobson's Central Station on their left. The portico we see now was completed in 1863. On the other side of the street the view would be different from the map which was surveyed in 1859. The new town being built by Dobson and Grainger was in the process of nearing Neville Street. Grainger Street was being extended to reach the station. Dr Gibb who is mentioned in Verse 3 had to move house because his old house at 45 Westgate Street (now Westgate Road) was demolished. His new house was on the corner of Grainger Street and Westgate Road. He moved there in 1862.

After Neville Street the bus would go diagonally across the Cattle Market and into Marlborough Street. On the left it would pass the Infirmary also mentioned in Verse 3. The Infirmary was the forerunner of the Royal Victoria Infirmary.

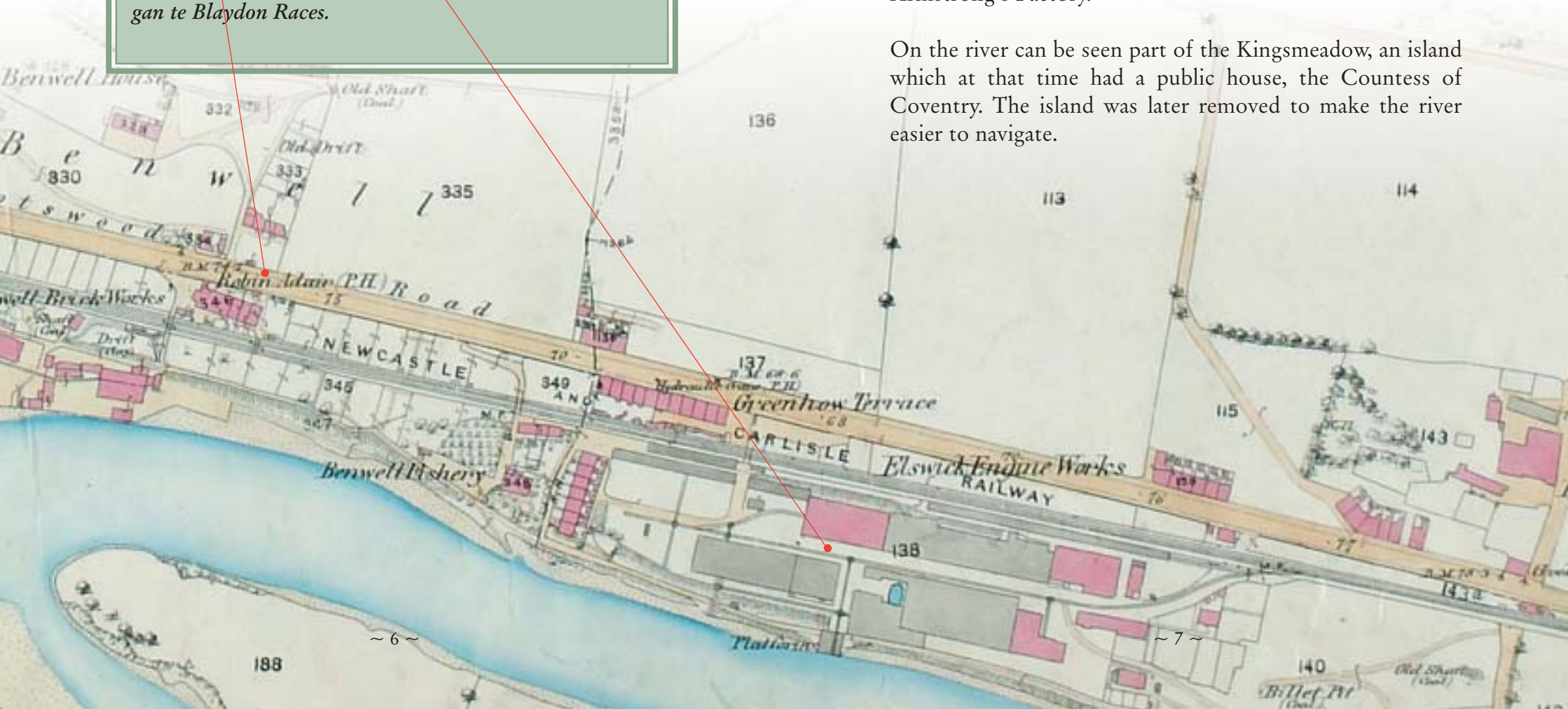


## Verse 2

*We flew past Airmstrang's factory, and up to the  
"Robin Adair",  
Just gannin doon te the railway bridge, the' bus  
wheel flew off there.  
The lasses lost their crinolines off, an' the veils that hide  
their faces,  
An' aw got two black eyes an' a broken nose in  
gan te Blaydon Races.*

Armstrong's Factory, which was eventually to stretch all the way along the river bank to Scotswood, was still in its early days in 1862. It had been built in 1847 and on the map is called Elswick Engine Works. By 1862 a major expansion was well under way that would see Armstrong's Factory stretch all the way along the river bank from Elswick to Scotswood. The north side of Scotswood Road was still mainly green fields although the construction of the workmen's houses had already begun. The public house, the Robin Adair can be seen on the south side of the road slightly east of Armstrong's Factory.

On the river can be seen part of the Kingsmeadow, an island which at that time had a public house, the Countess of Coventry. The island was later removed to make the river easier to navigate.



### Verse 3

*When we gat the wheel put on away we went agyen,  
But them that had their noses broke, they cam back  
ower hyem;  
Sum went to the dispensary, an' uthers to Doctor Gibbs,  
An' sum sought out the Infirmary to mend their  
broken ribs.*

In 1839 the Dispensary was moved to Nelson Street into a building erected by Grainger. It remained there until 1928.

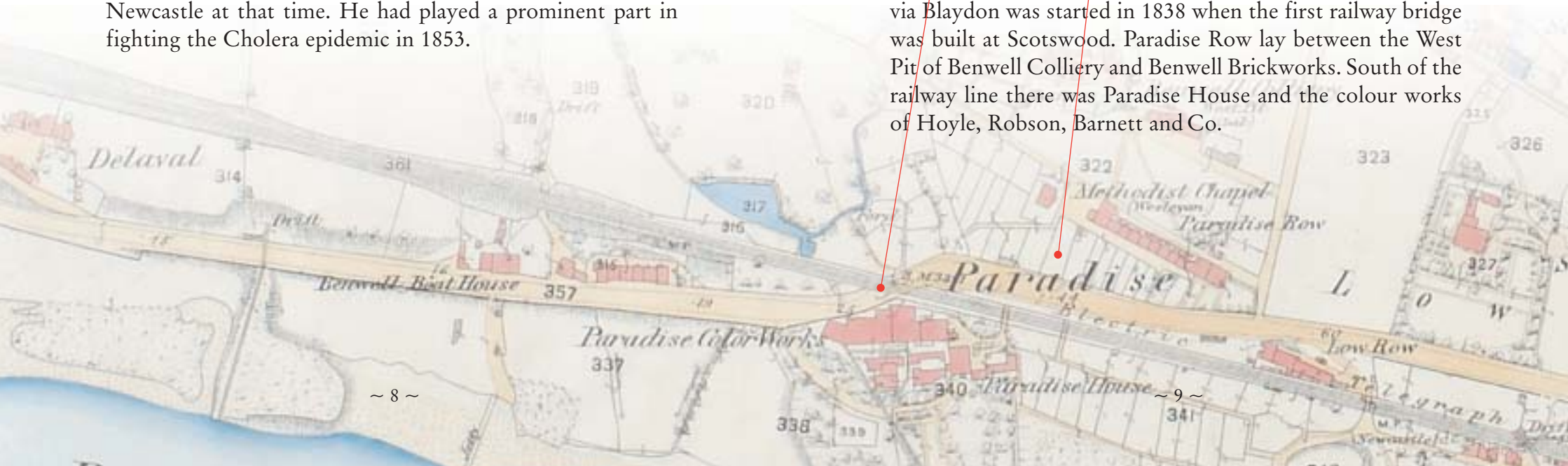
The Infirmary (see map with Chorus) was on the Forth Banks beside the Central Station.

Dr C. J. Gibb was probably the best known doctor in Newcastle at that time. He had played a prominent part in fighting the Cholera epidemic in 1853.

### Verse 4

*Noo when we gat to Paradise thor wes bonny gam begun;  
Thor wes fower-and-twenty on the 'bus, man, hoo they  
danced and sung,  
They called on me to sing a sang, aw sung them "Paddy Fagan,"  
Aw danced a jig an' swung me twig that day aw went to  
Blaydon.*

Between Verses 2 and 4, Geordy Ridley's geography becomes a bit confusing. As can be seen from the map, the railway bridge over Scotswood Road on which the bus crash occurred (Verse 2) is located at Paradise (Verse 4). The railway bridge carried the Newcastle to Carlisle railway. On the 9th of June extra trains were run to carry the crowds on their way to Blaydon. The railway link between Newcastle and Carlisle via Blaydon was started in 1838 when the first railway bridge was built at Scotswood. Paradise Row lay between the West Pit of Benwell Colliery and Benwell Brickworks. South of the railway line there was Paradise House and the colour works of Hoyle, Robson, Barnett and Co.

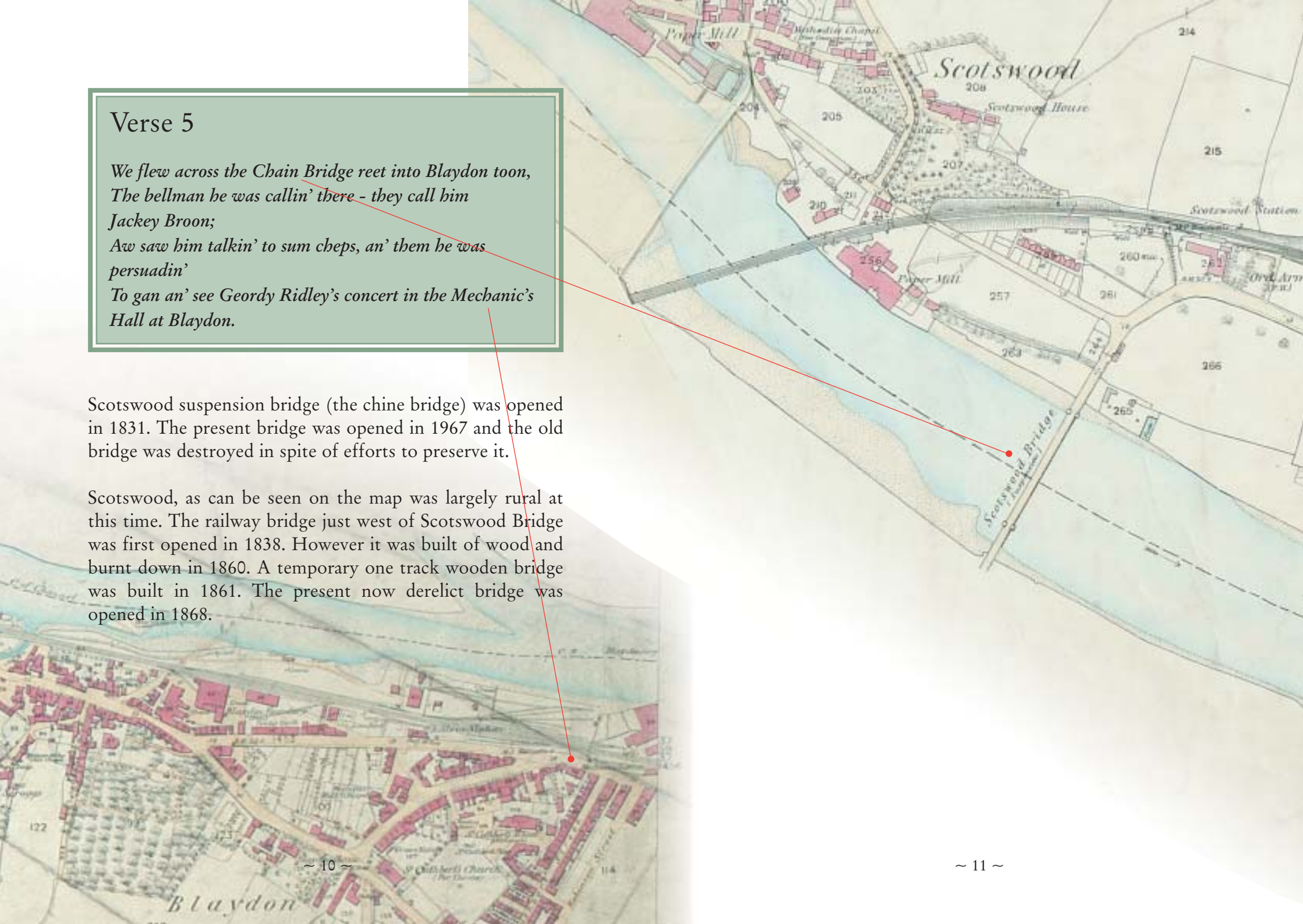


## Verse 5

*We flew across the Chain Bridge reet into Blaydon toon,  
The bellman he was callin' there - they call him  
Jackey Broom;  
Aw saw him talkin' to sum cheps, an' them he was  
persuadin'  
To gan an' see Geordy Ridley's concert in the Mechanic's  
Hall at Blaydon.*

Scotswood suspension bridge (the chine bridge) was opened in 1831. The present bridge was opened in 1967 and the old bridge was destroyed in spite of efforts to preserve it.

Scotswood, as can be seen on the map was largely rural at this time. The railway bridge just west of Scotswood Bridge was first opened in 1838. However it was built of wood and burnt down in 1860. A temporary one track wooden bridge was built in 1861. The present now derelict bridge was opened in 1868.



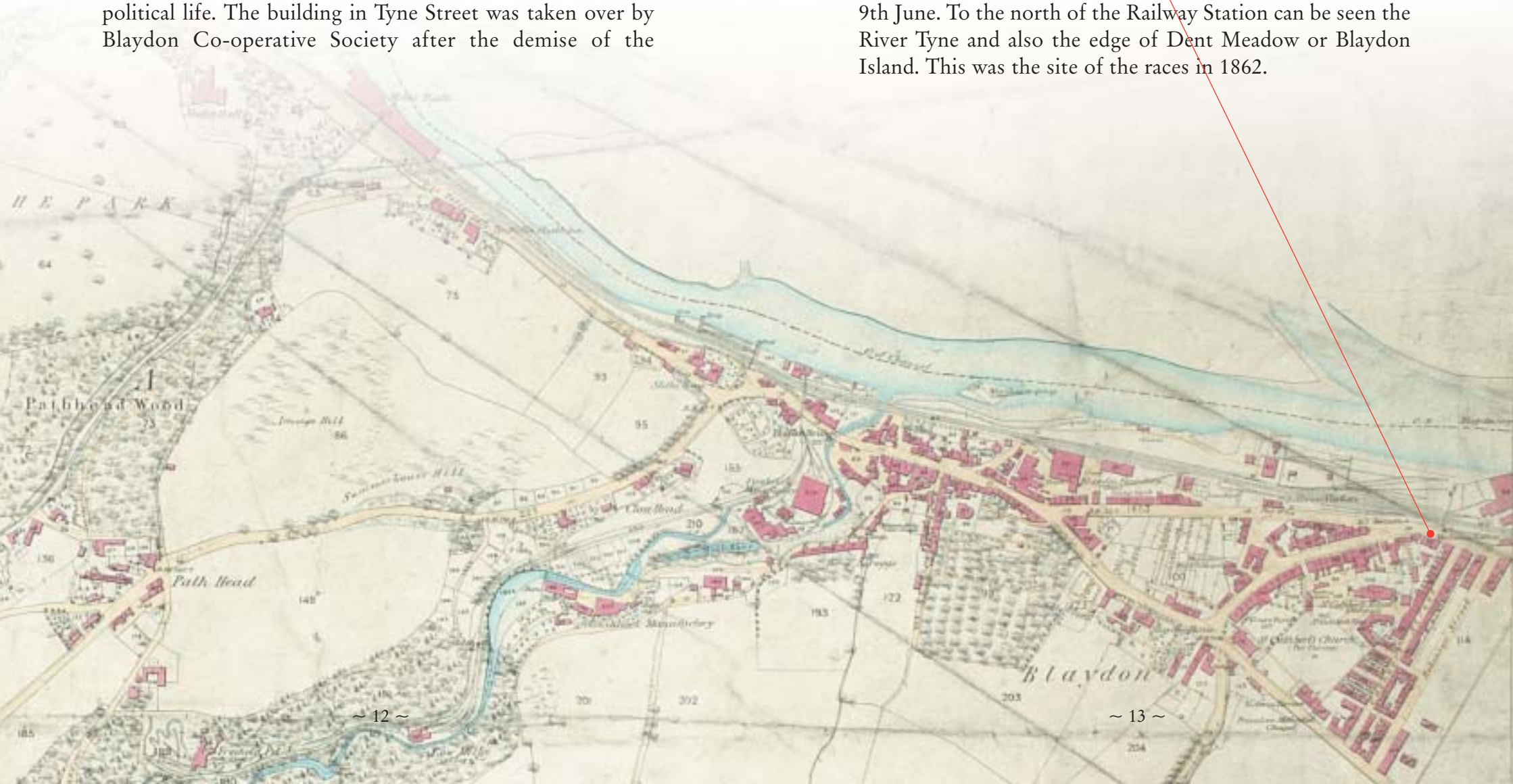


Jacky Brown the Bellman was the town crier at the time of the 1862 Blaydon Races. He was also the verger at St Cuthbert's Church. He died in 1901 and is buried in Blaydon Cemetery.

The Mechanics Hall, which was established in 1847, was for many years the centre of Blaydon's social, educational and political life. The building in Tyne Street was taken over by Blaydon Co-operative Society after the demise of the

Mechanics Institute in 1877. It was demolished in the 1970s. The sign that was above its door for many years is now in Blaydon Library in the aptly named Ridley Room. It reads "1853-1877 Blaydon and Stella Mechanics Institute".

Verse 5 also provides a self advertisement for Geordy Ridley and his concert in the Mechanic's Hall after the races on the 9th June. To the north of the Railway Station can be seen the River Tyne and also the edge of Dent Meadow or Blaydon Island. This was the site of the races in 1862.



## Verse 6

*The rain it poor'd aw the day, an' myed the groons quite muddy,*

*Coffy Johnny had a white hat on – they war shootin' "Whe stole the cuddy".*

*There wes spice stalls an' munkey shows, an' aud wives selling ciders,*

*An' a chep wiv a happeny roond aboot shootin' "Now me boys for riders".*

*Ridley  
Author's manuscript 1862*

The races recounted in the song were held on Blaydon Island where an oval course was made, almost a mile around. A bridge of barges was constructed to enable racegoers to cross to Blaydon Island from the Railway Quay at the back of the railway station. This was probably on the line of the ford which is marked on the map. Gas Lane, which was the site of the Blaydon Gas Works, would be the most convenient way for pedestrians to get to the race course if they did not arrive by train. The horses were walked across to the island from Lemington on the north side of the River.

Coffy Johnny was a famous local celebrity. He was a blacksmith at Winlaton. He appeared at all local festivities wearing his white hat. He died in 1900 and is buried in St Paul's Cemetery at Winlaton. Verse 6 would have had to be written on or shortly after the 9th June 1862, as it correctly records the torrential rain that fell on that day and made it difficult for the horses to get across the river.

