

SID WADDELL

TAAK

OF THE

TOON

HOW TO SPEAK

GEORDIE

**Sid Waddell**

**Collins Taak of the Toon:  
How to Speak Geordie**

**Аннотация**

Gain an insight into the English language, via one of the UK's richest dialects: Geordie. From George Stephenson to The Animals to Viz, the North East has long had a successful creative culture, developing alongside its industrial history. Newcastle in particular has successfully reinvented itself as a centre of the arts, while still maintaining its own regional identity. This book is the definitive guide to the most distinctive element of that identity: the Geordie dialect. This book is a must for anyone with even a passing interest in the language of the North East, and also provides a thorough examination of the general state of English, from the traditional wit and wisdom of the Geordie perspective.

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# TAAK OF THE TOON

HOW TO SPEAK GEORDIE



HarperCollins e-books

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## Introduction

Everybody thinks their own bit of Britain is the best. I have Cockney pals who swear their hospitality and wit are the tops. A mate of mine from Nottingham swore the best ale and the prettiest lasses could be found within a couple of miles of the Lace Market. ‘Rubbish!’ would be the verdict of West Country pals who would attest that their scrumpy, songs, and cheeses are unbeatable.

So what would a proud Geordie like myself crack up about the place, the people and the lifestyle? Well, we do welcome strangers like long-lost friends. We do have ales like the Broon that put a buzz on your visit and nosh, like stotties, to beef you up. Our lasses are as bonny and lippy as any and the lads are boisterous, aggressive-sounding, but often as soft as thistle-down. But our main talent as a tribe is verbal: Geordies, I reckon, word-for-word could out-patter anybody.

And this brings me to my main reason for writing **TAAK OF THE TOON**. At moments of high emotion and/or excitement I lapse into Geordie, despite living in Yorkshire for the past 38 years. That, I would suggest, is testimony to the sheer richness of our language. Some of our words date back to invaders who hit Bamburgh and North Shields 1300 years ago. Down the centuries we have melded in Dutch, Scottish and Romany words to articulate the vivid Geordie life-experience.

So tek a deep breath, rax yer tonsils, clear yer clack... and  
dive in, marras.

# THE ENTIRE GEORDIE NATION

There was a very loud Newcastle rock band in the 1960s called 'The Entire Sioux Nation'; nobody slept in the entire Toon when the lads were on the go. Dogs howled, workers wakened from bonny dreams cursed and burglars ran home with empty pokes.

The best way to regard the Geordie Nation is to parallel it with the American Indians: massive hunting and marauding tribes like the Sioux, the Apache and the Comanche. Within each of those proud fierce groups there were regional subdivisions who fought to the death over buffalo killing rights, theft of horses and the odd bit of squaw-pinching. However, though we Geordies talk with pals as though a fight is about to erupt, divvent youse worry. Our patter is merely torrential enthusiasm and we don't fight foreigners often.

The Geordie Nation's heartland is Newcastle, alias The Toon, with its long trading, seafaring and ship building traditions. From Scotswood to Wallsend we have the ancestral home of the Toony Geordies. They are descendants of blue-bonneted keel men; flash guys quick to take the piss out of pit village lads. See a rag and bone man clopping and calling doon Westgate Road and you see a patter merchant, a verbal chancer. Modern Newcastle is the Mecca for Hens and Stags from all over Britain and the chat on the Quayside is all the richer for it. It is also possible to theorise that the number nine shirt worn by the centre forward

of Newcastle United is a mythical totem-like symbol. Players like Hughie Gallacher, Jackie Milburn, Malcolm McDonald and Alan Shearer are to the Geordie tribe what Yellow Hand, Crazy Horse, Cochise, and Geronimo were to the American Indians – the peak of our manhood, role models and heroes.

Travel a few miles north of the Tyne and you find the Pitmatic Geordies: the branch of the tribe who once worked the coal mines round Ashington, Bedlington and Blyth. This lot talk as though they had a mouthful of iron filings and broken glass. I am a proud paid-up member of this branch, being bred in Ashington where my father worked down the pit for 48 years. Though the flash guys live in the Toon, the racy chat of the hard-grafting miners is probably the most vivid seam of Geordie language.

To the north and west of this branch, in Morpeth and Alnwick, we find the Romany influence in the Gadgie Geordies. Their main business was horse trading and they had many connections across the Pennines with Appleby and Carlisle. Some of their wild blood flows in my veins since I was born in Alnwick and my pipe-smoking granny spoke a lot of hawker/gipsy patter. **‘Deek the gadgie with the radge jugal and the cushty mort.’** TRANSLATION: ‘Look at the man with the mad dog and the comely maiden.’

Even further west we have the Coonty Geordies, the wealthy self-employed farmers, folk who have tended to look down on the poorer, more collective-minded branches of the tribe who dug the coal, built the ships, caught the fish, and manned the

boats. These people think ‘sex’ is what the coal is delivered in.

South of the Tyne and at its mouth we have the Sand Dancer Geordies. Some people regard them as Mackems, but most South Shields folk I know are proud to be called Geordies.

To the south of Geordieland, in what was once the old county of Durham, lies the land of the Mackems. They are so-called because they say ‘mack’ instead of ‘make’ and ‘tack’ instead of ‘take’. They are enemies of the Geordies, particularly on the football field. But a lot of them in Gateshead and the East Durham pit villages talk like us. So the inter-tribal violence is mostly satirical or symbolic.

The folk of Teesside are known as Smoggies, because of the rotten smelly fug that hangs like a manky shroud over their polluted river.

To the north of the Geordies live the Jocks, whose words you will read here because we swiped a lot of them. They are not really wor enemies, because to many Scots ‘a Geordie is just a Jock with his heid kicked in’.

I mention these other tribes because we Geordies have often defined ourselves as enemies of the lesser breeds south and north of the Rio Grande – the Mighty Tyne. But really, as this book will show once you get to know us, we are deed canny... as lang as we get wor own way!



**aad** *adjective* old

**aakward** *adjective* awkward

**aal** *adjective* all

**aalreet** *adverb, adjective* all right *Compare reet*

**I can hear yee aalreet but my lugs are not reet aalreet.**

**Aalreet? TRANSLATION:** I am at odds with you, myself and the entire world. OK?

**afore** *adverb, preposition, conjugation* before

**Afore oppenin yer gob, use yer noddle. TRANSLATION:**

Engage brain before speaking.

**agyen** *adverb* again

**ahad** *noun 1* a hold | *adjective, adverb 2* on fire [From Geordie

pronunciation of *hold*]

**Tyek ahad of me hand and ah'll lead yer to the land of**

**your dreams. TRANSLATION:** Come with me to the deeper

parts of Jesmond Dene.

**Ah've hoyed matches and paraffin on this bliddy fire but**

**it winnit tyek ahad. TRANSLATION:** We have to put on

woollies because I cannot get the fire to light.

**aheyt** *adverb, adjective* in the air [Probably from Geordie pronunciation of *height*]

**In pitch and toss yee hoy two coins up aheynt and cross yer fingers. TRANSLATION:** Gambling is not a reliable form of occupation.

**ahint** *preposition, adverb* behind [From Old English *aethindan*]

**amang** *preposition* among

**Aladdin must have been reet dim to faal amang them gadgies. TRANSLATION:** Aah the innocence of youth.

**argie** *verb* to argue

**Yee would argie yer way through the Hobs of Hell. TRANSLATION:** Your disputative nature will bring you to a very sad end.

**arly** *adjective* early

**arn** *verb* to earn

**atween** *preposition* between

**Ah feel ah'm atween a rock and a hard place. TRANSLATION:** The wife and the mother-in-law are in cahoots against me.

**aye**<sup>1</sup> *sentence substitute* yes [Old English *a* always]. Compare **aye**<sup>2</sup>

**aye**<sup>2</sup> *adverb* always; ever [Old Norse *ei ever*]

**Yer aye deein that! TRANSLATION:** Why not try to introduce some variety into proceedings?

**ayont** *preposition* beyond

**Hey bonny lad, that's weel ayont a joke.**

**TRANSLATION:** Your attempt to flatter me with humour is an insult.

# WELCOME STRANGER

Despite the violent sounding gutturals, glottal stops and in-ner-face delivery of us Geordies, we are a hospitable tribe, ever ready to welcome lads and lasses who come smoking the pipe of peace. Travellers will be greeted with the traditional warming cry: **'Gittheroondin kidda!'**1

So, before pointing your painted pony at our heartlands, here are a few key words and expressions to ease your entry into Geordie society.

I will dramatise your first few likely encounters with the locals: first, you alight for your weekend at Newcastle Central Station and wish to leave your luggage so you can begin *staggering* or *henning* right off. I suggest you approach the person on the pasty stall thus: **'Heypet cannahoymebagahinttheor?'**2

Almost certainly the answer will be: **'Naebotheratallcaacanny.'**3 If it's Saturday you will be surrounded by hundreds of human zebras – Toon fans proudly strutting in their black and white tops. Approach them boldly with a cheesy grin and say: **'Hoozit gannagan athgyemthiday bonnyladz?'**4

Once they see you are not a Mackem spy they will lead you willingly to their favourite watering holes with this encouraging cry: **'Howay alang wiusforrabevvy.'**5

Once in the Strawberry or the Bacchus, both decked out

with photos of United legends, they will ask, **‘Reet marra deeyeewant broon or ex?’**, refining the idea possibly thus, **‘Offtheneck – orbyglass, streyt or kinky?’**6

I would advise that after a few pints you seek food. Approach the barmaid and say, **‘Ahmscrannyhevyeeanystotties?’**7 She might reply like this, **‘Areeyesum radgie gadgie? nee mebbesabootit...wees hoachin withem.’**8

When the food appears, thank her profusely and tip her. **‘Tapeetgit yersella pint when yeetek yer blaa.’**9

Having satisfied the inner man or woman you may now proceed bravely and merrily among the locals.

# Glossary

1 ‘Buy the beers and you’ve got mates for life.’

2 ‘Pardon me, friendly-looking person, but may I deposit my luggage on your premises?’

3 ‘My pleasure, have a nice day’.

4 ‘Are you confident of a Newcastle victory in today’s soccer contest?’

5 ‘Join us for a libation or several.’

6 ‘Righto, pal, are you drinking Brown Ale or Exhibition? If you need a glass do you want a sleeve or a handle?’

7 ‘I am hungry. Have you any local sandwiches?’

8 ‘What a daft question! If we had any more sarnies in here there’d be no room for punters.’

9 ‘Pray take a sherbet on me during your break.’



**baary** *adjective* lovely [From Romany. Compare Scots *barry*]  
**We had a baary time at Whitley Bay even though we lost**

**aal wor lowey at the shows.** **TRANSLATION:** Our visit to the coast was fun even though we got skint at the funfair.

**babby** *noun* a baby, infant, or toddler

**You're sticking that top lip oot like a little babby.**

**TRANSLATION:** Grow up!

**baccy chow** *noun* chewing tobacco [From *baccy* tobacco + *chow* to chew]

**Yee are not worth a baccy chow.** **TRANSLATION:** You do not rank in my spectrum of esteemed persons.

**badly** *adjective* in poor health; sick; ill

**If ye weren't badly ah'd clock yer one.** **TRANSLATION:** Your illness is an excuse for getting away with murder.

**baggie** *noun* a stickleback or other small fish

**You're nowt but a tatty baggie in yer own little pond.**

**TRANSLATION:** There is a great big world out there, sonny.

**bagie** *noun* a turnip [From Swedish (*rota*) *bagge*]

**bairn** *noun* a child [From Old English *bearn*]

**bait** *noun* food, esp a packed lunch [From Old Norse *beita* hunt]

**bargie** *verb* **1** to claim | *interjection* **2** **bargies me!** bagsy!

**Bargies me that doggie in the window.** **TRANSLATION:** I wish that scruffy mongrel could be our family pet.

**barry** *verb* to bury

**Ah want to barry the hatchet – in his bliddy heed.**

**TRANSLATION:** The quality of mercy is extremely strained.

**bat** *noun* **1** a blow | *verb* **2** to hit (someone or something)

[From French *battre*]

**batchy** *adjective* extremely angry; furious [probably related to *batty*]

**Me mother went batchy when I got me new troosers hacky playing muggies.** **TRANSLATION:** Mama was not best pleased at the state of my pants after playing marbles.

**belly-topper** *noun* a young woman wearing an outfit that exposes her midriff

**Deek thon belly-topper; yee can see aal hor knickors and half her knockors!** **TRANSLATION:** Look at that young lady! Her attire leaves little to the imagination.

**beor** *noun* beer

**bide** *verb* to wait

**big end** *noun* the concert room in a pub or club. *Compare tit-and-fiddle end*

**The big end is stowed off, so we'll hev to slum it in the bar.** **TRANSLATION:** Do we really need to hear that comedian again?

**bingo dobber** *noun* a round felt pen used to mark bingo cards [Perhaps from Geordie pronunciation of *dab* or *daub*]

**Wor Markie is about as sharp as a bingo dobber.** **TRANSLATION:** Brother Mark is no Einstein.

**biv** *preposition, adverb* by. *Compare divvent*

**Ah've come to this club biv mesell cos ah nivvor score when ah'm wi the lads.** **TRANSLATION:** Lone wolves strike luckiest.

**blaa** *verb* **1** to blow | *noun* **2** breath; a rest [Northern pronunciation of *blow*]

**The wind is blaain see hard we'd better tek a blaa behind the dyke. TRANSLATION:** Let us shelter from the elements.

**blackclock** *noun* a cockroach [From *black* + *clock* (an obsolete or dialect word for any beetle)]

**bleb** *noun* a swelling on human skin that is smaller than a blob; a blister [Possibly a shortening of *blob* a bubble or blister]

**I hoyed the coal in till me hands were aal blebby. TRANSLATION:** Hard work has its problems.

**blether** *verb* **1** to waffl e; talk nonsense | *noun* **2** nonsense [From Old Norse *blathr* nonsense]

**blethered** *adjective* wearied; exhausted

**bletherskite** *noun* a compulsive talker [From *blether* to talk nonsense + *skite* a detestable person]

**That bletherskite is mekkin me lugs hort. TRANSLATION:** Please connect brain before engaging gob.

**blogged** *adjective* blocked

**Wor drains is blogged and there's a reet stink. TRANSLATION:** Avoid our place of residence in the immediate future.

**bogey** *noun* **1** a small non-motorized vehicle made by small children; a go-cart **2** a large motor vehicle used to transport industrial materials [Perhaps related to *buggy*, originally a two-wheeled horse-drawn vehicle]

**Wor kid's bogey is made of orange boxes and pram**

**wheels.** **TRANSLATION:** My brother's go-cart is no Beamer.

**boily** *noun* **1** soup **2** a hot drink made with milk and pieces of bread, given especially to infants and sick people [From French *bouillon*]

**bone** *verb* to ask (someone) a question [Perhaps related to *boon* a request or favour asked]

**Ah'm ganna bone him aboot that bet. Mebbees he nivvor put it on...** **TRANSLATION:** Perhaps he trousered our money knowing the horse had no chance.

**bonny** *adjective* **1** beautiful or handsome **2** excellent; first rate **3** drunk [French *bon* good]

**Yee were bonny last neet, yer legs were plaited.** **TRANSLATION:** The alcohol you drank did nothing to help your dancing style.

**bool** *noun* **1** a bowl **2 on the bool** on a drinking session | *verb* **3** to have sex

**He had a bool of porridge then went oot on the bool.** **TRANSLATION:** He filled up on oats and went out to sow them.

**bord** *noun* **1** a bird **2** a young woman

**borst** *verb* burst

**Had yer rotten tongue or ah'll borst yer gob.** **TRANSLATION:** Silence is advisable unless you'd like a visit to intensive care.

**bouldy-hole** *noun* a glory hole; coal hole

**bowdy-kite** *noun* a pot belly [Perhaps from *bowl* and *kite*]

meaning ‘belly’]

**Are yee expectin’, Mavis, or is that bowdy-kite doon to the Broon? TRANSLATION:** Is your protuberance down to procreation or recreation?

**bowk** *verb* **1** to belch **2** to vomit [From Middle English *bolken*]

**bray** *verb* to thrash; beat up [From Old French *breier* break, pound]

**breed** *noun* bread

**broon** or **Broon** *noun* Newcastle Brown Ale

**bubble** *verb* to cry

**bubbly-jock** *noun* a turkey [Perhaps rhyming slang for ‘turkey cock’]

**bullet** *noun* a type of small sweet [Purportedly because they resemble the bullets that killed Nelson]

**bummlor** *noun* a bumblebee

**He dances as though he had a bummlor doon his keks.**

**TRANSLATION:** Give that man 100% for effort.

**byek** *verb* to bake

**byeuts** *plural noun* boots

**Wor Chick gans ti the dance in his pit byeuts, sez it stops the lasses daddin’ his toes. TRANSLATION:** My friend is more practical than stylish.

# WOR HISTORY AND WOR HEROES

I suppose the first Geordie was the Venerable Bede who sat in his monastery at Jarrow about 1200 years ago and described the pillaging Vikings in much the same way as Toon football supporters describe the Mackem hordes: daft lads who go berserk after a couple of lager shandies. There is, in his works and the writings of his isolated pals on Lindisfarne, a sense of tribe that has come down through the ages, a sense of ‘ganging up’ against the rest of a hostile world. I like to think of Bede and a few of his muckers drying off their quills, sloughing off their hair shirts and swanning along to a pleasant Saturday night hop in Bamburgh. Drop of mead, quick Gay Gordons with the local talent, then back in time for a cold shower and a mumbled matins...

Moving to the colourful hectic age that Shakespeare immortalized, we have the doughty figure of Harry Hotspur, a cross between Lord Lucan and Arthur Scargill, part wild-child, part local hero. He spent his time fighting for whatever king was in power in London or sitting in Warkworth Castle planning to join the Jocks and invade London. Harry also had a terrible problem with pronouncing his Rs. So his granny made up this verbal mantra – one that many of us still use as an exercise today.

‘Roond the rugged rock the ragged rascal ran.’ It is best attempted by pushing out the cheeks like a hungry gorilla and trying to get imaginary claggum (chewing gum) off the base of the tongue.

The identity of Geordies became crystallized as sea-borne trade, particularly in coal, developed on the Tyne. Nowadays the ‘bonny lads’ who strut their stuff along the Quayside are rich footballers, legal eagles or IT wizards – all fat knots and designer stubble – but around 1750 the cocks of the walk were keelmen. These were an elite band of experts who rowed boats full of coal to and from merchant sailing ships in the Tyne. They had their own guild and their badge of honour was a blue bonnet, set off with a red neckerchief and silver shoe buckles. They earned top dollar, were known to enjoy a swallow or three, and occasionally broke the hearts of the ladies. Nobody knows why the legendary ‘Bonny’ Bobby Shaftoe – trained on keels but later a seafarer – went off over the briny, but I reckon it was to do with sex or drink or debt – or all the above. Our bright-eyed verbalized romanticism has always been deeply shadowed by excess.

In 2005 Northumberland County Council ran a ‘Most Famous Northumbrians’ website competition and polled 30,000 people. This was the result:

**George Stephenson.** He was the man who put a Rocket up the pants of the transport system by inventing a viable track-based steam locomotive. His mother kept shouting, ‘**Stop clocking that bliddy kettle, Georgie, ye knaa it’ll nivvor bile.**’  
TRANSLATION: ‘Get out of the house and do some useful

work, you waster.’

**Grace Darling.** Did the single sculls out of a harbour in a fierce storm and rescued people from a foundering ship.

**Lord Armstrong.** Famous arms and munitions maker with a factory along the old Scotswood road. Turned ‘Cragside’ at Rothbury into a turreted mansion sporting the latest electric and hydraulic gadgets. Typical saying: ‘**What do yee lot want with a union? Stand on yer own pasties!**’ TRANSLATION: ‘I’m alright, Jacks.’

**Jane, Duchess of Northumberland.** Smart lassie who persuaded the government to give her £14 million to create a massive natural jewel of a garden in the backyard of Alnwick Castle.

**Jackie Milburn.** The greatest centre forward Newcastle ever had. Scored six goals in a trial match having come from Ashington on the bus with his boots in a carrier bag.

**Jack Charlton.** Another Ashingtonian who was in England’s World Cup-winning team of 1966 and now hunts, shoots and fishes like a squire of old.

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