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NEWS OPINION

## Newcastle and Gateshead continue to thrive and prosper in unexpected ways

Paul Benneworth says the Great Exhibition of the North offers an unrivalled chance to create a new vision for the region

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BY CHRONICLELIVE.CO.UK  
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The amusement park in the North East Coast Exhibition was popular during the hot weather with many taking to the lake in 1929

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Wylam cropped up later in life through cricket, hosting two clubs where we played regular fixtures. Close to Newcastle but nestling in the green, the village was an idyllic backdrop to our always hard-fought contests with the local hosts.

Wylam was almost the scene of my greatest moment in cricket where a dropped catch was to deny me my first career wicket. But I could never be disappointed with cricket in Wylam, because it was always accompanied by an extremely convivial third innings. Even after heavy defeats, it was always a joy to decamp to the Boathouse for a well-deserved couple of pints.

In those days the Boathouse was the Wylam Brewery Tap, so you would never get a fresher – or tastier - beer. So I was curious last year to see that the Brewery Tap had relocated to Exhibition Park on the Town Moor.

Its location renews the connection between the region, beer and Exhibitions. Until last year, the only reminder was the **Newcastle Brewery's Exhibition Ale**, once a local drinker's staple but now sadly dying out.

That relocation also brings back into use the last remaining building from the Great Exhibition after which the Park is named.

The fine Art Deco Palace of Arts, previously a science museum then Military vehicle museum, was designed by W. & T. R. Milburn Architects of Sunderland using reinforced concrete techniques which ensured its survival to this day.

It is also one of the city's last explicit reminders of the 1929 North East Coast Exhibition, a tribute to the region's skills and industry. That Exhibition attempted reinvigorate regional industry following the early 1920s recession, but its long-term benefits were ultimately derailed by the Great Depression.

It is fitting that the building has been taken back into use just as the city and region gear up for another comparable Exhibition.

Although the idea started as a George Osborne Northern Powerhouse gimmick, it evolved into a fierce four-city race eventually won by Newcastle-Gateshead.

So from Summer 2018, the city will host **the Great Exhibition of the North**, a festival for arts and enterprise led by the region's major cultural organisations.

The Exhibition will showcase Newcastle-Gateshead's dynamic cultural scene, in particular around the Quayside areas, and aims to stimulate the region to recover from recent stagnation.

Despite the best efforts of successive governments to manage our decline, Newcastle and **Gateshead** continue to thrive and prosper in unexpected ways.

The high culture and low entertainment brought together today in the Wylam Palace of Arts epitomises how we continually found creative ways to survive in an increasingly turbulent world.

Stripped of Osborne's gormless city boosterism, the Great Festival is not just an opportunity to project a new image to the outside world.

It is also a perfect moment to reflect on what kind of region we are becoming and where we go in the future.

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The Exhibition of 1929 underscores that we have always been a global region, not just the world's manufactory, but somewhere to which people came from all over to learn about world-beating industry such as railways. Anno 2018 we are abandoning those great global traditions for an increasingly insular aggressive nationalism.