

Cleaning up the River Tyne

40 years ago the River Tyne through Tyneside was an awful, dirty, smelly river, a far-cry from the clean river it is today, with salmon being detected downstream near Newcastle and the area of the Newcastle Quayside, being a favourite with both Geordie partygoers and stag and hen parties from across the country. Without the dedicated work of a team of civil engineers who built interceptor sewers on either side of the river, there would arguably be no Sage Music centre, no Baltic Art Gallery, no Millennium Bridge or any of the other new developments down by the river, which have made it such an attractive place to walk, or just to sit and gaze at the fine collection of bridges. 40 years ago in the early 1970's hardly anybody went down to the River Tyne in Newcastle.....

Here are the recollections of one of those civil engineers, John Sagar, now in his 90's and still living in Newcastle.

"I became a civil engineer in 1952, because I was interested in construction work. I started work with Newcastle City Council in 1963.

My first work with Newcastle City Council was cleaning up the River Tyne and I also made drainage works.

I became involved in cleaning up the River Tyne, because I was employed by Newcastle City Council. There were 6 people in my team.

What my team did to clean up the River Tyne was to design the main drainage works, to divert foul flows into the Howdon Treatment Works.

If it wasn't for the work of civil engineers like myself, the River Tyne would remain an open sewer."

John Sagar November 2012