



Origins of the Name Geordie

Local Studies Factsheet No. 5

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There are a variety of explanations for the name Geordie. It would appear that no-one knows which, if any, is correct.

OPTIONS

- The name was born in the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, when the Jacobites bypassed Newcastle which, as well as favouring the Hanoverian King George, was also a well-guarded garrison. The Jacobites then said that Newcastle and the surrounding areas were all “for George”. Hence the name Geordie used as a derivation of George.
- The name originated from the coal mines of Durham and Northumberland, for many poems and songs written about, and in the dialect of, these two counties speak of the “Geordie”. The Oxford English Dictionary states that the word was first used to describe a local pitman or miner in 1876.
- The third possible origin is from George Stephenson, who in 1815 invented the miners’ lamp. Local miners used this lamp in preference to that invented by Sir Humphrey Davy. The lamp, and eventually the miners themselves became known as “Geordies”. The Oxford English Dictionary cites the first use of the word in this context in a mining glossary of 1881.
- In 1826 George Stephenson gave evidence to a Parliamentary Commission on Railways at which his blunt speech and dialect drew contemptuous sneers. From that date, it is said that Londoners began to call the colliers which carried coal from the Tyne to the Thames, and the men who worked on them, “Geordies”
- Frank Graham, a local writer and publisher, maintains that the name originally was a term of abuse meaning “fool”. It was first used in this way in 1823, when a local showman Billy Purvis, used it to put down a rival. He is quoted as saying “Noo yor a fair doon feul, not an artificial feul like Billy Purvis! Thous a real Geordie!” (From: Robson, J.P. The life & adventures of the far-famed Billy Purvis 1849 p.128). The word in this context appears to date from the reign of the unpopular King George III who became insane. His son George IV was also unpopular because of his extravagance and his promiscuity. (Graham, F. Geordie Dictionary 1979)

Who is permitted to call themselves a Geordie?

Again there are various viewpoints. Originally, it would appear that the name applied only to miners, colliers, or inhabitants of Newcastle. Later it became applied to residents of Tyneside in general. Local Folklore has it that a Geordie is someone born on the north side of the Tyne, within a 1 mile radius of Newcastle. Dictionaries also record that the word is used to describe natives of Tyneside, or things pertaining to Tyneside. Nowadays many people from outside the area refer to anyone from the North East as a “Geordie”.



Issued June 2009 by :

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