



Town Moor Hoppings

Local Studies Factsheet No. 3

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In 1357 King Edward III granted a charter to the town of Newcastle upon Tyne confirming possession of the Town Moor - 89 Acres of common land.

Today the City has approximately 1,000 acres of Moor, including Nun's Moor, Duke's Moor and Little Benton. The section known as the Town Moor, near Grandstand Road, covers 349 acres.

The Moor is controlled jointly by Newcastle City Council, who own the land and the Freeman of the City, who have grazing rights. 300-400 cows currently graze on the land. Events held on the land require consent of both parties.

Income, generated by letting, is used to maintain and improve the land although a small amount of the income is donated to charity. The greatest amount of revenue is raised by the annual fair commonly known as the "Hoppings" this name derives from the hopping or dancing which occurred at old fairs.

The Hoppings is a major event in the North East; showmen travel from all over the country to attend. It is said to be the largest non-permanent fair in the world, perhaps because unlike many similar fairs held in streets, this one is in a large open space covering 28-30 acres.

The amusements have changed from steam driven, ornately carved and decorated roundabouts to the white knuckle rides of today but the fair remains a temperance event. The fair is always held during the last full week in June.

SIGNIFICANT DATES

1721 The annual horse racing meeting, usually held in Northumberland, was transferred to the Town Moor. Traditionally this meeting was held at Whitsun but was changed to coincide with Midsummer Day.

1882 The meeting was transferred once more, this time to Gosforth Park. The period became known as Race Week; during which the Pitmen's Derby, the race for the Northumberland Plate, was held. Also in 1882 a Temperance Festival was held on the Town Moor. A two day event held during Race Week. Music, sport, children's games and military competitions were included. This festival became an annual event until 1912 when the grazing was damaged during wet weather, resulting in the withdrawal of permission to use the land.

1914-22 A small fair was held at Jesmond Vale.

1923 The festival returned to the Town Moor and was held annually until the Second World War.

1942-45 A fair was held in Exhibition Park - a 6 week event which was part of Tyneside's Holiday at Home programme in response to a Government request to reduce demand on transport.

1946 A dispute over site fees occurred between the Festival Committee and the Showmen's Guild resulting in a rival show at Saltwell Park, Gateshead.

- 1947 The showmen returned to the Town Moor.
- 1949 Race Week was no longer a holiday for miners. This is believed to have led to a drop in takings for the showmen.
- 1950's The Hoppings opened for 7 days, Saturday to Saturday. Sunday had become a time for Speakers Corner when topics such as religion, politics and CND were covered.
- 1952 The day of the race for the Northumberland Plate was moved from Wednesday to Saturday.
- 1958 The weather was so bad that the fair was extended for a further 6 days to allow the showmen to recoup their lost income. This had only previously occurred in 1909 and 1912.
- 1962 Race Week holiday for school children was cancelled because GCE examinations were scheduled for that week.
- 1964 Problems arose over unauthorised caravans using the site. Showmen and gypsies were separated. This unauthorised use re-occurred periodically leading, in 1992, to a threat to ban the Hoppings.
- 1971 The Hoppings opened on Friday evening, as a bonus for increased site fees used to pay for car parking facilities, litter collection and extra policing.
- 1975 Sunday opening was allowed between 2.00-8.00pm on condition that the music did not disturb local residents.
- 1979 Attendance at the fair was estimated at 1,250,000 people - the largest crowd ever, with 26,077 cars being parked.
- 1993 All time record for the number of cars parked -30,335 indicating that the Fair was as popular as it had ever been.
- 1995 Opened 23 June with the largest display of attractions during the 113 year history of the fair 22,755 cars were parked during the week. Europe's largest travelling wheel appeared for the first time at the Hoppings. The 127ft. Liberty Wheel, made in 1995 for the French VE day celebrations, weighed 250 tonnes.
- 1998 Opening postponed by 12 weeks because of bad weather conditions. Held 26 June-5 July

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Newcastle Local Studies & Family History Centre
City Library
Charles Avison Building
33 New Bridge St West
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE1 8AX

Tel: 277 4100

E-mail: information@newcastle.gov.uk