



John Betjeman sings praise, a Blue Carpet, The Blaydon Races, and the Vampire Rabbit.

Starting point:

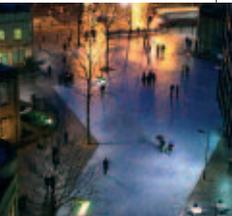
Monument Metro station / Grey Street

Length of walk: 1.5 - 2 hours

Many have fallen in love with Grey Street, none more so than the former poet laureate, Sir John Betjeman, who once commented: "I shall never forget seeing it to perfection, traffic-less on a misty Sunday morning. Not even Regent Street, even old Regent Street, London, can compare with that subtle descending curve." The street is the jewel in the crown of Grainger Town, a clearly defined conservation area in the middle of Newcastle, which was the brainchild of property developer, Richard Grainger, who began his re-modelling of Newcastle back in 1834.

Walk down the street and you'll soon come to the impressive front entrance to the **1. Theatre Royal**, which was opened in 1837. This beautiful Grade I listed building was massively renovated in 1986 and is now the third home to the Royal Shakespeare Company (after London and Stratford upon Avon).

Blue Carpet



Return up the hill and past Waterstone's bookshop on your right, and head down the alley which will take you to the **2. Tyneside Cinema**, one



Theatre Royal

of the few independent cinemas remaining in England. It still boasts a delightful 1930s Art Deco auditorium. Intermzzo, the café bar underneath is a perfect refreshment stop - serving the best Italian coffee in the city. Turn left at the end of the alley and you'll come to **3. Northern Goldsmiths** on the corner. Look up and you'll see the beautiful golden lady representing Venus atop an ornate clock. She'll always give you the time of day. Cross now into Northumberland Street, Newcastle's main shopping area. Head past Fenwick's on your left and above the Zara clothes shop you'll notice **4. four stone figures** gazing down on the shoppers. The building was once owned by Boots the Chemist, who had a habit of decorating their buildings with local historic figures. These are: Thomas Bewick (the 18th century wood engraver - more of which

later); Harry Hotspur (14th century soldier and son of the first Earl of Northumberland); Sir John Marlay (Newcastle's Mayor during the Civil War period); and Roger Thornton (Newcastle's 15th century "Dick Whittington"). Head back down Northumberland Street and turn left at Vision Express to see the **5. Laing Art Gallery** straight ahead. The Laing celebrated its 100th anniversary in 2004. When you've availed yourself of the gallery's wonderful collection and emerge from the glass fronted entrance/exit, you'll find the next attraction beneath your feet. This is the **6. Blue Carpet**, a tiled area completed in 2002 by artist, Thomas Heatherwick and winner of several arts' awards.

Leave Blue Carpet Square (with the gallery on your right hand side) and turn left, head towards the next junction and turn right onto Market Street. Walk along here and turn left onto Pilgrim Street which will bring you to the narrow opening of High Bridge, one of the oldest streets in Newcastle, and home to some lovely boutiques and independent retailers. Heading down this street (crossing over Grey Street which intersects it) you'll arrive at the **7. Bigg Market**. This is where medieval Newcastle citizens once sold and bought a type of barley known as "bigg". Towards the top end of this paved area (up the hill) you'll see the **8. Rutherford Memorial**, possibly the most ironic monument in Newcastle. It commemorates John Hunter Rutherford, a Scottish doctor and educational reformer of the mid 1800s, and a strong advocate of temperance. Today the area is the playground for young revellers, drawn by the sheer weight of pubs, and the inscription on the monument - "water is best" - is unlikely to challenge their belief that "Barcadi Breezer is best". Look above Pop World pub and you can see the small white crescent moons which are a reminder of its past as an old coaching inn. Other notable features of the area include the wonderful tiling of the Beehive pub (spot the bees!); The Old George pub (walk down the alley and notice the building opposite which was once a stable. The pub has been in existence since 1690); and Balmbras (now a brash 80s fun pub, but in the 19th



Vampire Rabbit

century, where the Geordie anthem, "The Blaydon Races", was first sung). Opposite High Bridge, and a little uphill, head down Pudding Chare until you reach the **9. Revolution bar** (the grand interior reflecting its former history as a bank) on the corner. Continue along Collingwood Street and you'll come to **10. St. Nicholas' Cathedral**. The elegant Lantern Tower (1448) is particularly ornate and the cathedral's crowning glory. Inside there are a host of interesting features (guidebooks are available). On leaving the cathedral, turn left and left again (past the old churchyard) and you'll arrive at a paved area. Look at the doorway opposite and you'll notice a **11. Fanged Hare**, or, as its more popularly known, the Vampire Rabbit! One of the more striking sights in town, no-one knows for sure why it is actually there. Answers on a postcard please... In the south corner of this enclosed area is a bust of 18th century local artist and wood engraver, **12. Thomas Bewick**. Bewick was a pioneer of wood engraving, and his workshop once stood on this site. Now, head down the flight of stairs onto Dean Street, turn left and head up the hill. Once over the junction, you're back onto Grey Street and time, once again, to enjoy your wonderful surroundings as you stroll up Grainger's masterpiece, back to Grey's Monument and Monument Metro station.