

Fantasy tale – city

Children's book spotlights statues of Newcastle

By Tony Henderson
Environment Editor

A GOLDEN boyhood memory has inspired writer Chris Goulding and illustrator Chris Mabbott to put the Toon into cartoon. The pair, who are near neighbours in Jesmond, have teamed up to produce a cartoon book tale of how statues in Newcastle come to life one Christmas Eve.

The result, *Tinseltoon*, is the first children's book to be published by Newcastle Libraries and Information Service and is expected to be a big seller at £4.99 for Christmas stockings.

And in the book the two Chrises have included a ritual which they say has become a regular part of Newcastle's nightlife.

Among the statues which are brought to life are railway pioneer George Stephenson, who stands in Westgate Road, and the four classical figures representing North-East industries who sit at his feet.

"They continually end up with traffic cones on their heads in what has become a modern folk tradition in Newcastle. So we had to have them wearing the cones in the book," said Chris Goulding.

The book is narrated by Grainger the cat, who while prowling around the city sees the golden lady on the top of the Northern Goldsmith's clock in Pilgrim Street spring to life. She flies fairy-like over the city, sprinkling magic dust on the statues, who climb down from their pedestals and buildings for a night of high jinks.

The first to move are the statues of two mayors of Newcastle, John Marley and Roger Thornton, then engraver Thomas Bewick and the knight Harry Hotspur.

Earl Grey slides down his monument and the 19th Century inventor and industrialist Lord Armstrong decides to pay a visit to his Swing Bridge creation.

Queen Victoria joins in and is followed by St George, a miner, King Neptune and Jackie Milburn, who organises a football match among the statues in Northumberland Street.

Former tax inspector Chris Goulding is now a writer and actor, who has appeared in TV's *Byker*

Grove and in Catherine Cookson dramas, and is also a post-graduate student at Newcastle University.

He is also the author of the library service's best-selling *Hidden Newcastle* book, on the little-known curiosities to be found in the city.

He said: "It started as a bed-time story off the top of my head for the children of friends.

"As a child I had always been conscious of the statues looking down on people and used to wonder what would happen if they came to life."

Raised in Chester-le-Street, he would come on shopping trips to the city with his mother.

"We would get off the bus at Worswick Street and walk up Pilgrim Street, and the first thing I used to see was the golden lady on the top of the clock.

"Living in a small town like Chester-le-Street, Newcastle was always a special place for me.

"People would be surprised if they stopped to consider how many statues there are in Newcastle but they tend to go unnoticed as people go about their business."

He hopes that the book will have an educational benefit for youngsters.

"The worry is that they don't look at anything unless it is on a TV or computer screen, and don't notice their surroundings as much as earlier generations.

"We hope that from the book they can learn something of the city's history, of why certain people were commemorated and what a fine place Newcastle is."

Chris Mabbott, who worked as a teacher for 25 years, has had work published in *Punch* and other magazines. He now works as a supply teacher so that he can devote more time to his work as a cartoonist and illustrator.

He said: "The book opened my eyes to how many statues there are in the city and a lot of research went into each picture."

The book is available only at Newcastle Central Library until Monday, when it will be on sale in shops.

● THE four statues of Roger Thornton, John Marley, Thomas Bewick and Harry Hotspur are on a building in Northumberland Street, opposite Saville Row.

Jackie Milburn's statue is at St James's Park.

The miner stands on top of Burt Hall in Northumberland Road, opposite the City Hall.

The golden lady in Pilgrim Street has an identical sister in Westgate

Tinseltoon – statues come to life



Fun saga: Left, the golden lady on Northern Goldsmiths' clock. Right, the golden lady and the cat in the story. Bottom, left, author Chris Goulding, top, and illustrator Chris Mabbott with one of the Stephenson statue figures. Bottom right, Stephenson and his "mates" dance in the story.



Road. Queen Victoria sits outside St Nicholas Cathedral.

Lord Armstrong is in front of the Hancock Museum.

King Neptune stands on top of the old Fish Market on the Quayside.

St George and the Dragon are in Old Eldon Square.

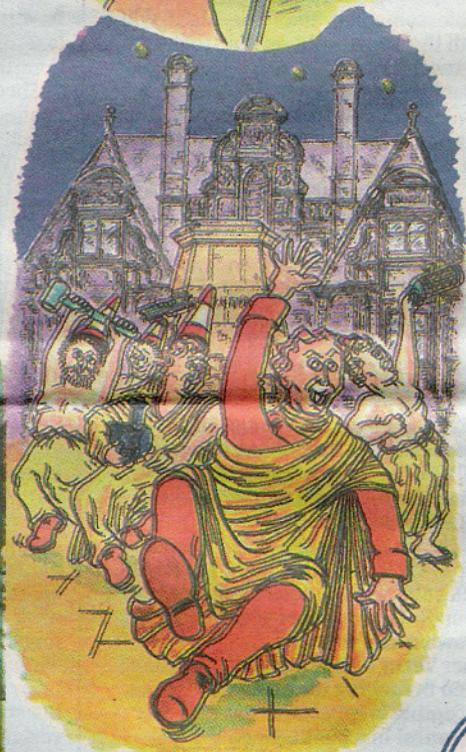
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tale – city style

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