

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Narrative heroes and civic builders in Newcastle city region during the nineteenth century

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Abstract

The literature on nineteenth-century Newcastle city region is a narrative of industrial progress premised upon technological prowess. But there is another story to be told about the transformation of a relatively small northern town into a conurbation with the attributes of a modern city. This second process of ‘rounding out’ the city with social, cultural and political institutions to accompany the economic prowess is relatively under-reported. In this study, we follow 1,621 individuals and compare their record of being mentioned in the literature to their participation in 343 local institutions. The focus is directed towards those who are much more visible in the literature compared to institutional membership – ‘narrative heroes’ – and those with the reverse pattern, much more to be found in institutions than in the literature – civic builders. The two sets of individuals are discussed and reasons for their contrasting positions are suggested.

Introduction

Cities and city regions are intrinsically complex. Large populations with myriad economic, political and cultural motives interact to create immense multifaceted social entities. And this process is amplified during periods of rapid urban growth. Such was the situation for Newcastle and its city region – spreading both along the Tyne and to industrial Wearside – in the nineteenth century.¹ At the beginning of the century, Newcastle was a relatively minor northern English city, overtly dependent on the coal trade;² by the end of the century, it had a global reputation as an industrial conurbation built upon engineering innovations ranging from railways to shipbuilding and electricity. In economic terms, Newcastle city region was a huge success story, and this is reflected in the dominant historical narrative with

¹M. Barke and P.J. Taylor, ‘Newcastle’s long nineteenth century: a world-historical interpretation of making a multi-nodal city region’, *Urban History*, 42 (2015), 43–69.

²J. Ellis, ‘The “Black Indies”: economic development of Newcastle, c. 1700–1840’, in R. Colls and B. Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne: A Modern History* (Chichester, 2001), 1–26.

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its plot line of world-changing technologies, albeit one that was also presented with historicist underpinnings.³

But the complexity of such transformative urban growth cannot be reduced to a single story, even one as compelling as industrial progress. There is always more to city development than economic achievements. The profound urban changes along the Tyne and Wear were premised on the economic vitality of the region but the urban outcome was much more than this. Jacobs⁴ argues that when a city experiences economic growth spurts there occurs a parallel ‘rounding out’ of the city, non-economic processes coming to the fore that generate a recognizable city complex. Alongside the economic entrepreneurship, there will be political conflicts, cultural initiatives, social problems and responses, all developing in a continuing swirl of institution building that represents the city’s complicated development. This was certainly the case with Newcastle and its region; by the end of the nineteenth century, it was a sophisticated urban society. Our research project is specifically concerned with the specific ‘rounding out’ process. Jacobs does not develop this concept beyond descriptions of its supplementing rapid economic growth to make a more liveable city. In this article, we interpret Jacobs’ concept as institutional growth, the creation and sustaining of numerous organizations that mark the city region’s civic development in parallel to its economic growth. This research provides us with a different telling of Newcastle’s nineteenth-century story. In this article, we compare the narrative of this civic building with the economic success narrative through the individuals who are the main characters in each story.

Who are these main characters, the people who figure prominently in the two tellings of Newcastle’s story? For the conventional treatment of the nineteenth-century city region, we have used 97 primary publications (36 local histories, 61 biographies and obituaries) and recorded mentions of individuals in this literature. From these data, we have measured the ‘historical visibility’ of 1,621 individuals. For the civic building, we have used archival data on 1,329 lists of organizers in 343 local institutions for different years.⁵ From these data, we have measured the ‘associational practice’ of these same individuals representing the rounding out of Newcastle city region. Thus, for each of the 1,621 people, we have measures of both their historical visibility and their associational practice. Comparing the two measures produces a correlation of 0.46, which is statistically significant. This is as would be expected in such a large sample: people with high visibility tend to engage in more associational practice. But such a level of correlation indicates that only 21 per cent of the variation in historical visibility amongst the 1,621 individuals can be accounted for by their associational practices. In other words, nearly four-fifths of the variation in our data is not explained and requires further investigation. It is these differences that we explore in this article. We focus particularly on those with high relative historical visibility as prime ‘narrative heroes’ and those with relatively high associational practice as the ‘civic builders’. Our discussion concentrates

³R.W. Johnson, *The Making of the Tyne: A Record of Fifty Years’ Progress* (London, 1895).

⁴J. Jacobs, *The Economies of Cities* (London, 1970).

⁵M. Barke and P.J. Taylor, ‘Associational life in the rounding out of dynamic cities: an in-depth methodology and application to Newcastle’s city region in the nineteenth century’, in Z. Neal and C. Rozenblat (eds.), *Handbook of Cities and Networks* (Northampton, MA, forthcoming, 2021).

on why individuals appear in these two contrasting groups that make up two alternative city narratives.

The article consists of four parts. We begin with a literature review to show how our research relates to and extends from knowledge of nineteenth-century cities. The second part describes the methodology, data collection and measurements, before the substantive part outlining our results. These consist of two sections: identification of leading narrative heroes in the story of progress, and the civic builders conspicuously neglected in that same story. A short conclusion summarizes these contrasting fortunes of legacy.

Building on existing literature

In the narrative of the history of any region, specific individuals inevitably take a prominent place. Even if not explicitly engaging with the 'Great Man' theory of history,⁶ the concept of the central, leading individual may be implicit in such accounts. Although there are other forms of celebration, memory and possibly myth-making (as demonstrated by Madgin and Rodgers in relation to Edinburgh for example),⁷ the historical role of such leading individuals is mainly represented in the historiography of that particular region. Thus, until recently, the principal repository for this record remained the written word. Collectively, such texts form an essential part of the corpus of knowledge, not only about the contribution of the individuals concerned, but also about the place. This article derives from research that focuses on individuals within voluntary associations in nineteenth-century Newcastle and its region and who were thus actively involved in shaping civil society.⁸

The reaction to the problems of organizing the new urban society from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries has generated a substantial literature from a variety of theoretical perspectives. An important early concern was with formal institutions, their structures and the type of individuals active within them, along with their response to the new issues and challenges of nineteenth-century urban governance.⁹ This informed a rather more specialized segment of the literature, directly concerned with the central theme of this research, namely the development of a voluntary associational culture as part of an overall civic culture. Numerous studies have identified the role of different groups, such as religious, merchants, professionals and manufacturers in the public life of various towns,¹⁰ often avoiding the somewhat impressionistic descriptions of earlier historians. But few studies have

⁶T. Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (New York, 1888 edn); W. James, 'Great men and their environment', *Atlantic Monthly*, 46 (1880), 441–9; for an early critique, see H. Spencer, *The Study of Sociology* (New York, 1873).

⁷R. Madgin and R. Rodger, 'Inspiring capital? Deconstructing myths and reconstructing urban environments, Edinburgh, 1860–2010', *Urban History*, 40 (2013), 507–29.

⁸R.J. Morris, 'Civil society and the nature of urbanism: Britain 1750–1850', *Urban History*, 25 (1998), 289–301.

⁹E.P. Hennock, *Fit and Proper Persons: Ideal and Reality in Nineteenth-Century Urban Government* (London, 1973); D. Fraser, *Urban Politics in Victorian England: Structure of Politics in Victorian Cities* (Leicester, 1976); D. Fraser, *Power and Authority in the Victorian City* (Oxford, 1979).

¹⁰R.J. Morris, *Class, Sect, and Party: The Making of the British Middle Class: Leeds, 1820–1850* (Manchester, 1990); S. Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the urban middle classes and the "dominance" of manufacturers in nineteenth-century Britain', *Economic History Review*, n.s., 44 (1991), 66–85; G. Morton, R.J.

actually sought to compare the biographical record directly with other indicators of active participation.

This article is concerned with individuals within such voluntary associations and, crucially, the relationship between the 'biographical record' as discussed above and a measure of the volume of their actual participation in such organizations. In other words, we are interested in examining the potential contrast between 'reputation' and actual activity within this sphere. Before embarking on this analysis, it is necessary to locate it more deeply within the literature on nineteenth-century associational culture.

North American scholars figured prominently in the early literature on voluntary associations, with the familiar starting point being Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*¹¹ and his famous quip that Americans were a 'nation of joiners'.¹² One of the major conclusions from a reading of this literature is the plural nature of voluntary associations in the sense that many grew up to serve specific, sectional interests, reflecting the heterogeneity of the city but nevertheless were essentially an expression of democracy.¹³ Much of the British literature also recognizes the range of types of voluntary associations in particular places but has sought rather different interpretations. If the predominant theme in the North American literature relates to voluntary associations as an exercise in democracy, issues of class are recurrent in British studies. Morris, for example, has stressed the relationship of voluntary associations to the creation and maintenance of middle-class identity.¹⁴ They were a fundamental 'part of creating, developing and asserting middle-class values and public practice'. But the search for an overarching common theme has led to other perspectives. Morris has also argued that it is necessary to examine associations 'in particular provincial localities if their unity and fortunes as a coherent social development are to be demonstrated'.¹⁵ Wirthian sociology has been invoked to explain the growth of voluntary associations. They were a way of coping with heterogeneity and potentially absorbing conflict – 'towns which lacked a range of mediating institutions tended to be more prone to conflict and breakdowns of law and order'.¹⁶

The research reported here, however, is shaped by the theoretical perspective of Morris that voluntary associations were instrumental in the dual role of assertion of authority by the urban middle class and in defending their power and privilege.¹⁷ But our concern is not with the associations *per se*, but with the individuals who were the key actors in this process. It is clear that much of the focus of the literature

Morris and B.M.A. de Vries (eds.), *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places: Class, Nation and Culture in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (London, 2006).

¹¹A. De Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (Oxford, 1953 edn).

¹²Z.P. Neal, *The Connected City: How Networks Are Shaping the Modern Metropolis* (New York, 2013).

¹³M. Ryan, *Civic Wars: Democracy and Public Life in the American City in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley, 1997).

¹⁴R.J. Morris, 'Voluntary societies and British urban elites, 1780–1850: an analysis', *Historical Journal*, 26 (1983), 95–118; R.J. Morris, 'Urban associations in England and Scotland, 1750–1914: the formation of the middle class or the formation of civil society?', in Morton, Morris and de Vries (eds.), *Civil Society, Associations and Urban Places*, 148.

¹⁵Morris, 'Voluntary societies', 96; see also Morris, 'Civil society', 289–301.

¹⁶Morris, 'Civil society', 296.

¹⁷Morris, 'Voluntary societies'.

on voluntary associations has been on the organizations themselves, either as a group¹⁸ or on individual associations, their impact and changing contexts over time.¹⁹ A different approach is to look more closely at the individuals who constituted these societies, especially those who created and ran them, and the networks they formed. Committee members who devoted time and energy in unpaid capacities are therefore the central focus of our research. We should stress that this approach is emphatically not a return to the 'Great Man' interpretation of history. We are concerned here with networks of individuals and with large numbers. Furthermore, we are concerned with the 'performance' of individuals. One of the problems with the 'Great Man' approach to history is that it relies substantially on the biographical record. Whilst this, of course, may be subject to critical analysis, much of the 'data' is actually 'second hand'. As already explained, our intention is to compare this 'biographical record' of individuals within a locality with their participation in a quantitative sense.

Thus, our study is concerned with the contrast between the biographical record and actual active participation. The work of Nenadic is of particular significance for our study as it stressed the significance of divisions within the middle class and questioned, for example, the role of manufacturers in civic affairs.²⁰ The conventional wisdom of nineteenth-century civic development often affords considerable significance to this group. Nenadic suggests that this comes from an uncritical reading and set of expectations about nineteenth-century urban growth. Manufacturers have attracted considerable attention in the biographical record, especially those associated with key innovations, but such individuals, although highly visible, were not necessarily active in key civic institutions. Crucially, part of the creation of potential myths relates to the nature of the biographical record and the way in which alleged 'significance' can become cumulative, the received narrative being repeated from one source to another. Our purpose is to query this process and to test it by comparing the accumulated biographical narrative with empirical measures of active participation in civic life through voluntary associations. We argue that this adds substantially to the existing literature on voluntary associations.

Data collection and measurement

There is a simple rational explanation why the correlation between historical visibility and association practice is not so high: divergences between historical

¹⁸M. Gorsky, 'The growth and distribution of English friendly societies in the early nineteenth century', *Economic History Review*, 51 (1998), 489–511; I. Inkster and J. Morrell (eds.), *Metropolis and Province: Science and British Culture, 1780–1850* (London, 2012); L. Robinson, 'English associational culture in Lancashire and Yorkshire, 1890s – c. 1930s', *Northern History*, 51 (2014), 131–52.

¹⁹S.J.M.M. Alberti, 'Placing nature: natural history collections and their owners in nineteenth-century provincial England', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 35 (2002), 291–311; R.E. Schofield, *The Lunar Society of Birmingham: A Social History of Provincial Science and Industry in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1963); S.A. Shapin, 'The Pottery Philosophical Society, 1819–1835: an examination of the cultural uses of provincial science', *Science Studies*, 2 (1972), 311–33; S.A. Shapin, 'Property, patronage and the politics of science: the founding of the Royal Society of Edinburgh', *British Journal for the History of Science*, 7 (1974), 1–41; C.E. Makepeace, *Science and Technology in Manchester. Two Hundred Years of the Lit. and Phil.* (Manchester, 1984).

²⁰Nenadic, 'Businessmen, the urban middle classes'.

visibility, as represented in the biographical record, and actual engagement in urban associations are merely a consequence of their different national/local resonances. The voluminous biographical literature on individuals is a product of their achievements in their fields of endeavour, through which their importance transcended the merely local or regional. At the opposite end of the spectrum are individuals whose quantitative involvement with associations may be equally voluminous but whose sphere of activity and nature of involvement was mainly local in scope, reflected by a much smaller biographic record. Thus, in the course of the nineteenth century, several individuals from Newcastle city region achieved national and international fame and not surprisingly attracted the attention of biographers. Great inventors, industrialists, politicians, artists and architects were inevitably celebrated far and wide and their stories became central to the narrative and external interpretation of the region. But not all individuals who made a significant contribution are recognized in the bibliographic record. Our analysis of two large data sets on the biographic record and active participation in urban associations enables us to interrogate the different ways in which the historical visibility of individuals compares with their actual urban activities. The salience of our findings relies very much on the large size of our two data sets; unusual in this respect, they enable detailed consideration of individuals selected for their specific relations to the prime narrative.

Measuring association practice

The unit of analysis of our study is functional communicative associations (FCAs) in the specific context of rounding out a city. The 'functional' means the association pursues an agreed purpose. In practice, this results in our data collection including many more transient associations, often single instances of comings together, than usually recognized in the literature. We see such temporary associations as particularly important in the rounding out process during rapid urban change. The 'communicative' means the association encompasses a message, each providing something distinctive to urban life. We are concerned with the more committed members, therefore we focus on organizers such as committee members, formally active members rather than ordinary members. In addition, we include the local state in the city region, both elected and appointed (general-purpose councils, magistrates and grand juries), and two specific functional organizations (Boards of Poor Law Guardians and School Boards both required, from 1836 and 1871 respectively, through national legislation). All members of these state organizations were unpaid, and in that sense qualify as volunteers.

The method of data collecting was based upon early research on the world city network:²¹ the scavenger method – searching out relevant information from myriad sources, in this case publicly available archives and libraries. The quest was for lists of people organizing an FCA from which we can construct customized data. By its nature, the scavenger method generates data in multifarious forms; to make it workable, each data list has to be similarly coded. For each list, members are scored in

²¹P.J. Taylor, G. Catalano and D. Walker, 'Measurement of the world city network', *Urban Studies*, 39 (2002), 2367–76.

terms of their communicative potential ranging from 1 to 4. For instance, for a committee running a society or club, ordinary committee members score 2, functional officers (secretary and treasurer) score 3, and figurehead (chair or president) scores 4, with others in less functional positions (e.g. patron or chaplain) scoring 1. We have been ravenous collectors of such lists, scoring each as appropriate. These are the 1,329 participation lists from 343 FCAs over the nineteenth century we mentioned in the Introduction. There are 7,723 active persons in our data; for this study we focus on the more active. By including only individuals with the equivalent of five ordinary FCA memberships or above (i.e. scoring 10 or more), we reduce the number to 1,621. The sum of scores for each of these individuals is our measure of association practice; these ranged from the cut-off point of 10 to 441.²²

Measuring historical visibility

Our measure of ‘historical visibility’ is based on the historical and biographical publications as enumerated in the Introduction. Professional historians will have their own specialist knowledge and detailed familiarity with many of the individuals discussed in our text, but we are concerned here only with the material on the public record, the material that, within the context of individual actors, creates a regional narrative. As our concern is with present ‘historical visibility’, we choose to include only a limited amount of biographical material from the main part of the nineteenth century, utilizing mainly sources from the very end of the century and subsequently. As much biographical material produced in the course of the nineteenth century was written from specifically polemical perspectives and frequently not a considered assessment of the individual concerned, we do not use such material in our quantitative assessment of subsequent historical visibility. The biographical material we have included from the very end of the nineteenth century relates principally to obituaries published by learned and scientific societies as these are sources with a higher level of probity. We are conscious that the nature of the narrative on any individual is likely to change through time, as elegantly demonstrated by Colls in the case of George Stephenson,²³ as is the choice of who should be remembered. For that reason, we are less concerned with the contemporary reputation and assessment of individuals and more with their lasting memory and how this compares with their actual involvement in the course of that century.

Data collection consisted of searching for each of our 1,621 subjects in the texts of the 97 publications. As in the previous exercise, we coded the data from 1 to 4, in this case in terms of the significance of citations. Thus, personal biographies score 4, mini-biographies in bibliographic collections and scholarly obituaries score 3, multiple index citations in a local/regional history book scores 2, and a citation (but usually of several sentences) in said books scores 1. The sum of scores for each of the 1,621 individuals is our measure of historical visibility; these ranged from 0 to 63.

²²For more details on the data collection, see Barke and Taylor, ‘Associational life’.

²³R. Colls, ‘Remembering George Stephenson: genius and modern memory’, in Colls and Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 267–92.

Relative visibility

Our purpose is to relate historical visibility to associational practice. We do this by standardizing each variable (mean = 0, standard deviation = 1) to facilitate comparison. Relative visibility is defined as the difference between the standardized values for historical visibility and associational practice. We have chosen to compute the differences for each individual by subtracting association practice values from historical visibility values. Thus a negative score indicates that an individual has more associational practice than historical visibility, and a positive score means more historical visibility than associational practice.

Relative visibility ranges from -10.21 to 8.98. We focus on the extreme cases: those individuals 'historically renowned' (high positive scores showing relatively over-represented in the literature) and those 'historically under-rated', the obverse of the latter. These results are interpreted through selected discussion of individuals in each group: which people are major actors in the prime narrative and who are relatively overlooked? Interpretation of extreme individual cases provides specific insights into the nature of the prime narrative, both inside and outside the region.

We concentrate on the two tails of the relative visibility distribution, those with scores of beyond 3 both positively and negatively. This produces 24 individuals who are very historically renowned and 19 who are very historically under-rated. Although limited space does not allow a full discussion of these 43 individuals, the elucidatory cases will feature in the following discussion.

Narrative heroes in a story of progress

The historically renowned individuals are listed in [Table 1](#) along with their prime activities. These are people whose volume of bibliographic record is significantly in excess of their associational presence within the region. We understand them as individuals who are specifically leading the prime narrative: [Table 1](#) is the roll call of these narrative heroes.

There are few surprises in this group who we can describe as historically visible and primarily constitute the popular narrative of the region in the nineteenth century. However, a notable absentee from our analysis is George Stephenson who, although scoring highly in the biographical record, does not meet our minimum criteria of a score of 10 in associational visibility. George Stephenson was not an enthusiastic associational individual,²⁴ appearing only on the committee of the Mechanics' Institute in the 1820s and turning down a knighthood more than once, a Fellowship of the Royal Society and honorary membership of the Civil Engineering Society.²⁵ Frequent absences from the region and his subsequent residence in Derbyshire would also have a negative impact on the volume of his formal associational life within the region.

Although the contributions made by most of the 24 individuals listed here were outstanding and, for some, unique, the degree to which these contributions differ from their actual participation within the region is our prime interest. Given the

²⁴L.T.C. Rolt, *George and Robert Stephenson: The Railway Revolution* (London, 1960); H. Davies, *George Stephenson: The Remarkable Life of the Founder of Railways* (Stroud, 2004).

²⁵S. Smiles, *The Life of George Stephenson* (London, 1857).

Table 1. Historically renowned

RV*	Leading figures	Description
8.98	Stephenson, Robert (MP), FRS (1803–59)	Railway and civil engineer
7.78	Palmer, Charles Mark (MP, Sir) (1822–1907)	Entrepreneur, coal owner and metal shipbuilder
7.12	Dobson, John (1787–1865)	Architect
6.97	Grainger, Richard (1797–1861)	Developer and entrepreneur
6.09	Bewick, Thomas (1753–1828)	Engraver and natural historian
5.82	Parsons, C.A. (Hon.), FRS (1854–1931)	Inventor and industrialist
4.83	Swan, Joseph Wilson, FRS (1828–1914)	Inventor, physicist and chemist
4.67	Armstrong, William George (Sir, Lord) (1810–1900)	Inventor and engineer
4.44	Hudson, George (MP) (1800–71)	Railway entrepreneur
4.34	Buddle, John (1773–1843)	Mining engineer; promoter of mining safety
3.98	Hedley, William (1779–1843)	Coal viewer and railway engineer
3.93	Stephenson, David (1757–1819)	Architect and town planner
3.82	Grey, Charles (2nd Earl Grey) (1764–1845)	Landowner and reforming Whig politician
3.77	Welford, Richard (1836–1919)	Historian and educationalist
3.64	Mackenzie, Eneas (1778–1832)	Historian, printer and publisher; promoter of Mechanics' Institute
3.57	Cowen, Joseph (MP, jnr) (1829–1900)	Industrialist, newspaper owner and radical politician
3.57	Hawthorn, William (1799–1875)	Railway engineer
3.54	Bell, John (1783–1864)	Numismatist and antiquarian, proposer of Society of Antiquaries
3.44	Wood, Nicholas, FRS (1795–1865)	Mining and locomotive engineer; first president Institute of Mining Engineers
3.29	Lambton, John George (MP, Lord/Earl Durham) (1792–1840)	Whig politician, coal owner, colonial administrator
3.19	Sharp, Cuthbert (Sir) (1781–1849)	Soldier, administrator, antiquarian and collector of north-east folk culture
3.12	Attwood, Charles (1791–1875)	Innovator, glass maker and ironmaster
3.09	Burt, Thomas (MP) (1837–94)	Former miner, trade unionist and Liberal politician
3.02	Leslie, Andrew (1818–94)	Hebburn shipbuilder and philanthropist

*Relative visibility

preferred narrative of the region, this group is dominated by industrialists, shipping and coal interests, with 14 of the 24 individuals listed being in this category. This is the received popular narrative of nineteenth-century north-east England, characterized by an ‘impressive stream of invention and innovation’²⁶ and celebrated in street names and statues throughout the region (however, as we shall see, the complete narrative was considerably more nuanced than this). Although W.G. Armstrong has by far the largest historical visibility in our data set and may have been expected to be the most significant ‘historically renowned’ individual, this position belongs to George Stephenson’s son Robert. It is the latter who is most over-represented in the literature compared to his actual involvement within the region. Arguably, Robert Stephenson is the perfect demonstration of cumulative amplification within the biographical record and historiography of a region. This is in no way to detract from his accomplishments or those of any others in our analysis – our observations concern the disparity between the two measures.

²⁶J. Ellis, ‘Regional and county centres, 1700–1840’, in P. Clark (ed.), *Cambridge Urban History of Britain*, vol. II (Cambridge, 2000), 675.

A highly illustrative case in this first group is George Hudson (1800–71), the most important railway entrepreneur of his generation, Sunderland MP (1845–59) and three times lord mayor of York. After the late 1840s, the usual practice in discussing him was ‘to pour indiscriminate abuse on the head of Mr George Hudson’,²⁷ and Charles Dickens observed ‘I am disposed to throw up my head and howl whenever I hear Mr Hudson mentioned.’²⁸ Financial irregularities led to his disgrace and he fled into exile in France on two occasions.²⁹ There is no mention of him in Lawson’s *Tyneside Celebrities* (1873) and Welford’s *Men of Mark Twixt Tyne and Tweed* (1895).³⁰ Despite his wrongdoing, some contemporaries retained a grudging respect ‘Let others abuse George Hudson as they may – Newcastle and Gateshead are bound to preserve a respectful and decorous silence.’³¹ Such an intriguing character who, through whatever means, accomplished so much in terms of physical infrastructure was bound to attract a huge amount of historiographic attention, especially when this was accompanied by strong whiffs of scandal.

An unexpected name in our leaders of the historical narrative is John Buddle (1773–1843), who, with the exception of those with specialist interests is probably the least widely known amongst those listed in [Table 1](#). However, Buddle was the ‘most eminent mining engineer in the northern coalfield’,³² responsible for technical innovations and recognized nationally by appointment to commissions and national inquiries. Buddle largely eschewed political activity, but he was an enthusiastic supporter and academic contributor to the Natural History Society and Mechanics’ Institute. Outside his professional activities, he was a strong advocate of cultural activities including the Institute of Fine Arts, music festivals and the Theatre Royal. He was an accomplished musician who ‘formed a society for the cultivation of chamber music, which he kept together from 1825 to 1840’.³³ But in a region where the narrative is dominated by industry and, more specifically, by coal we should expect such a leading figure to be historically recognized. And he certainly was in his own life-time – at his funeral ‘over sixty gentlemen on horseback preceded the hearse which was followed by nine mourning coaches, upwards of sixty private carriages, and a great number of tradesmen, workmen and others on foot’, a procession in excess of one mile.³⁴

Although the Newcastle city region became synonymous with coal-based economic activity and industrialization, it is noteworthy that at least four of our leaders in the historical narrative were also inventors. Their achievements transcended

²⁷Anon., *Sketches of Public Men of the North* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1855), 51.

²⁸R. Beaumont, *The Railway King* (London, 2003).

²⁹R.S. Lambert, *The Railway King. A Study of George Hudson and the Business Morals of His Times* (London, 1964).

³⁰W.D. Lawson, *Lawson’s Tyneside Celebrities* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1873); R. Welford, *Men of Mark Twixt Tyne and Tweed* (London, 1895).

³¹Anon., *Sketches of Public Men*, 53.

³²R. Welford and J.C. Hodgson, ‘Biographies of contributors to the Society’s literature’, in *Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne, Archaeologia Aeliana, (Third Series) Vol. X, Centenary Volume, 1813–1913* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1913), 119.

³³*Ibid.*, 120.

³⁴Lawson, *Lawson’s Tyneside Celebrities*, 212.

merely building and sustaining large industrial enterprises and concerned the application of scientific innovation to industrial processes: Armstrong in the application of hydraulics to civil and military purposes, Palmer in the technology of iron-built merchant shipping, Swan and Parsons in the development of electricity and, in the case of the latter, turbines as a motive power for sea vessels. These men were literally industrial and economic revolutionaries and constituted, in the words of the city's mid-twentieth-century historian, the apogee of the region's nineteenth-century 'growth and achievement'.³⁵ As such, they were fundamental to the regional growth narrative and sense of itself.

It may seem surprising, therefore, that this 'over-represented' category includes cultural icons such as John Dobson, David Stephenson, Richard Grainger, Thomas Bewick and the historians/antiquarians Richard Welford, Eneas Mackenzie, John Bell and Sir Cuthbert Sharp. Despite its industrialization, or perhaps because of it, the region sought to demonstrate that it had significant cultural manifestations and that these were distinctive, manifest at several levels from 'high culture' (architecture, music, etc.) to folk traditions, and even its own language. Whilst the Tyneside (Geordie) dialect was eschewed and mocked in early eighteenth-century Newcastle,³⁶ it had notably risen in status a century later, particularly associated with a radical political tradition manifest in songs and poetry, and publicized by John Bell, one of our narrative heroes.³⁷

Although ostensibly disparate and apparently counter to the simple popular narrative, this 'cultural' group contributed in different ways to the story of the urban region as a modern, technologically based, industrial leader. Most obvious were the creators of the built environment. For example, Grainger's role as developer of a unique new central area, commensurate with the status of regional capital, and the heroic scale and technological achievement of Dobson's Newcastle Central Station and the Grainger Market, opened in 1834–35.³⁸ Yet, earlier developments by David Stephenson, in planning Mosley Street and Dean Street which 'contain as excellent shops as any out of the Metropolis' and laid down a precedent for expressing civic ambition through the built environment, have been viewed as creators of a modern Newcastle.³⁹

There may be some irony in the presence of the historians, arguably custodians of the narrative of the past of a region, in this category of the over-represented. Furthermore, the presence of Eneas Mackenzie is particularly noteworthy in the context of cumulative historical narratives, as his work on the history of Newcastle has been criticized as being highly derivative from Brand's 1789 *History and Antiquities of Newcastle upon Tyne*.⁴⁰ But Mackenzie was a founder of the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute, an organization that accorded well with the application of science to industrial development narrative of the region (George Stephenson took the chair at the inaugural meeting). Along with John Bell, Sir Cuthbert Sharp is, in many ways, an intriguing member of the 'narrative

³⁵S. Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne: Its Growth and Achievement* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1950).

³⁶B. Griffiths, 'Last word: dialect', in Colls and Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 362.

³⁷J. Bell, *Rhymes of Northern Bards* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1812).

³⁸T. Faulkner and A. Greg, *John Dobson. Architect of the North East* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 2001).

³⁹Middlebrook, *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 146.

⁴⁰J. Cannon, 'The historians', in *Lit & Phil Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993), 55.

heroes', as both were essentially antiquarians. Ostensibly, this does not fit with the dominant narrative. However, as noted above, the very process of industrialization itself created the need to demonstrate a richer and historically grounded identity manifest in different spheres of activity.

Thomas Bewick was probably the greatest wood engraver of all time who 'attained a universal reputation and is now regarded as almost the creator of the art he resuscitated and popularised'.⁴¹ Bewick won international acclaim for revitalizing and reinventing the art, especially after the publication of his *History of British Birds*. His contribution to natural history was recognized on the discovery of a new species of swan in Northumberland in 1830, named 'Bewick's swan'.⁴² More germane to our argument about creating and sustaining a regional narrative, his work was admired and praised by subsequent national cultural icons such as Ruskin, Charlotte Brontë, Charles Kingsley and Virginia Woolf.⁴³ Bewick scores highly simply because he was unique.

The significance of the region to reformist politics is appropriately reflected in the presence of Earl Grey, Joseph Cowen Jr and Thomas Burt in this historically visible category. All three are represented in the iconography of Newcastle's built environment in the form of Grey's Monument, Cowen's highly visible statue in Westgate Road, and Burt Hall. All three attained national status and recognition, the latter two as radical MPs, hence their high level of historical visibility. Cowen was also heir to a prominent local industrial dynasty and owner of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, a newspaper that played a vital role in helping the region create a sense of itself.⁴⁴ The coal-based industrialization historiography of the region was and is ideally served by Burt's credentials as coal miner, trade unionist (secretary of the Northumberland Miners' Association) and one of the earliest working-class MPs elected. Although regionally based, it was at the national level that he won lasting recognition.

In summary, the narrative heroes comprise major industrial leaders as would be expected in a story of nineteenth-century progress, but key cultural and political figures are also included, often with a national reputation and who help embellish the city region's self-identity. These findings resonate powerfully with Colls' discourse on the 'New Northumbrians', the emergence of a liberal nineteenth-century urban elite intent on creating a 'modern', progressive urban regional identity based on more than industrialization.⁴⁵ Central to this was the role of history and folk tradition being integral to the creation of regional identity and rootedness at a time of rapid and potentially disturbing change.

Civic builders neglected by the story of progress

The process of city growth and emergence of a 'modern city' is about much more than economic development; it involves somewhat less heralded attributes that

⁴¹ Lawson, *Lawson's Tyneside Celebrities*, 165.

⁴²J. Uglow, *Nature's Engraver. A Life of Thomas Bewick* (London, 2006), 396.

⁴³*Ibid.*, 401–2.

⁴⁴J. Hugman, 'Print and preach. The entrepreneurial spirit of nineteenth-century Newcastle', in Colls and Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 113–32.

⁴⁵R. Colls, 'The New Northumbrians', in R. Colls (ed.), *Northumbria: History and Identity 547–2000* (Chichester, 2007), 151–77.

require civic builders. These may also be key economic figures but, although highly visible, the depth of real civic involvement of the latter was often limited. In contrast, there is a 'substrata' of people who may not be significantly recognized in the historical narrative but who created the associational infrastructure so essential to the overall development of the city. The most significant historically under-rated individuals from our analysis are listed in Table 2. These are people whose associational presence is massively in excess of what we would expect from their biographic record. We understand them as individuals who are specifically engaged in 'rounding out' the city region; Table 2 is the roll call of civic builders.

As a group of people who, relatively, have been excluded from the principal narrative of the nineteenth-century Newcastle city region, explanations for this neglect are complex and varied. Remarkably, the two most quantitatively 'connected' and active individuals overall are amongst the most under-represented in the biographical record, in fact one – Charles William Bigge (1773–1849) – is statistically *the* most under-represented by some distance. The other – John Clayton (1792–1890) – has the highest overall degree of 'connectedness' in our data and may be counted as a 'civic builder' *par excellence*. His position demonstrates that historical visibility is far from being a simple function of volume of associational practice. Quite different factors help to explain the relatively weak historical visibility of these two.

John Clayton was an immensely powerful and wealthy individual in nineteenth-century Newcastle. 'The bland and prudent son of a bland and prudent sire',⁴⁶ he succeeded his father as town clerk in 1822 and held that position for 45 years. He accumulated a vast amount of wealth, some of which was used to pursue his hobby of archaeology. He purchased and introduced measures of conservation on large stretches of Hadrian's Wall.⁴⁷ He was instrumental in facilitating the success of Richard Grainger's redevelopment scheme for central Newcastle, coming to the rescue of Grainger when he was threatened with bankruptcy, and ensuring that the work continued. He never married and left his estate of 20,000 acres and over £720,000 (equivalent to £42 million in modern money) to his nephew.⁴⁸ He is by no means an invisible historical figure but, in the historiography of our region, he is most often mentioned, albeit frequently, in passing as a rather shadowy background figure. For all his achievement, it appears that he was such a character in life: 'surprisingly little is known about him',⁴⁹ and one contemporary radical critic observed that 'he has all the craft and subtlety of the devil'.⁵⁰ He failed to attract the attention of major biographers but he excited considerable adverse comment: 'The ordinary feelings, impetuosities and weaknesses of common men do not assail him.'⁵¹ Furthermore, despite his immensely long and ostensibly influential administrative career, 'He will not give clear opinions. Seldom suggests or originates. He is not a fresh and vigorous thinker. Sixty years enjoyment under the dynasty of the

⁴⁶Anon., *Sketches of Public Men*, 53.

⁴⁷Welford and Hodgson, 'Biographies of contributors', 183.

⁴⁸L. Wilkes and G. Dodds, *Tyneside Classical. The Newcastle of Grainger, Dobson & Clayton* (London, 1964), 120.

⁴⁹*Ibid.*, 50.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, 52.

⁵¹Anon., *Sketches of Public Men*.

Table 2. Historically under-rated

RV*	Leading figures	Description
-10.21	Bigge, Charles William (1773-1849)	Coal owner and banker
-6.49	Swinburne, John Edward (Sir) (1762-1860)	Landowner, Whig politician, antiquarian
-6.16	Embleton, Dennis (Dr) (1810-1900)	Physician and local historian
-4.38	Robson, Edward Capper (1812-93)	Liberal Quaker flour miller, Sunderland infrastructural promoter
-3.89	Stevenson, James Cochran (MP) (1825-1905)	South Shields industrialist, civic improver, local and national Liberal politician
-3.71	Hunter, William Rutherford (1797-1881)	Businessman, railway director
-3.64	Green, Robert Yeoman (1823-1904)	Solicitor, amateur natural historian
-3.60	Brady, George Stewardson (Dr, Prof.) (1832-1921)	Physician and natural scientist
-3.45	Dixon, Dixon (before 1825 Dixon Brown) (1776-1852)	Landowner and county militia
-3.39	Headlam, Thomas Emerson (Dr) (1777-1864)	Physician, local Whig politician
-3.35	Dees, Robert Richardson (1814-1908)	Solicitor
-3.32	Blacklock, Joseph (1814-94)	Solicitor, amateur natural historian
-3.30	Hodgkin, Thomas (Dr) (1831-1913)	Barrister, banker and historian
-3.27	Bell, Matthew (MP) (1793-1871)	Landowner and Tory politician
-3.21	Philipson, George Hare (Prof., MD) (1836-1918)	Physician
-3.20	Liddell, Henry Thomas (MP, 2nd Baron Ravensworth) (1797-1878)	Landowner and Tory politician
-3.17	Clayton, John (1792-1890)	Administrator, bureaucrat and amateur archaeologist
-3.15	Turner, William (Rev.) (1761-1859)	Unitarian minister and educationalist
-3.10	Trevelyan, Walter Calverley (Sir) (1797-1879)	Landowner and naturalist

*Relative visibility

Claytons has convinced him that the safe course is never to harass the body you manage with new thoughts.⁵²

Rather different was Charles William Bigge, our most significant 'under-represented' individual overall. An eminent coal owner, early in life he 'interested himself in the public affairs of the county and the social progress of Newcastle'.⁵³ He was high sheriff of Northumberland, a county magistrate, an active member of the Lit & Phil and, on the retirement of Sir John Swinburne, became president for the rest of his life. In 1824, along with George Stephenson, the Rev. William Turner and others, he helped to establish the Newcastle Mechanics' Institute and was its first president. He was also instrumental in establishing the Northumberland Agricultural Society in 1836.⁵⁴ Yet, despite this level of involvement, he appears to have been almost totally neglected by the biographical record. He does not appear in *Sketches of Public Men of the North* (1855). He is not included amongst Lawson's *Tyneside Celebrities* (1873) and, extraordinarily, despite his 36 years of service to the Society of Antiquaries (a founder member from 1813),

⁵²*Ibid.*, 81.

⁵³Welford, *Men of Mark*, 284.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*

he is not included in the over 170 biographies of that society's 1913 centenary volume of *Archaeologia Aeliana*.⁵⁵ Although we have no direct evidence, it seems likely that Bigge was a victim of events that occurred soon after his death. He entered into banking in 1806 but the withdrawal of Sir Matthew White Ridley's capital upon his death in 1836 placed his bank in a difficult position. In 1839, it amalgamated with the newly established Northumberland and Durham District Bank with Bigge remaining as a partner which 'was disastrous for the family'.⁵⁶ Bigge died in 1849 and, after a period of rumour and speculation about unwise investments, eight years later the bank went into liquidation. 'This ruined the Bigges and their estates were sold.'⁵⁷ Despite his major contribution to the social and economic life of Newcastle and Northumberland, Bigge's historical reputation was severely overshadowed by this event. Thus, he is the most significant outlier in terms of the failure of his historical visibility to match his actual activity and commitment. The story of a major coal owner, whose family moved into what we would now call 'financial services' and did not make a success of it, did not suit the dominant regional narrative.

Less explicable in terms of under-representation is Sir John Edward Swinburne (1762–1860). His range of contributions was exemplary and his relatively low level of historical recognition is especially puzzling. In addition to his record of achievement, he was a member of a famous family with powerful connections at the national scale. Swinburne himself was also far more than a regional figure. He was a Fellow of the Royal Society, a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries (London), a member of the Royal Society of Literature. He was president of the Lit & Phil for 40 years, president of the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle upon Tyne for nearly 50 years, and he supported the Rev. John Hodgson in his monumental County History both financially, through arranging loans of source material, and by his continued encouragement. He was high sheriff of Northumberland in 1799, deputy lieutenant of the county and 'a kind and liberal landlord'.⁵⁸ Other causes he engaged with include the Society for the Abolition of Slavery, the Royal Infirmary and the Society for Fine Arts. Asa Briggs paid him a back-handed compliment in his bicentenary lecture to the Lit & Phil, observing 'he is best remembered...as the grandfather of a very different grandson, the poet Algernon Charles Swinburne'.⁵⁹ Perhaps here we have one of the most significant examples of where the nineteenth-century image of the north-east as a dynamic, leading industrial region is not best served by such a character, despite such an impressive volume of participation.

A similar enigma, and probably the most 'undeservedly' under-represented individual in our study, is the Rev. William Turner (1761–1859), 'for many years the foremost man of his time in the educational and religious life of the town'.⁶⁰ It is now widely recognized that he was the principal founder of the Literary and

⁵⁵Welford and Hodgson, 'Biographies of contributors', 109–333.

⁵⁶G. Long 'The Bigges of Benton', *Tyne & Tweed*, 28 (1976), 13–16.

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁸Welford, *Men of Mark*, 477.

⁵⁹A. Briggs, 'The foundation and subsequent role of the Society', in *Lit & Phil Bicentenary Lectures 1993* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1993), 18.

⁶⁰Welford and Hodgson, 'Biographies of contributors', 144.

Philosophical Society.⁶¹ He was a founder member of the Mechanics' Institute, established the first Sunday School in Newcastle and the Royal Jubilee School. He became secretary of the Lit & Phil from 1793 to 1837 and, astonishingly, delivered over 600 lectures there in a 20-year period. Other activities included establishing a fund for the benefit of the poor and a tract society; he was the driving force in establishing a local Schoolmasters' Association and clerk and treasurer to the Society for Widows and Orphans of Dissenting Ministers. For his 'day job', he was the Unitarian minister at the Hanover Square chapel in central Newcastle. Yet he does not appear in *Sketches of Public Men of the North* (1855), Lawson's *Tyneside Celebrities* (1873) or Noble's *Short Sketches of Eminent Men of the North of England* (1885). Despite the fact that 'one self-taught genius, George Stephenson, freely acknowledged his indebtedness' to Turner,⁶¹ the regional narrative to be proselytized was a different one. Despite his massive contribution, a number of issues probably contributed to this failure to be recognized in the aggregate historical written record. First, he was a Unitarian minister and apparent radical at a time (particularly relating to events in France) when unquestioning loyalty to the crown and constitution was expected from leading figures and dissent could be represented as bordering on treason. This created an atmosphere where support for Parliamentary Reform, for example, became difficult to express. Turner had to go to considerable lengths to explain his position.⁶² A further issue concerned Turner's innocent role in a major schism within the Lit & Phil in 1808 when his lectures were described a 'heavy burthen upon the Society' and 'a Minister of the Gospel might be better employed than in the vain pursuits of practical philosophy'.⁶³ Clearly, there was an anti-Turner faction within the Lit & Phil., including the Rev. Edward Moises, a leading Anglican churchman in the town and headmaster of the Grammar School.⁶⁴ From 1824, Turner appears to have been more concerned with the Mechanics' Institute.⁶⁵ Further evidence that Turner was partially discounted in his own lifetime, at least by some, lies in the fact that he, along with others, was initially by-passed when the foundation stone of the Lit & Phil's new building was laid by HRH Duke of Sussex in 1822. The event was largely usurped by the masonic fraternities, who rushed to obtain access to the duke, whilst the men who had actually started the Society were initially overlooked in the invitation list. The president (Sir John Edward Swinburne) 'had difficulty in ensuring fair play at the dinner for the Lit & Phil members'.⁶⁶ This episode gives some insight into the prevailing social atmosphere in Newcastle at the time. Against the background of celebrating industrial progress, achievement and dedicated activity in other spheres has been no guarantee of wider recognition.

Our historically under-rated group contains several members of the medical profession. In the absence of any spectacular medical breakthroughs being associated

⁶¹Welford, *Men of Mark*, 543.

⁶²Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle upon Tyne* (Leeds, 1997), 37–40.

⁶³*Ibid.*, 75.

⁶⁴R. Spence Watson, *The History of The Literary and Philosophical Society of Newcastle upon Tyne (1793–1896)* (London, 1897), 221.

⁶⁵Briggs, 'The foundation', 18.

⁶⁶Harbottle, *The Reverend William Turner*, 101.

with one specific name, this is not surprising. In contrast to the celebration of technological and industrial progress, the nineteenth-century medical profession was not the most glamorous or reputationally rewarding beyond the immediate locality. In the cases of Embleton, Philipson and Brady, sheer longevity was a factor in high 'activity' patterns whilst, in comparative terms, a relatively narrow focus of activity explains their limited historical visibility. Also a medical man, Dr Thomas Emerson Headlam, was heavily engaged in other local activities, especially as an active Whig politician. A very high level of participation in such activities produced an elevated involvement score but Dr Headlam was not universally popular. 'Cautious, temperate, reserved, his contemporaries can point to no overwhelming blunders, or mortifying errors' but 'We are not certain that there is much in the doctor's career for the youth of Newcastle to emulate.'⁶⁷ He spent much time attempting to promote the parliamentary career of his nephew of the same name, a rival of the much more popular Joseph Cowen jnr. This 'T.E. Headlam was patently inept, railed by his opponents as a closet Tory with no demonstrable commitment to Tyneside or its inhabitants.'⁶⁸ For his uncle, 'Reversals of fortune... cast a shadow over the evening of his life' and when the council had the opportunity to place him in a comfortable position as master of Mary Magdalene Hospital, they chose not to do so.⁶⁹ He failed to win the trust and affection of a significant proportion of his peers.

Ironically, given the predominance of industrialists in the 'historically visible' grouping, another sub-set in the significantly under-represented category consists mainly of economic actors but, unlike their more illustrious compatriots, Capper Robson and Rutherford Hunter lacked the lasting memory bestowed by groundbreaking inventions or sheer economic power and their biographical record is correspondingly small. They were significant 'civic builders' in terms of their associational activity, but relatively unacknowledged in the biographical record.

Possibly the most intriguing example of a historically under-represented individual is James Cochran Stevenson MP (1825–1905). He presents all the requisite characteristics of an innovative, predominantly industrial, but socially involved figure. He was managing director of the Jarrow Chemical Works, which became the largest in the world and one that was 'remarkably attentive to the welfare of their workmen'.⁷⁰ He was instrumental in establishing the South Shields Chamber of Commerce, and the open-minded nature of his thinking is indicated by his promotion of the amalgamation of the Newcastle, Gateshead and South Shields Chambers of Commerce, urging 'that this would be one way of uniting the Tyneside communities'.⁷¹ He played a major role in securing the British Association visit to Tyneside in 1863.⁷² He was remarkably active in acquiring infrastructural development for the new borough of South Shields, including water supply and the Burial Board and helped establish both the Public Library and Infirmary. Beyond the merely

⁶⁷Anon., *Sketches of Public Men*, 43.

⁶⁸J. Allen, *Joseph Cowen and Popular Radicalism on Tyneside, 1829–1900* (Monmouth, 2007), 110.

⁶⁹Welford, *Men of Mark*, 487–8.

⁷⁰G.B. Hodgson, *The Borough of South Shields from the Earliest Period to the Close of the Nineteenth Century* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1903), 369.

⁷¹*Ibid.*, 406.

⁷²W.A. Campbell, *The Old Tyneside Chemical Trade* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1961), 62.

local, he was an unceasingly active figure on the Tyne Improvement Commission for virtually the whole of the second half of the nineteenth century. Chairman from 1880 to 1900, he introduced the proper control of pilotage on the river, helped finance the purchase of land for quays for the river ferries and promoted their control by the commission rather than by private companies. In addition, he was an active MP, a 'progressive' Liberal from 1868 to 1895, with over 170 'interventions' in the House. In his lifetime, he was an extremely popular politician and was returned several times as MP for South Shields, twice unopposed. He was not only a 'civic builder' but also a figure of national importance. He moved to the south of England in 1900 due to ill-health. It is remarkable that this impressive record fails to be significantly recognized in the biographical record. Perhaps the answer lies in the fact that, apart from the Tyne Improvement Commission, unlike his brother, Alexander Shannan Stevenson, he was never a member of the key metropolitan institutions (for example the Lit & Phil), and that he was unashamedly not from Newcastle!

In summary, one could be a major civic builder in numerous different ways, but with a historical narrative essentially focused on a different message – best represented by the industrialists (especially if they were also inventors), the makers of a 'modern' nineteenth-century urban environment, artists and architects, the recorders of the past within the region and, at the national scale, politicians who were instrumental in changing the trajectory of public discourse – other, often quite immense, achievements have been simply side-lined, largely lost to posterity until revealed by deep mining in a general archival exploration of associational practice.

Concluding comments

In any large-scale comparative analysis, there is always a need to add caveats. Thus, although it is tempting to look for simple categorizations of the individuals identified in our two extremes, a comparison of [Tables 1](#) and [2](#) indicates the complexities of this. Any one-dimensional categorization into 'businessman', 'manufacturer', 'professional', 'gentry' or 'cultural' clearly underestimates the plurality of occupational identities exhibited by most of these individuals. How, for example, does one classify Sir William Armstrong – a qualified solicitor, an inventor, a manufacturer, a philanthropic landowner or a businessman? Or Joseph Cowen Jnr – radical politician, newspaper owner or brick manufacturer? However, a very broad categorization into (a) individuals associated with industry and commerce, including shipping and coal, (b) professional, non-industrial activity and (c) cultural activity is possible. On this basis and not surprisingly, there is clearly a strong representation in the 'historically renowned' of the industrial, coal, shipping economic activity group. Much less expected is an almost equal presence of the cultural, 'liberal professions' with the artistic/architect group ([Table 1](#)). The Newcastle bourgeoisie has always been anxious not to be seen as uncouth, unsophisticated northerners and, correspondingly, to celebrate its cultural representatives.⁷³ In the 'historically under-rated' category ([Table 2](#)) it is the professionals – the law and medicine –

⁷³P. Usherwood, 'Art on the margins: from Bewick to Baltic', in Colls and Lancaster (eds.), *Newcastle upon Tyne*, 245–66.

who are most numerous and, again, surprisingly, the gentry. The latter runs counter to the general view that the gentry's role in nineteenth-century urban associational culture was minimal, 'very few of the gentry or members of the aristocracy are involved except as patrons'.⁷⁴ These gentry were much more than mere 'patrons' of societies, they score highly in terms of their active involvement.

As far as we are aware, there are no precedents for the quantitative examination of the relationship between the associational involvement of individuals within a region and their historiographical recognition. Our purpose has been to conduct a statistical analysis of the quantitative 'weight' of the historical biographical material on individuals in relation to quantitative measures of their actual activity as key members of local/regional voluntary associations. We have focused on the two extremes of this relationship but, in conclusion, we must emphasize that this study is not an assessment of the 'absolute' regional significance of any one individual. Nor are we attempting to promote one group over the other. Narrative heroes and civic builders both represent incredibly dynamic processes that equally transformed the Newcastle city region in the nineteenth century. If we are to understand comprehensively the development of the region, we need to consider the presence of both within its historiography. But they are not mutually exclusive categories – many of our 'narrative heroes' were also 'civic builders'. Simply for practical purposes, we have examined the two extremes of our relative visibility measure, which is actually a long continuum of the relationship between the two categories.

An equally relevant point is that this examination of the relation between historical visibility and institutional presence has revealed that there is indeed a significant statistical connection between the two, but the relationship is far from being a simple, causal one. In the representation of the region of the biographical record, a number of individuals 'lead' the narrative. This is entirely understandable, but some are over-represented in this narrative in relation to their actual involvement in local/regional associations. Similarly, a number of individuals are significantly under-represented in the narrative despite being extremely active within the associational network. The significance of this issue relates to familiar but under-researched questions such as whose history is represented in the written record? To what extent is this written record a 'true' reflection of participation and achievement? Who 'leads' the narrative about the region and who is forgotten?

A variety of explanations account for both this over- and under-representation. A fundamental point concerns the way in which, in the historiography of a region, the biographical record on individuals can become a cumulative process over subsequent years with a dynamic of its own. An early recognition of significance can be easily repeated and become accepted as conventional wisdom. Probably more importantly, an early neglect of an individual, possibly because of some perceived shortcomings, may result in their diminution or possible disappearance from the narrative. Misfortune is also an important factor – again, operating in two directions. For some, that misfortune led to notoriety and the interest that excites, as exemplified by George Hudson. For others, despite the previous weight of achievement, failure led to virtual oblivion as in the case of Charles William Bigge.

⁷⁴Morris, 'Voluntary societies', 96.

Finally, recovering Charles William Bigge's civic activities and therefore his contribution to the making of Newcastle as a vibrant Victorian city requires more than creating lists showing his neglect. The institutional association data collected on 1,621 individuals enables identification of co-memberships of individuals in different institutions and these personal links can be used to find different clusters of civic builders – groups of individuals sharing similar institutional profiles – as input to understanding the Newcastle city region as an unfolding kaleidoscope of increasingly diverse institutional building.