Newcastle-under-Lyme (1800 – present day)

The Industrial Revolution of the early 19th century changed the landscape of Newcastle –culturally, economically and literally! Newly mechanised processes turned old industries on their head and transformed Newcastle and the surrounding towns into a manufacturing heartland. With plentiful reserves of coal and iron in the mines of Silverdale, Apedale, Audley & Talke (later Holditch & Wolstanton), these burgeoning industries had the fuel they needed to power their mills.

Three Silk Mills were built in Newcastle – on Hempstalls Lane, on Marsh Parade and Friarswood Road. On Liverpool Road, Richard Thompson built a Cotton Mill. A series of limekilns were also constructed.

During the 19th century, Newcastle was particularly well known for its hat making industry,
at one point employing up to a third of the working population in either hat production or related industries. Other major industries included pipe, nail, paper and clock making.

Newcastle-under-Lyme also produced pottery with the first viable porcelain produced at the Pomona pottery (now the site of the Belong Heritage Centre) in the first half of the eighteenth century.

To transport the necessary raw materials to these factories and mills, and to provide them with the water they needed, canals were built. These were replaced by the railways in the mid-19th century which had become the preferred method of long-distance travel for both goods and people.

Being on the main transport route from London to Liverpool Newcastle flourished as a market town serving both local residents and overnight travellers who rested at the many coaching inns and hotels along the High St and Ironmarket. Regular market days are still a feature of the town today.

By the late 1920s, the motor car was an increasingly common site in Newcastle. This change in travel habits would also lead to a programme of road building - with the dual carriage way around the town constructed between the early 1960s and late 1980s.

Newcastle was also a centre of culture. The many market days and fairs attracted showmen, carnival performers and all kinds of outdoor entertainment. The Father of the Modern Circus, Philip Astley was born in Newcastle-under-Lyme.

In 1787, the first theatre in North Staffordshire - The Newcastle and Pottery Theatre - opened its doors, overlooking what is today Nelson Roundabout. The New Vic Theatre moved to its present home in 1986.

Despite the fact that over 8 centuries have passed since the town received its first royal charter it's reassuring to know that many of Newcastle's town's traditions are still with us today such as the Burgesses, the markets, industry, family business' and its vibrant culture.

As traditional industries declined, new industries took their place. The Nineties and Noughties saw a huge growth in the service sector and high tech industries. Of particular note is the spectacular success of Keele Science and Innovation Park which has grown from a single Innovation Centre, opened in 1999 to six innovation centres and the first independent purpose-built centre dedicated to people with autism.

Keele University has also become a leader in green energy, being home to a European first, the Smart Energy Network Demonstrator. This facility enables the testing and evaluation of new and evolving energy technologies, using the campus as a 'living laboratory'. The borough clearly has a long-time relationship with providing energy to the nation!

Sadly, the last two decades have seen a significant decline in town centres across the country, and Newcastle and Kidsgrove are no exception. However, both towns have been able to benefit significantly from the government's 'Levelling Up' agenda. Over £50 million worth of investment is already planned over the next five years, with the prospect of more on the way. This investment will help to provide jobs, improve access, enhance leisure opportunities and generally create a more vibrant and sustainable quality of life for the Borough as we move towards our 900th anniversary.