

Paul Menzies Discusses His New Book on Middlesbrough's History

Paul Menzies, a well-known local author and broadcaster, is about to release his latest book on the history of Middlesbrough. This time, the often black and white world of the past has been brought back to full colour thanks to innovative techniques. He discusses this landmark new work.

Middlesbrough – A Colourful Past offers 'never seen before' images, many in colour for the very first time, which together with detailed insights into the town's history, provide a landmark contribution to the rich heritage of the region.

What was your motivation for creating the book?

During lockdown I wanted to help people deal with the issues of Covid by providing some sort of daily distractions, so I decided to share some of my work from previous books with people through the recognised Middlesbrough pages on Facebook.

As an academic historian with a Master's degree in History I have a great interest in our region - this led me to start on my research work 45 years ago as I visited every place I could find to collect copies of images, articles etc. Through writing books over the years I have collected a lot of material – much of which never made it to the 'final cut', so I thought I could share this and to my surprise I developed quite a strong following. Middlesbrough Mayor Andy Peston was among those who emailed me to say that I must really do something with these images.

Having written many books, I was looking for a different 'angle' in presentation and as trained digital image restorer I decided to colourise the material. When I did this the impact was often overwhelming. Suddenly the images of 100 years ago were images of yesterday. It was as if I had opened my office window and could see and touch yesterday's world today. I am used to working with Photoshop and image restoration but adding colour really upped the wow factor.

I knew then that these restored images deserved a larger audience.

What is your hope for the book?

I want the book to make a definitive point in recording the history of Middlesbrough - the industrial heritage that we all know about but have little record of other than small black and white images. To see the industrial images in colour was really quite an experience - colour adds a touch of beauty to what was often a very harsh and tough world.

Most of all I want readers to really feel that these images have brought the past alive for them to experience the world that their grandparents knew so well - in full colour.

After all we live in a world of colour - so did they!

What interesting images and content can we look forward to?

I am biased but I think that every image in this book is special.

The restoration and colouring of the images of the ironmasters district and the docks was really quite an astounding - almost breath taking experience. During my student days I worked in local industry

and know how hard and tough it can be, yet to see these scenes from a century ago was astonishing. The images taken on the river are stunning - it emphasises what our heritage is all about here in Middlesbrough. The sheer grit and determination of people comes through so much in the images from the iron and steel mills.

Look too for the beauty of the country areas - I say country areas for that is what Middlesbrough was not so long ago. Images of farms and green fields of locations which I have only known as part of an urban world, are for me at least, full of the wow factor.

Walk down Linthorpe Road in the early 1900s, shop at Dickson and Benson's, see the 'steel river' in its industrial heyday when your grandad was out there in the cold earning his wage to put food on the table for another week.

In contrast, away from that noisy, smoky industrial scene feel the calm of a Sunday afternoon walk down Marton Road for afternoon tea at Marton Bungalow, or enjoy just sitting in Albert Park on a sunny day watching children on the boating lake. See Prince Arthur wave to the crowds in 1868 at a Middlesbrough Station building that was demolished 145 years ago.

It's all there waiting for you - your unique collection of heritage images.

What is your process in turning these historic images from black & white to colour?

The colour restoration of these images is a long and often painstaking process - yet I find it is incredibly exciting to bring alive something from the world familiar to my grandparents in Middlesbrough a century ago.

The technical process involves the use of Photoshop; I underwent full training with Adobe in London to develop my skills in using this fantastic programme. As a historian I was very frustrated with sources being damaged or simply unusable resulting in an expensive restoration if they were indeed able to be restored.

Now I can restore almost every resource - even photographs that have been torn up - as I did for at least one of the images.

Available from 27 April, *Middlesbrough - A Colourful Past* is available from all good booksellers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Paul Menzies has written extensively about the Teesside region for more than thirty-six years. As well as his many books on the area, Paul's weekly Teesside history broadcast on BBC Radio reaches many listeners. With his regular lectures and talks throughout the region, Paul is very much at the heart of promoting the history and heritage of the area. Other accomplishments include the BBC Radio series *Keep The Home Fires Burning* which he wrote and presented together with articles which appear on the BBC history website.

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