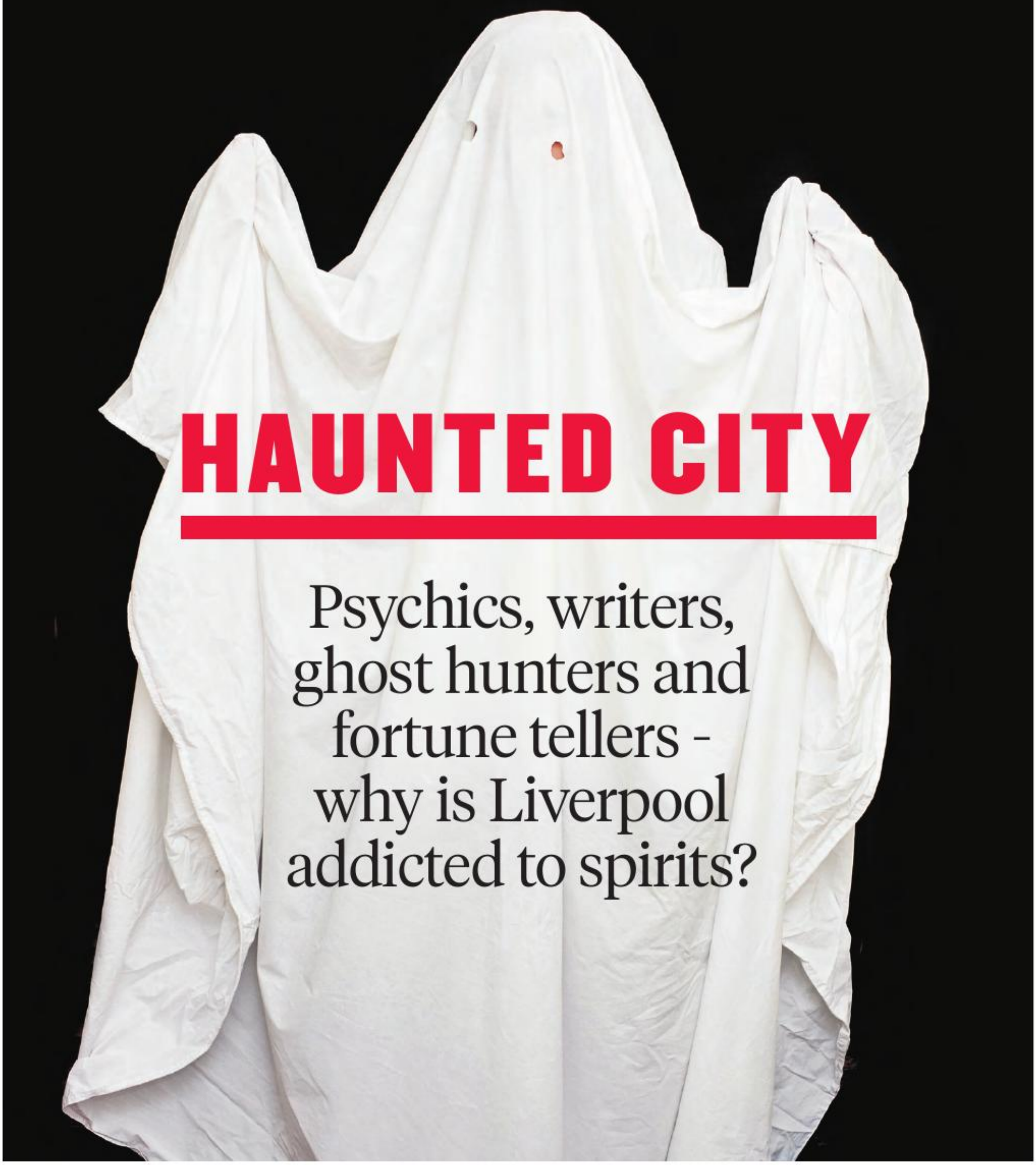
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SEVEN STREETS

Almanac



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The Place Beyond the Pines, Before Midnight, RED 2,
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SEVEN FORESTS TO FALL FOR

We all breathed a sigh of relief when the Government's hair-brained suggestion to sell off our woodlands was felled. Time, then, to enjoy some of the fine specimens on our doorstep - especially in this golden time of year.

Mab Lane

Launched last year, this vibrant community forest in West Derby consists of 20,000 new trees, sprouting from two former brown field sites on the edge of the city, creating 23 hectares of green space, wildflower meadows, a community orchard and seasonal wetland areas. Mab Lane recently launched its 'Green Gyms' initiative, with weekly al fresco fitness sessions (starting this morning, event listing here) so why not slip into your lycra body suit and join them?

Littlewood, Croxteth

Such is the variety of landscapes on our doorstep, some of our oldest, most mysterious woodlands rub against some of the city's toughest urban developments. Such is the case at Croxteth, where Littlewood, in Croxteth Country Park, contains ancient oak, beech, ash and sycamore, with cyclamen just coming into bloom. Croxteth Hall Country Park was once one of the region's biggest country estates, with 500 acres of country park, a walled garden and a working farm and exotic specimens flowering in the hot houses, there's still something of the Downton Abbey about Croxteth.

Calderstones Park

With its ornamental gardens, 200 year old walled kitchen gardens, Japanese Garden and herbaceous border, Calderstones is a traditional suburban park, with a touch more mystery than most. Within its borders lie clues to the city's ancient past. A Ha Ha (hidden trench) can still be seen in front of the Mansion House, which shows that, beyond the trim gardens, all that lay ahead was empty heath land and common grazing land. The venerable Allerton Oak is estimated at 1,000 years old and, according to legend the ancient 'Hundred Court' sat beneath its branches. Much older still, the Calder Stones are relics from an ancient burial ground.

Kirkby Moss

Shown on a map of Kirkby in 1769, the Acornfield Plantation is one of the few remaining woods of the original Manor of Kirkby. Within, you'll find oak, birch and alder trees with beech and Scots pine which were planted for timber production during the 19th century. The lowland in the centre is a squelchy carpet of sphagnum moss, ponds and soft reeds – which is, really, what the whole of Kirby is built on. Wonder if that's where the term 'sink estates' came from? Probably not.

Storeton Woods

Bought out from private ownership by 'The Friends of Storeton Woods', with a little help from the Woodland Trust, this ridge-top woodland enjoys fantastic views over to the Clwydian Hills. Since their stewardship, the 32 acre woodland has thrived. They're on the site of an old quarry, and you can spot the old quarry railway lines if you know where to look. Although it's easier to spot the stone that was once hewn from here, as it was used to build Birkenhead Town Hall. The quarry was filled with soil from the Mersey Tunnel excavation, and is now a mature, tranquil and much loved local woodland.

Bidston Hill

There's something of the Picnic at Hanging Rock about Bidston Hill, the highest spot on the Wirral. Ancient carvings of Sun Gods, a mysterious observatory, the scything silhouette of a 17th century windmill. It's all very otherwordly. The sandstone escarpment is where most head - for breezy views over estuaries Dee and Mersey, but dive into the beech, oak and ash forests that skirt its lower edges, and stop for coffee at the excellent Tam o'Shanter urban farm. North Birkenhead can be beautiful, too.

Mill Wood

An 18 hectare Speke success story, Mill Woods is one of only two sites in Liverpool classified as ancient woodland. The Friends of Mill and Alder Woods protect and preserve this special spot, running conservation days, coppicing and creating pathways through the undergrowth.
The main species in the woodland are oak, ash, alder, elm, birch, sycamore, willow and hawthorn. The best time to visit? Early spring, when the woods are carpeted in wild English bluebells on the leeward side.


Bidston Hill


Calderstones



Subscribe and Save

Almanac, to your door, for cheap? Nice.

For three years, we've worked super hard to make SevenStreets the sort of site we wanted Liverpool to have. And now we're on a mission to do the same with Almanac: issue three features new food and drink sections and an expanded look at the best of the month's goings on. And, it being Hallowe'en, we take a look at the city's obsession with talking to dead people.

We're also hoping this is the issue that you'll think about taking out a yearly subscription. We've teamed up with the chaps at Independent Liverpool to offer you a great deal: a year's worth of Almanacs posted straight to your door, and a free Independent Liverpool Card (worth a tenner on its own) for the ridiculous price of just £28.

We all know the free economy is broken. How do we fix it? What's the incentive? How do we ensure that no-one gets screwed? We don't know, basically. All we know is that we make sure everyone who contributes to Almanac gets paid. As we pointed out in our Contra feature on SevenStreets.com, which definitely hit a nerve within the city, business models based on not paying contributors are killing the creative industry. And we're not gonna be a part of it.

Take out a year's subscription and it could make the difference between being here and not being here. It's sort of that simple.

Visit www.tiny.cc/SSalmanac



We've redesigned

A brand new SevenStreets.com

We loved our old website. But, since we've started doing Almanac, we've been looking at the web in a different light.

So much of online publishing is a smash-and-grab mess of link-baiting, 'Like'-baiting and a rush to get the next *#exclusive*. It's exhausting to watch. So we're doing things differently, and we've designed accordingly.

Whereas previously we were balls-to-the-wall with posts and features and never stopped to breathe, we'll be taking time to highlight longer, more immersive reads to chew over (a few of which will have had versions in Almanac) as well as posting bursts of bloggy news, announcements, reviews and the usual good stuff you're used to on SevenStreets. This new site also allows us to play around with lovely images, so expect great slideshows, photography features from great local snappers and loads more illuminating eye candy. The site's also fully mobile-friendly now.

Thanks for sticking with us. Let's carry on exploring this amazing city together.

ABOUT US

SevenStreets.com

ISSUE 3
THE HALLOWE'EN NUMBER

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Brain Food

Seven evening courses to take this season





Autumn draws on. Time to engage your summer-addled brain in an evening course.

They say learning new stuff keeps you young. So imagine how youthful you'd be if you enrolled on a 20-week course on "Becoming self employed within the therapy and beauty sector", in Newsham? We don't need to, obviously. Instead, we're considering the following...

1. Greek Cookery and Language
Learn how to make the best Tzatziki, and how to brag about it like a native. From 26 September. Broadgreen ALC. £60.
www.liverpool.gov.uk/learninliverpool

2. Searching for Richard III
Evening lectures on one of the most controversial of all English kings (the one who ended up buried beneath a car park in Leicester). From 14 October, Liverpool University. £30

3. How to read Egyptian Hieroglyphs
Learn to read from ancient texts in ten weeks. Liverpool University. From 7 October. From £41.

4. David Hockney
In tandem with the upcoming Walker Art Gallery show, this course looks at Hockney's strident and passionate early works. Liverpool University. From 28 October. From £41.

5. Worlds of Wonder: Writing Sci-Fi and Speculative Fiction
Liverpool University. Ten meetings from Thursday 26 September. From £41.
www.liverpool.ac.uk/conted

6. Street Food
How to recreate the world's best street food dishes at home. Can Cook Studio, October 29th. £50
www.cancook.co.uk

7. An Introduction to Astronomy
Beginning 15 November, this is a five month long-distance learning course (appropriately enough) run by John Moores University. Deadline for applications end of October. £170.
www.astronomy.ac.uk/intro.html

Ghost Streets: Bevington Bush





SevenStreets has been rumbled. Caught in the act, tripod fully extended, a man approaches us.

"What are you doing lad?"

"Just taking some pictures," we explain.

A thin rain has begun to fall on the two of us, as we hover at the edge of our personal zones. He: tightly clutched Tescos bag, muddy Parka, 60ish. Us: keeping a firm grip on our Panasonic Lumix. "There's nothing here. What you photographing? A brick wall? " our passing inquisitor remarks. It's true. We are.

"There used to be something here," we say.

"Ah well, there's not now." he says, unarguably and finally. Then – seemingly struck by a more pressing concern – he shuffles off in the direction of the city.

We're at Bevington Bush - not, alas, a private detective under the employ of Bertie Wooster, but one of the most curious corners of our city's map, curling in the crook between Scotland Road and Leeds Street.

In the middle of the 18th century the fields around here were gold and green. Bevington Bush was a hamlet hunkered within a thickly wooded hill. The 'bush', was a patch of elevated land on which a handsome crop of corn grew. In 'A History of Corn Milling' (you can borrow our copy, but we want it back), Bevington Bush is listed as having four windmills in 1768.

City merchants used to enjoy nothing better, on a Sunday afternoon, than to stroll from the industry of town to the open fields of Bevington Bush - the first village on the road to Preston.

The Bush (also known as 'the Bevvy') was home to a popular inn, perfectly placed for that reviving Sunday afternoon session.

In Recollections of Old Liverpool, we learn "...the sailors were very fond of going to The Bevvy, with their sweethearts, and many a boisterous scene have I witnessed there. The view was really beautiful from the gardens.... Along the Scotland Road were cornfields, meadows and gardens..."

The gardens didn't last long. With the opening of Scotland Road the ancient hamlet of Bevington Bush soon became surrounded by our ever-growing city. But the inn remained.

In time, Scotland Road's manor houses and market gardens made way for a mass of cramped houses, most of them back-to-back. Liverpool Corporation built St Martin's Cottages here in 1869: the first council houses in England. And the impressive Bevington Bush Baths were the largest municipal swimming baths in the city.

By the end of the 19th century, workers, dockers and sailors found sanctuary in the Bevington Bush Hotel, offering rooms for a penny a night. So long as you were sober. The hotel became Arden House, and, eventually the city's first Salvation Army refuge.

In the 1960's, Liverpool songwriter, Glyn Hughes, immortalised the tale of a chap called Seth Davey, who 'sat on the corner of Bevington Bush', at the inn, in at the fag end of the 19th century.

"Come day, go day. Wishing me heart for Sunday.

Drinking buttermilk all the week; whisky on a Sunday."

Magazine Corner

This month: Zona



"Zona is produced by Art & Soul, working with people who've had drug and alcohol problems. Our poetry and fiction collection, 'Content', has been running for six years but we wanted Zona to have a wider brief, concentrating on landscape, both manmade and natural with a Liverpool attitude," says editor Phil Thornton.

"Basically it's scouse psychogeography minus all the pseudo-philosophical bullshit. Issue 1 was devoted to 'Paths' whereas our next issue will look at the coast."

Why did you set it up?

We felt there was a need for a magazine that explored not only local but national themes of identity and history in a more down-to-earth, humourous manner. For example how to do you get from Walton to town without being spotted by CCTV? A grafter's eye view of the city.

Why a magazine?

In the age of the internet I think magazines are due to make a big comeback. We wanted something that was small enough to carry in your pocket and had high quality writing, photography and design.

Where can we get it?
You can pick up free copies from News From Nowhere, Bold St Coffee, Egg Café, Ran etc. We can send a copy out with an SAE and two first clas stamps or you can always read it via the PDF version.

Art & Soul
58 Hope Street
Liverpool



The Liverpool Pie

Go ahead, slice us right open: this is what we're made of right now

23% 'CURATING'
It's not the Guggenheim. It's a stage at Static. Behave.

24% E CIGARETTES
When can we expect the first case of passive water vapour disease? Better call Saul.

95% BREAKING BAD
...talking of which....

33⅓ LATIN AMERICAN MEAT RESTAURANTS
Red paddle for no more meat. Green paddle for no more Amazonian rain forest.

45% ARTISANS
They're people who make things. And speak only medieval French, apparently.

12 % PANEL DISCUSSIONS ABOUT CULTURE
Put a grant-funded sock in it and get back to work.



Of Gods and Monsters

Liverpool's multi award-winning Vogue Ball is back - and with a theme of 'Gods and Monsters' this year you can expect Camp and Furnace to be camper, and hotter than ever. Club culture meets high art as Vogue teams (known as 'houses') battle for fierceness and dance supremacy. And, boy, do they dress for the occasion.

"I want to see the vogue houses really dig deep to release their characters on the runway, whether they see themselves as fierce titans or heavenly creatures," says organiser Darren Suarez. His thighs are insured for millions, you know.

5 October
Vogue Ball
Camp and Furnace (£14)

The Breaking Bad Withdrawl Kit

And so, the end is near. Not ready to face your final cook? We've assembled a kick ass kit for you. But let's be clear - we're not in the meth business, we're in the empire business. Bitch.



RV Rentals - For all your big country cook outs.
www.livethedreammotorhire.co.uk



Hazard Kit - Don't want to mess up your strides...
Smiffy's Serious Fun, Bold Street



Tighty Whities - Then again, you could take 'em off
Debenhams, Liverpool ONE



Crystal Kit - "warning, choking hazard!"
Smyths Toys, Croft Retail Park, Bromborough



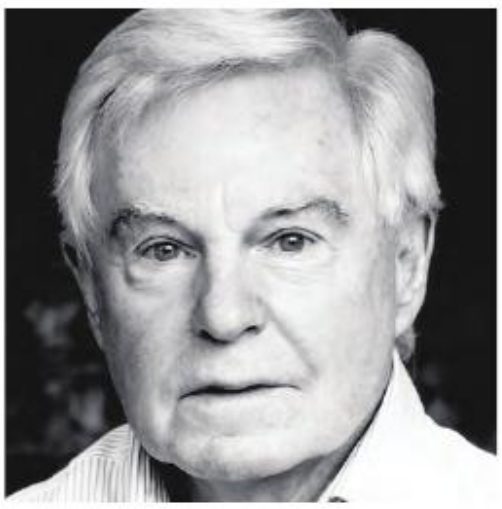
Chemistry Set - No school need suffer a break in
Toys'r'Us, Paisley Street

Pork Pie Hat - Protection from the Albuquerque/Albert Dock sun.
Hat Company, Northgate Street, Chester

SevenStreets Reads!

We're at the Chester Literary Festival this month - reading our favourite bits from the site's first three years. Come join us on October 18th (Chester Town Hall, 1pm), or grab a space on our workshop, on Sunday 20th (Chester Town Hall Magistrates, 2pm). This year's festival features Derek Jacobi (right), Clive James, Fay Weldon and Peter Snow. All the big hitters. And us.

13-27 October
www.chesterliteraturefestival.co.uk





A Taste of Toxteth

So, farewell then, summer. We can't complain. Especially when it tasted this good. Liverpool bee keeper, Andrew Hubbard has hives across Liverpool. Pick up a pot of his 'postcode honey' - labelled by location - and see L25 duke it out with L8. Look closely and you'll see the nectar changes colour, depending on the postcode pollen. Sweet.

Available from Baltic Bakehouse, £4

School's Out

"Long ago, Deaf School were the first band to give me hope that Liverpool music might survive The Beatles," says Paul Du Noyer of his new biography of the band (Liverpool University Press).

"I've adored them ever since, and go to their shows whenever I can. Now I've written a book about them because their story makes a great tale, and it should be better known.

They were middle-class art students who made a deep emotional connection with ordinary Scouse teenagers. They were the Next Big Thing who were betrayed by a sudden switch in London tastes. They were a band who broke up but then realised they were in this game for life.

There's a lot of Hope Street in there, too. I badly wanted to write about Hope Street, partly because of its huge artistic importance, and partly because I could spend whole days in legendary pubs like the Belvedere and Peter Kavanagh's, kidding myself it was "research"."

19 October
Deaf School Book Launch and Celebration Show
East Village Arts Club (£18)



The Monthly Seven

1. MUSIC
Hjaltalín: Enter 4

The jazzy, bass-boosting Icelanders are back with a fizzy collection of strident Scandi pop. Think Sugarcubes meets Cardigans. And ramp it up.

2. BLOG
Jak and Jil (jakandjil.com)

The internet's crammed full of peacocking street style blogs, but photographer Tommy Ton has a slightly different, curious eye. There's behind-the-scenes glimpses into Fashion Weeks across the globe, candid shots of the immaculately dressed off guard, and no pretentious text to accompany it. Just beautiful photos.

3. TELLY
Orange Is The New Black

Sharp, intelligent and humane - Netflix has scored a palpable hit with their streaming prison drama. Makes you weep for how stratospherically ahead the US is with stuff like this. See also House of Cards.

4. BOOK
Arnaldur Indriðason: Strange Shores

Another masterclass in taught, economic and compelling crime fiction. And, very possibly, the last outing for Erlendur, Nordic fiction's unhappiest detective. Which is, frankly, saying something.

5. FILM
Kelly + Victor

Liverpool-based bleak debut by Kieran Evans is hardly a laugh a minute (and it's a little uneven) but as calling cards go, it's impressive - as is the Jon Hopkins/Bill Ryder-Jones infused soundtrack. Out now.

6. PODCAST
The Jeff Rubin Show (jeffrubinjeffrubinshow.com)

From Chuck Klosterman's ruminations on Breaking Bad to pop culture conspiracies, Jeff Rubin (CollegeHumor) presents interviews with creative people who, when prodded, are happy to release the geek within. Always worth a listen.

7. RADIO

Sounds of the 80s, Sara Cox/ Radio 2

We've a lot of time for Sara Cox, one of radio's sharpest female presenters - so we're confident her new Radio 2 slot (10-12pm Saturday nights) will cover some of the 80s less-obvious musical gems. "Dig out your lace gloves and ra-ra skirts," she says. Oh, OK then, maybe not...

















ONE MAN'S MEAT

What can Liverpool learn from New York's Meatpacking District? David Lloyd finds out.





Flick through any proposal for the cultural regeneration of our city and, before long, you'll see it: 'this is going to be the 'Meatpacking District' of Liverpool. Ten years ago, it could easily have been the Ropewalks - now it's the turn of the Baltic Triangle to make a play for the title.

The region's been cited in the Council's Strategic Investment Framework (SIF) - with no less than six mentions (more than any other district) - and even the Baltic's own website refers to itself as 'Liverpool's Slice of NYC's Meatpacking District'

The comparison, at least on paper, makes sense: gritty industrial zone given new lease of life by creative intervention. But the real story is somewhat different. And if we're to learn anything from this slim downtown corner of Manhattan and its miraculous modern day makeover, we should do more than trot out lazy comparisons. We should take a look at exactly what's happening over there....

Lauren Danziger is the Executive Director of the Meatpacking District Improvement Association, a body - funded by local businesses - charged with managing the District's public spaces, promoting the area's business interests, and producing a year-round calendar of events.

Falling somewhere between a Chamber of Commerce and Business Improvement District, the Association's responsibilities take in sanitation and beautification, promotion and protection. And it does it all via private fundraising, and the collective will of its residents.

We point Danzinger to the Baltic's website. Does she think our comparisons are odious?

"It's funny," Danziger tells SevenStreets, down the line from 9th Avenue, "I get calls all the time from random cities in other countries, saying we're gonna be the Meatpacking District of wherever, as if there's a formula to copy. There isn't. Everything here is very organic."

Organic or not, this slim stretch of real estate sandwiched between the West Side Highway and 9th Avenue has enjoyed a reboot that's been nothing short of transformational. The area's web of side streets has gone from ailing industrial zone to Jimmy Choo-trodden catwalks in less time than you can say 'double macchiato with soy': yet, crucially, it's done so without mutating the area's DNA too much.

"We never said 'we're gonna make this a nightlife sensation, or a cool shopping area'," Danziger says. "Everything here is just a happy set of circumstances, based on the area's history and the determination of landlords to keep its character alive."

No one visits New York these days without wanting to check into the Meatpacking District. It wasn't always so. Illicit raves, drugs, transvestites and prostitutes... thirty years ago, the MPD was NYC's meat market. Changes in the supply of fresh food - away from local depots to national distribution centres - saw many of the area's huge warehouses fall out of use, to be quickly recolonised as cavernous nightclubs.

And not just any nightclubs. The MPD's out-of-earshot location kept it away from prying eyes too, and legendary gay and BDSM clubs, cheerily named The Manhole and the Mineshaft, made their after dark manoeuvres here.

"The area's always been zoned as a manufacturing district, which means that no-one can live here legally. They never have. It meant that nightlife flourished here," Danzinger says.

All of which may come as a bit of a shock to our Council: "The city centre residential offer needs greater identification," it proclaimed in its SIF. "There should be a number of defined neighbourhoods across the City Centre where we add depth and quality. To illustrate the point we have looked at NYC's meatpacking district."

They can't have looked too closely.

"Yes, we only have five residents here," Danzinger confirms, "That's why it works."

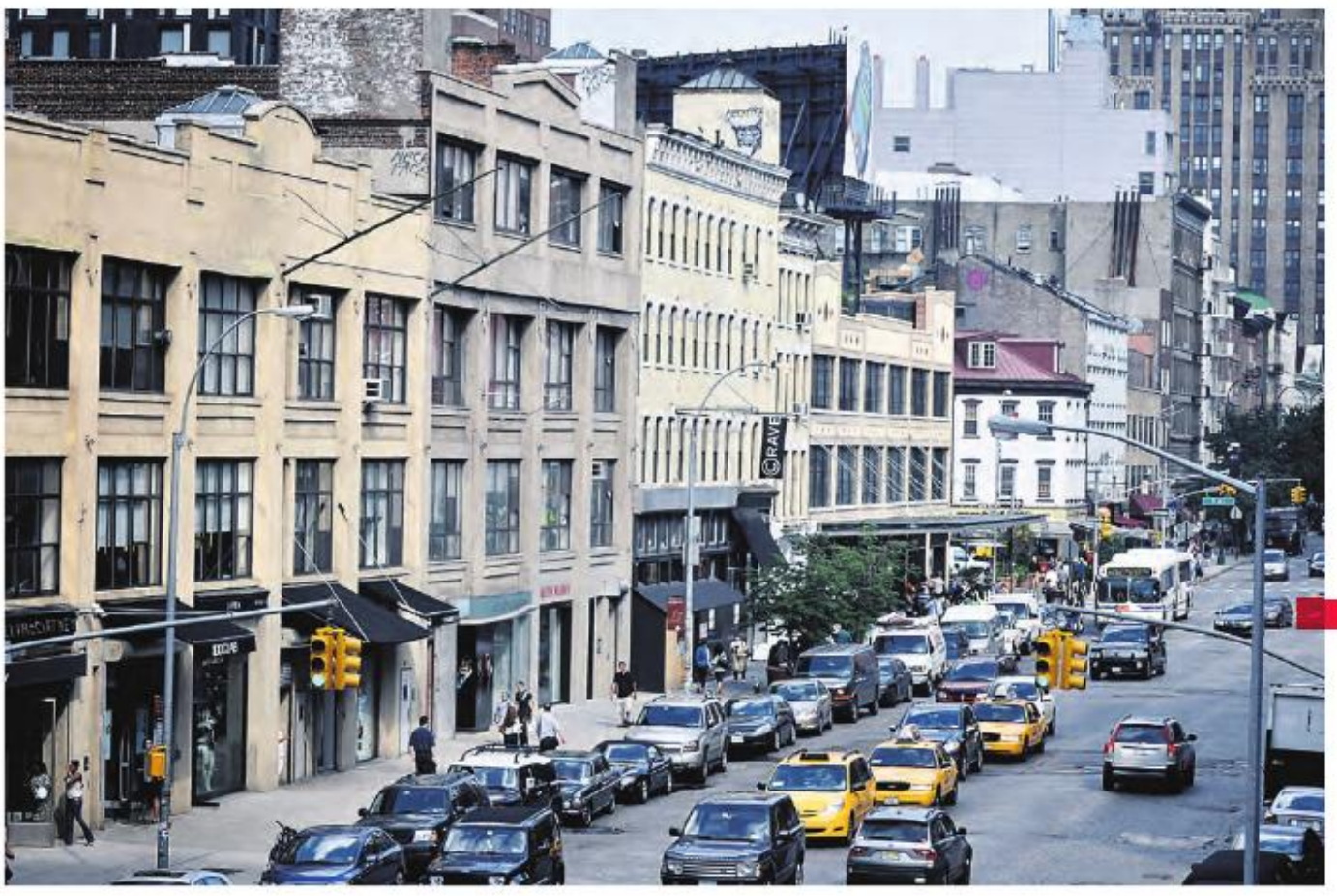
With the cool clubs came the first early adopters - a few trendy boutiques and design studios infested the ground floors of grand, five story slaughterhouses and brick-built office blocks.

Names such as Diane von Furstenberg, Alexander McQueen and Apple became anchor tenants at street level while, above, digital studios colonised long-silenced packing plants and accountancy offices. But this was no latter-day gold rush. The area might have shifted from butchery to boutiques but, importantly, these coolly handsome warehouses and produce markets stayed in the control of a handful of families.

"The property owners have been here for 80, 100 years," Danzinger says. "Their families were meat cutters, butchers back in the day. That's what's so unique about what happens here; they care about this place. People are invested here for life, not just to make a quick buck."

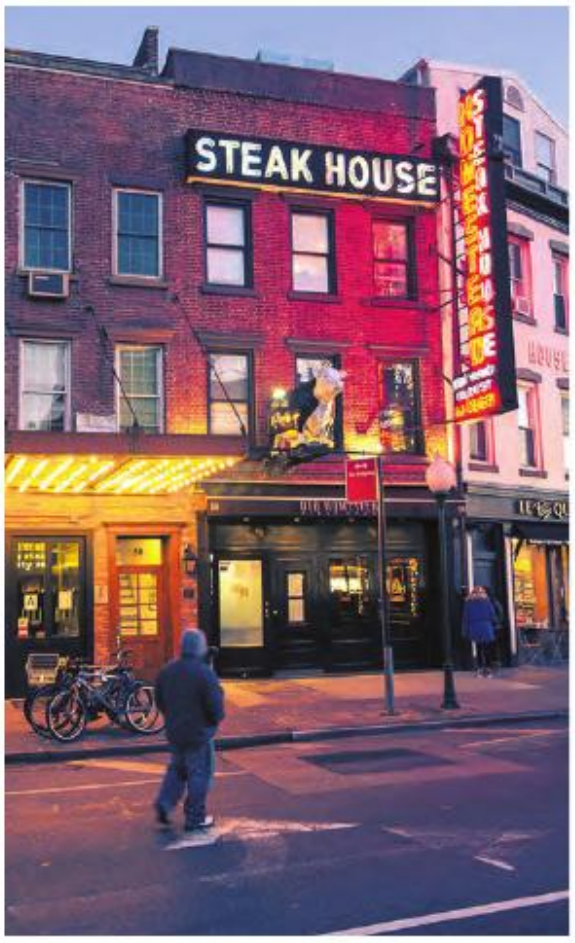
All of which might serve as a lesson to those in the city who'd happily parcel off entire neighbourhoods, wrap them in tape, and consign them to the fates of CPOs and private equity companies intent on creating 'the next Liverpool ONE'. As if one size really did fit all regeneration needs.

Continuity is something, Danzinger believes, that separates the MPD from the market-led turmoil and speculation of uptown Manhattan - and of many



The area's always been zoned as a manufacturing district, which means that no-one can live here legally.





post industrial cities eager for a slice of the cultural goodlife.

"This is a historic area. There are a few families here who own a lot of properties. Ownership is something that runs very deeply here," she adds.

The struggle to preserve a sense of place, and the fight to prevent residential creep... these are issues Liverpool - with its pass-the-parcel approach to ownership - could do well to heed. Already within strolling distance of the Baltic's Greenland Street/Jamaica Street epicentre, the steel skeletons of student flats grow like some implanted strain - harbingers of mixed-use battles ahead.

"The moment developers are allowed to build apartments within earshot of taxis and clubs is the moment the neighbourhood will die," Danzinger says, matter-of-factly.

There is, in the MPD as everywhere else, the challenge of how much of the past you preserve, and how you take it into the future. It's something Danziger's all too aware of.

"We serve as a collective voice and an advocate regarding change in the neighbourhood," she says. "Change is essential. It's how you manage it that's key. We're not here to represent only the big studios. Everyone has a stake in our community, from a one-man operation to a five floor studio. That's partly why it works - it's a symbiotic thing."

That's not to say the area's without a touch of mission creep of its own. The swanky Hotel Gansevoort - with its manicured rooftop garden offering panoramas of the High Line - is one of NYC's most in-demand, and there have been grumbles about rent rises.

"Twelve years ago there were very few businesses here, and as businesses have relocated it's put pressure on costs, as there's more demand and limited space. But that's natural in any maturing area. We're still far from being the most expensive place in town."

"It's about balance," she adds.

"We know that, ahead, lies a right way and a wrong way for us to grow. We've pulled together the property owners, the businesses and the creative leaders to talk through what we'd like the narrative to be. We can't stop the council green-lighting new developments if they pass the planning regulations, but we can show how our approach has resulted in a district that's not just a great place to work, but a great example of how, left to its own devices, a neighbourhood can flourish too."

Danzinger points to the MPIA's recent public plaza project: a linear series of nine mini parks along 9th Avenue which has infused new life into the area by encouraging people to not just browse and shop, but to stay, sit, eat and attend events in the heart of the neighbourhood.

"We're responsible for maintaining these spaces," she says, "and they've been very successfully received. As our businesses develop, they need places for their employees to gather at lunchtime. Same goes for tourists. The more time they spend here, the more they boost the local economy."

The spaces form natural focal points to the MPD's busy calendar of events, too. Events that are as homegrown as the herbs in the High Line's aerial park above.

"Our cultural programme is very important to us, and we've had lots of interest from external event organisers wanting a slice of the action, but why would we do that? We're a cultural hub, we have the talent here. If we sell off our streets to outside promoters make a quick buck, where's the differentiation between us and Times Square?" she says.

Danzinger's associationdoesn't have legislative powers but, by harnessing the support of all who use the district, its mandate is strong: and its results speak for themselves.

What the Meatpacking District shows is that there really is another way. That ownership - whether in property deeds or simply a feeling of connection - encourages responsibility. That the long game will always win out over short term gain and speculation, and that, left to their own devices, our cities' most interesting corners can breed cultures richer, stronger and better able to adapt to the future, than any top down master plan ever could.

As we say our goodbyes, SevenStreets mentions it's planning a visit to New York next spring...

"Come and say hi," Danzinger says, "I'll buy you a coffee... Oh, that reminds me of another thing: We don't have any Starbucks here..."









From Meat to Burgers

The Meatpacking district occupies a slim chunk of eight blocks, on Manhattan's west side - more-or-less wedged between 9th and 10th Avenue, between Chelsea and the West Village. The area developed in the mid 19th century, when freight connections - and the elevated railroad which is now the aerial park of the High Line - allowed the area's produce markets to transport their goods across New York's five boroughs.

By 1900, there were 250 slaughterhouses and packing plants here, and the area continued to prosper until, in the 1950's, improvements in refrigerated travel allowed meat to be transported further, from centralised distribution points.

Now the area's grand warehouses, tenement blocks and Greek Revival residences house boutique burger bars, digital start ups and design hotels. But, in a nice twist, there's a new breed of artisan butchers appearing alongside the cocktail joints.

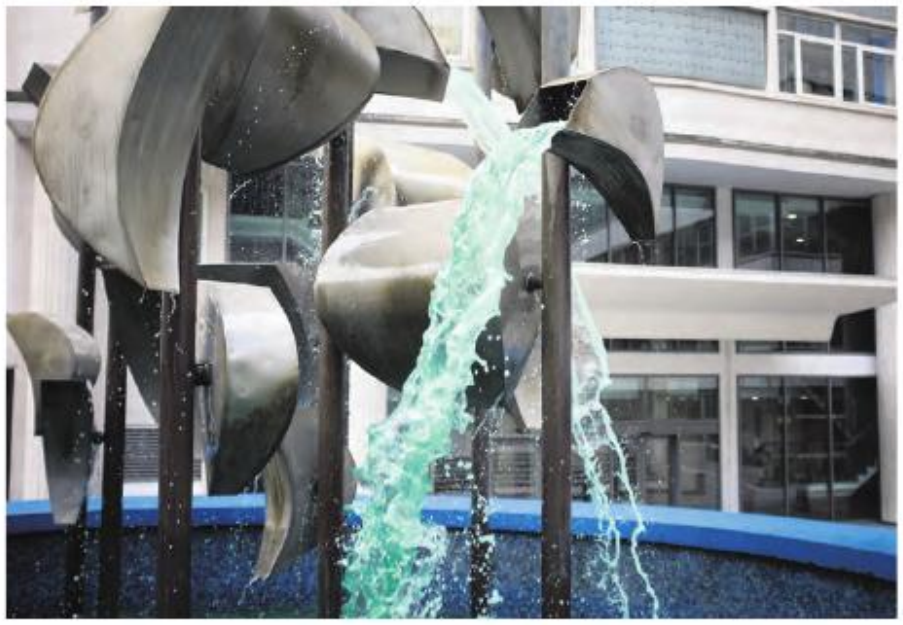
From Baltic to the World

The Baltic Triangle's name comes from Liverpool's trading links across to the great ports of Europe - and on to St Petersburg. Its main thoroughfare, Jamaica Street, recalls the city's links to the slave triangle linking Liverpool to west Africa and the Caribbean, while Greenland Street is another reminder to the city's less salubrious past: its connections to the whaling industry.

The area's sturdily impressive warehouses recall the days when 40 per cent of the world's trade passed through the city's docks. Now these Grade II listed spaces, which used to store fruit, sugar, spices and spirits, are home to sprawling entertainment venues such as Camp and Furnace, digital start ups and creative agencies such as Sound City, Liverpool Biennial and, erm, SevenStreets.

The area's nominal triangle shape reaches its apex at the distinctive Baltic Fleet pub, with its cluster of chimneys painted to resemble ships' funnels.

URBAN SAFARI #1









THE TIPPING BUCKETS

An occasional guide to Liverpool's lesser celebrated landmarks. Photography by Pete Carr

Cammell Laird's workforce might well want us to think of them as muscle bound shipwrights hammering steel and iron in the dry dock furnaces of Birkenhead. But even they had dress-down Fridays. When they weren't riveting warships together they were making dinky little buckets which splashed and sprayed like a baby on freshly laid Pampers.

And so, with some irony, the great shipbuilder's legacy in Liverpool is not some moored-up Dazzle Ship or the scything profile of a great liner, but Beetham Plaza's 'Bucket Fountain'. For it was the men of Lairds who welded this sculpture to life, over forty years ago.

Yet it's a miracle the Bucket Fountain is still with us. In the (we hear) crazy 60s, kinetic sound-sculptures like this could be found soaking civic squares from Wellington to Seattle. But delicate-eared locals objected to them, complaining that they sounded too much like flushing toilets.

To us, they had an altogether different resonance. They represented the turbulence and unpredictability of waves (that and the fact that flushing toilets didn't reach some parts of Kensington until Hatton had them personally installed).

At least, that's what Welsh sculptor, Richard Huws envisaged when he created the piece.

"It is a waterfall of a strange new kind," Huws told the Merseyside Civic Society when the piece was installed. "Instead of streaming steadily, water hurtles down unexpectedly in detached lumps in all directions."

Huws was a man with previous. He created a stunning 43 foot high water sculpture at the Festival of Britain in 1951 and, today examples of his work can be seen in Tokyo and New York, although precious little remains intact in the UK.

Water was, most definitely, Huws' thing. Which is another irony in this little tale. For Huws, and his patchwork-artist wife Edrica lived in darkest Anglesey with neither electricity nor running water, throughout the 1960s.

"The sight and sound of waterfalls is so spellbinding that they have always been centres of attraction in the landscape, and in the places where we work we are prompted to create them artificially," Huws said, adding that the 'perpetual bubblings' of man-made fountains bored him to tears. For him, there had to be a twist.

"To make it more exciting we contrive various means of providing additional animation, a very simple device which interrupts the regular flow, so as to create a round of action. The sound and movement of which is no longer that of the ever-monotonous bubbling river, but that of the restless, temperamental sea..."

Recently the sculpture has been given a lick of paint, and a new lease of watery life. And, if you're lucky, it's sometimes turned on. Which is, kinda, the point of it.

Originally destined for some nameless new town in Lancashire, the Arts Council stepped in and contributed £750 towards the Merseyside Civic Society's campaign to have the sculpture relocated along the banks of the Mersey – on the site of the old Goree Warehouse. And, should you be brave enough to get close, you'll notice an African shield on the base. If you're not, the shield's inscription reads:

"Originally two arcaded warehouses in the middle of the old dock road was named after the island 'Goree' off the west coast of Africa. On the 14th September 1822, the Piazza was gutted by a spectacular fire, described by Thomas De Quincy. In 1817 Washington Irving worked at the American Consul in Liverpool, had his office at Washington House – Goree. The old Piazza was severely bombed in the air raids of 1941 and finally demolished between 1948 and 1950. In 1967, to mark the completion of the new piazza this plaque was kindly presented by Cammell Laird and Co, builders of the fountain."

What a shame the tipping buckets weren't around at the time of the fire. Could have saved a heck of a lot of trouble. Although, chances are, they'd have been turned off then too.

They stand sentinel, still, on the breezy and bland Beetham Plaza (sadly now minus the excellent Home Canteen) reminding us of a time when Liverpool wasn't afraid of making a bigger splash.

Bucket Fountain
Beetham Plaza

PEOPLE

DESIGN

Mono Vision

A supercar for Liverpool? Believe it - with his brother, Ian Briggs has created one of the most exciting pieces of metal in recent years. Photography by Graeme Lamb





Liverpool is not without form when it comes to automotive. After all we do build the Range Rover Evoque and the Vauxhall Astra – two very good cars in their own right – and have a long, if not always totally successful, history of car-making.

The reveal of the Briggs Automotive Company's (BAC) Mono supercar this Summer kicked things, if you will, into overdrive. The Mono – a lightweight one-seater with a focus on dynamics rather than outright power – is the brainchild of brothers Ian and Neill Briggs, who have an impressive heritage in the industry.

They boast a formidable reputation and client list (Bentley, Ford, Porsche) - and run a design studio and conceived the Mono as a shop window for their skills.

"At the very least we thought it would be a great acquisition project for us, where we could show potential clients what we're capable of, but it's become our main focus," says Ian Briggs who designed the car; brother Neill is the project director.

"We had the desire to own and drive something like this but we also wanted to show what we could do to the big car companies. The private and professional desires came together and in mid-2011 we debuted the car in Stuttgart and had a great response. Within six weeks we had an order for 80 cars. It just went crazy.

"We were just falling over ourselves in terms of space; now we've got the people and the space to expand into Liverpool.

Their new factory in south Liverpool isn't a coincidence or simply result of some attractive tax breaks. With a lengthy supply chain in the area due to the North West's automotive know-how it was an obvious place to do business.

"One of the challenges you have is that you can't afford automation; we needed guys from the automotive or aerospace industries or very highly-skilled technicians. But due to the amount of car industry in the Merseyside area we were able to recruit from the supply chains around here.

The car will be built at Speke Hall Industrial Estate and is being tested on roads around Liverpool. You may have seen it being put through its paces on the Top Gear track by The Stig. Should you be interested you can expect 300 horses and a sprint time of 2.8 seconds for your £100K. But this is a car that's much more about ride and handling than outright speed - and what's really clever is the adaptive gearing, meaning that you can have the car set up to complement your local track.

The track, of course, is where the car can really come alive - although Ian is at pains to point out the versatility of the car on A and B roads; even around town. It's the purity of the vision of a car designed purely to be enjoyed, free of compromise, that excites him.

"The more you think about it, cars have always had a legacy of transportation - even with supercars - whereas if you look at something you do just for the fun of it such as skiing or mountain-biking, you'd never dream of having an additional occasional passenger. Imagine having a mountain bike that would allow you to occasionally take a pillion passenger - how compromised would that be?

"Because cars are a transport medium people don't view them in that way but we started with a blank sheet of paper and designed something specifically for the enjoyment. It's about a pure experience."

Ian's attention is distracted by a troupe of young scousers. "Is that your car mate?" they shout at him. "You must be a millionnaire!" Ian demurs as they turn their attention back to the car, marvelling at its lines and quiet intent. Already this is a Liverpool supercar.

www.bac-mono.com



ART

Pieces and Parts

Low Coney's scrapbook aesthetic rips it up and starts again...

Making analogue collages from vintage found imagery, Low Coney (aka Phil Bridges) champions the lo-fi, the handmade and the computer-free approach to making.

"I like the image Coney Island evokes of faded glamour, and weather beaten rollercoasters," Bridges says. The Low? "as in '- Fi'."

Where do you take your inspiration from?

I've been making music and writing a bit for some time (Low Coney is one half of dream pop/psych duo Two Sunsets) so I think the collage work comes from the same place as that. But where that is I really don't know.

Tell us about the creation process?

It's relatively spontaneous. I surround myself with vintage source materials - dusty books, magazines, old photographs, record sleeves, and take an analog dive into the unknown - cutting, positioning, sticking - until a piece feels natural. There's a certain naivety to the process in that I have no formal art training. But just know what I like. There are some narratives/ themes in there - such as nostalgia, states of mind, memory, identity.

Who've you been working with?

I've just exhibited for the first time through an art collective called The Lucky Jotter and might do another show with them in October. I've also done a bit of work in Urban Outfitters and most recently was included in a New York based magazine called Secret Behaviour.

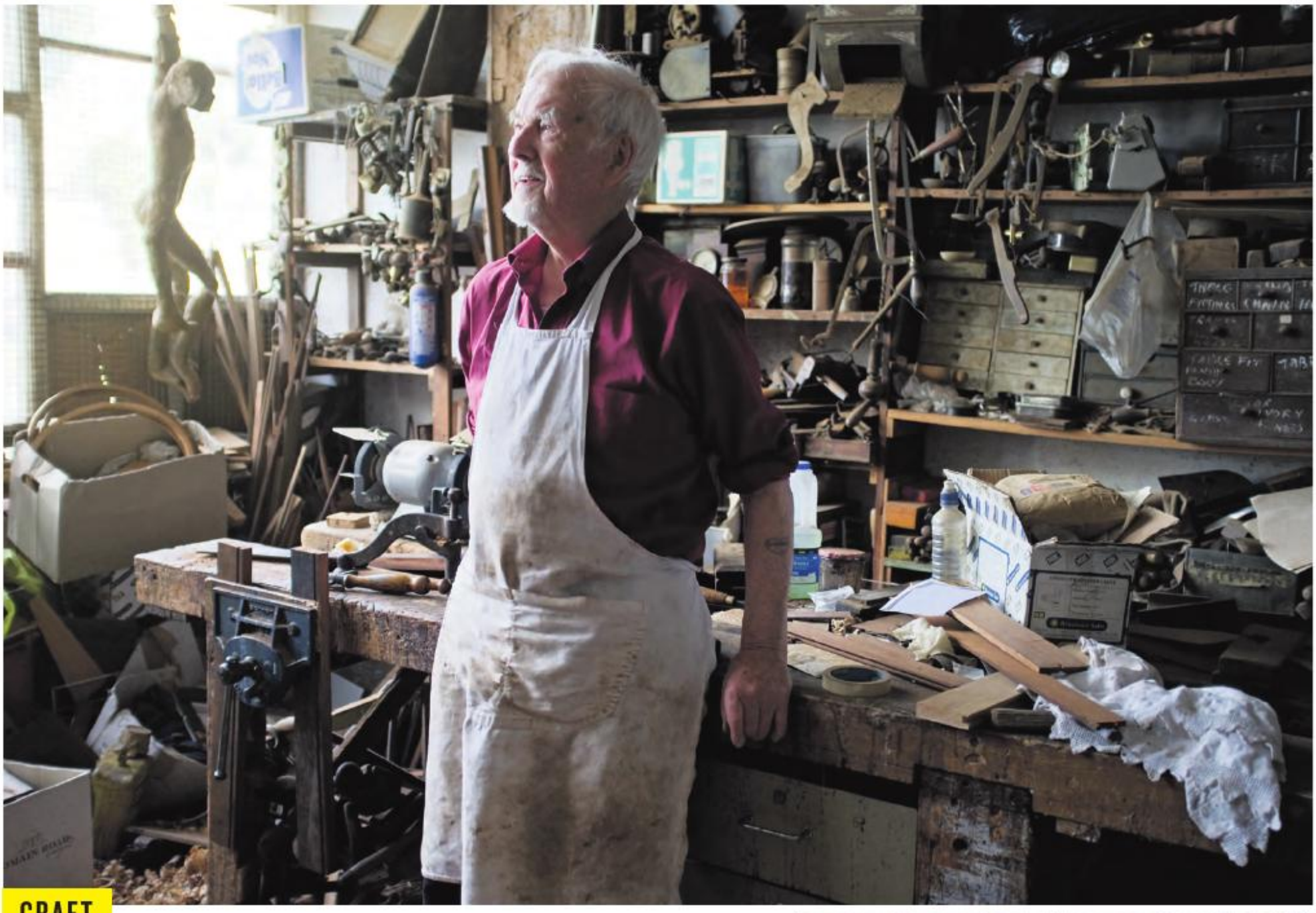
What about source material - where's the richest pickings?

Car boots, charity shops, flea markets. I spend almost as much time searching for source materials as I do making the work. I've gathered a large archive of materials mainly from between 1950 - 1980 - as print from that period has a great quality to it, in terms of the colours and textures.

Whose work do you admire?

Collage has its routes in surrealism and dada with early pioneers such as John Heartfield being important to the form. And I like that stuff. But I also like John Baldessari, John Stezaker, James Gallagher, plus lots of filmmakers, musicians, writers - it's all just one thing to me.

www.lowconey.con
facebook.com/lowconeylowconey



CRAFT

The Woodsman

Well into his tenth decade, Wallasey's Bill Davies breathes new life into old wood...

Photography by Jane MacNeil

"How would you describe yourself? Cabinet Maker? Artisan?"

"Artisan?" Bill Davies spits the word back at a tremulous SevenStreets.

"That's just a fancy word for someone who makes things. Arrrrtisan! Ha! I hope you have better questions than that."

It's a battle of wits, and round one goes to 94-year-old Davis, as he shows us around his Wallasey workshop. A cabinet of curiosities in itself. Shelves, sagged and warped with time, groan beneath tiny sets of meticulously dovetailed drawers; one marked, enigmatically, 'eyes'.

"You're a fool if you throw anything away," Davis says, blowing dust from a felled forest of laminates. "They don't make laminates like they used to. I'll find a use for these one day..."

Much of Davis' booty is salvage. Boardroom tables saved from the scrapheap, panelling hewn from decommissioned ocean liners, huge screens rescued from a 'modernisation' at the Adelphi - all hauled onto the roof rack of his trusty (wood-framed) Austin Traveller.

We think we're the generation who invented upcycling? Davies' yellowing photographs show otherwise: wood liberated from funeral pyres, now standing tall as fitted bookcases and display cabinets in swanky west Wirral homes.

"Young people don't know what they're looking at. But it's not your fault. You're sold rubbish, so you expect rubbish. Modern furniture?..." he pauses. "Crap."

We settle on 'antiques restorer' for a job description - it comes with none of the fancy lexicography so evidently out-of-favour with the nonagenarian wood turner. And, as he's still handy with a chisel, who are we to argue?

"I've had five apprentices. They're all dead now. There's a lesson in that..." he says. It comes off somewhere between a territorial threat and Count Arthur Strong braggadocio.

Davies - 'born in the slums of Toxteth' - moved to Wallasey 60-odd years ago, shutting his Great George Street showroom and settling into family life. "I married a Wallasey woman. The best thing I ever did. Her family had an indoor toilet."

His wife died 50 years ago. Since then, Davis hasn't sold a thing, nor has he wanted to. He works to bequeath pieces to his family and because, as he says, he loves the feel of 'the living wood' beneath his hands. Of coaxing the grain into an exquisitely scalloped side table, a flamboyantly pedimented wardrobe, or casing for a Grandfather clock.

What do you work in? We ask, tentatively.

We get that look again.

"There is only one wood. Spanish mahogany. There's nothing that comes close," he purrs. "But I can only manage an hour or so these days. And my eyes are no good for fine carving."

We're not so sure. Davis shows us another piece he's working on - a gargoyle set to adorn an old bevelled mirror. Its features delicately carved out. Its eyes sparkle with devilish intent. With life.

Who could he have modelled it on, we wonder?








THE HANGED
TEMPERANCE
THE TOWER
JUDGEMENT
THE SUN
DEATH
TAROT

WHO YOU GONNA CALL?

As Hallowe'en season descends on the city, we take a sceptical tour of spiritual Liverpool - embarking on a ghost hunt, subjecting ourselves to a psychic reading, and enjoying a night in the spectral presence of Joe Power - and talking to a master of modern horror...

Illustration by Sarah Fuller

HAUNTED HOUSE?

David Lloyd tours a haunted house with Merseyside spirit-whisperer Billy Roberts

We're taking a tour of Jean's home – an imposing suburban villa built in 1840. It's a turreted, Gothic affair with a round tower and stone mullioned windows. Straight outta Psycho, you could say. If Hitchcock had filmed it in Southport.

Jean – keen to unearth what she believes to be the house's spiritual hangers on – has invited us for a tour with celebrated city psychic, Billy Roberts. After coffee and cakes, the tour begins.

I comment on the pleasing play of light as it dapples the hallway from the stained glass of the porch. But, as we enter a first floor bedroom, it's obvious Billy's having none of my small talk. "Someone was murdered in this room," he says. "Or if not murdered, they took their life in a gruesome way." Talk about ruining the atmosphere.

"Yes!" Jean squeals excitedly. "Visitors have reported seeing orbs," she says. "A friend even saw an apparition." Orbs – the latest must-have in the world of the spirit – are bouncing spheres of unearthly light, often caught on camera by 'ghost hunters'. You might know them as dust particles. Like a Maplins salesman, Roberts swiftly whips out a series of handheld electronic gizmos – all flashing lights, beeping dials and bouncing needles.

He aims them vaguely at the woodchip and tweaks his EMF meters like an electrician chasing an errant power supply. "Yes, this room is spiritually active," Roberts says, less than three feet away from a rumbling old immersion heater with its thermostats and heating coils churning away.

The prognosis – instantly and convincingly drawn – is that somehow Roberts' booty of battery-powered toys have merely confirmed what Robert's inbuilt psychic detectors knew all along. As a serious investigation into the realms of parascience it seems curiously brief. I point out that, apart from the merest crackle of static, humans (living or, especially, dead) just don't give off the kind of energy that EMF meters detect. We're not – unless we're a member of Kraftwerk or a mate of Gary Numan's – sufficiently electric. If we did mess up EMF signals quite so readily, electricians would have stopped using them years ago in fear of mistaking the buzz of a nearby pylon as their dead grandfather trying to say hello.

"When we die, we move into a higher frequency of life," Roberts offers by way of explanation, "and we can pick this up with these machines." Neurologists might have something to say about the theory that, once dead, the human brain could trigger a needle in a £50 black box to bounce around quite so energetically.

Psychologist, Dr Matthew Smith – ex of Liverpool Hope University, now teaching associate at Oxford Brookes – has something to say about it, too. "We're hard wired to be gullible. We have a knack of drawing conclusions from insufficient evidence, and it's easier to say something's 'paranormal' or 'mysterious' than to actually try to figure things out rationally and scientifically. It's how magicians, and so-called psychics make such a good living." Belief in ghosts, of course, has a pay off. For a lot of us, it's a glimpse of immortality. Of something beyond our earthly plane.

"Extraordinary claims demand extraordinary proof," Dr Smith says, "and time and again, these psychics simply refuse to take part in genuine scientific trials. That's really all you need to know."

We finish our tour of Jean's house. Over tea and biscuits, Roberts talks of triboluminescence, recordings trapped in the fabric of buildings, geomagnetic access points acting as some kind of Stargate entry points into the spirit world (and we always thought that was Thatto Heath station). We get the feeling we're being drawn into a process of persuasion, rather than genuine scientific enquiry.

To SevenStreets, there's nothing more alarming than someone who unflinchingly knows the answer first, and then attempts to map out a route towards it. Liverpool's particularly full of them.

Mix a few centuries of maritime folklore, a few sprigs of Celtic spirituality, a dash of Catholic purgatory and stir together for 800 odd years and you've got a potent brew of demons seeping from the walls of our city.

There's no mistaking Roberts' enthusiasm to all things psychic. He set up the Thought Workshop, a centre for psychic studies, still lectures around the world and is a regular on Most Haunted. His skill? "My pineal gland is bigger than other peoples'," he tells us. "I believe that's what gives me the gift of seeing." Should've gone to Specsavers, we'd have thought. Whether talking to the dead, seeing them float through walls or witnessing their otherworldly squeals with his psychic iPods, Roberts is very clear about one thing: ghosts exist. "All human experience and emotional activity impregnates the atmosphere's 'natural memory bank' rather like data stored on a computer. Occasionally the memory is tripped and the replay of events takes place: causing 'ghosts' to appear."

So far so 'I can change the laws of physics'. We ask him why, this being so, there has yet to be any scientifically documented proof of life after death. "I believe that one day, when scientific laws – currently unknown – are discovered, we will be able to combine the paranormal with everyday science," he says. "Let's face it, people once thought it was impossible to land on the Moon..." Roberts has chronicled many of these computer malfunctions in his Spooky Liverpool series of books (a kind of celebrity deathmatch with that other chronicler of nonsense, Tom Slemen).

Fans of prolific paranormalist Slemen have even waged a war of words on Amazon saying: "I would not recommend Spooky Liverpool. I would recommend the excellent and legendary Tom Slemen." "I wonder who wrote those reviews?" Roberts says with a knowing little smile.

Jean, meanwhile is happy. Her suspicions have been confirmed. "I always knew there was something strange in this house. It's amazing how you've picked it up." Less amazing, we offer, is that, by calling a psychic to your house, it's an easy hunch to make that you're not after a quote for cavity wall insulation, but that you're a believer? "No, I have a completely open mind on it," Jean says. She later shows us her scrapbooks – and adds that, as a keen local historian, she runs tours of the house for local interest groups. "I can't wait to tell them about the ghost, now it's official..." You have to wonder, don't you: Is it our houses that are haunted? Or us?

There's nothing more alarming than someone who unflinchingly knows the answer first, and then attempts to map out a route towards it

STAND UP, ROUTINE

Joe Powers raises the dead, if not his audience. Michael Marshall was there to witness the magic.

"If there's anyone in the auditorium not prepared to have their secrets revealed and receive messages from the other side please leave now."

As introductions go, 'psychic' Joe Power's pulls no punches, and the crowd of under 100 people seated in the Envi nightclub are suitably prepared. Nobody leaves. We're here for the revelations, warts and all.

Well, some of us are. Others, it's fair to say, are here because tickets have been reduced by 75% on Skiddle, and there's little to do on a Sunday evening. Whatever the reason, it wasn't long before the 'other side' got in touch... with staggeringly meh results.

It's hard to say what my personal highlight was, in an evening of cringe-worthy lows. It might have been the moment Joe, having established an audience member's murdered brother never returned home, relayed that the brother was "killed some distance away" because Joe "wasn't feeling it was here." We're sure Envi will be pleased at that revelation.

Moving on, we established that someone had cancer, or a cancer scare. With a reading so specific as to include anybody who ever worried their mole looks a bit iffy, it's no surprise this fishing expedition proved successful, with an audience member confirming his granddaughter has cancer. Barely missing a beat, Joe offered: "Have you got to go back to the hospital? Why are (the spirits) saying X rays?" I'll be honest Joe, I'm not psychic, but I imagine those might be related to the cancer he just mentioned.

Things got worse with the next reading: "The next person who's coming through is a girl who would have taken her own life."

When more than one volunteer was forthcoming, he delicately clarified: "As in hung themselves?" What followed amazed even me, a skeptical veteran of more than a few dozen such shows, and something of a Joe Power connoisseur (google it): having located the volunteer through these two questions, thirty seconds later Joe paused as if hearing a new message from the spirits: "Hang on... just give me a minute... would she have hung herself?" Clearly an astounding display of short term memory, if nothing else.

If the readings weren't enough to make the audience cringe, Joe's incessant stream of unsuccessful questions surely ought to have been. "What falls on the 20th?" "Who is Paul?" "What is the number 27?" "Who is Allan?" (and can he help us figure out who Paul is, I wonder?) "Where does Joe fit in?" (which, by odd coincidence, was the same question I'd been asking all night). For a man in claiming to be in contact with the dead, he asked a lot of questions of the living.

Worse still were the disappearing questions - questions perfectly weighted and intoned to seem insightful in any direction.

Joe carefully asked the volunteer with the murdered brother: "Did they not get the people that was [sic] responsible?" - The answer: "Yes, they locked them up for life", to which Joe responds: "Yes, he's telling me he's happy his killers faced justice".

Why not just say that in the first place, Joe?

Perhaps the highlight came earlier in the evening, when I was told the front row seats were reserved for a group who arrived with 'VIP' stamped on their hands. It was this group of VIPs Joe returned to several times during the show, curiously enough. There is a technique revealed by 'mediums' who later admitted themselves to be fraudulent, where audiences would be padded out with former clients - where a statement routinely confirming details from a prior reading seems, to the unknowing audience, to be an astounding insight.

While it's impossible to say this was knowingly employed by Joe, it's worth pointing out that a little light inquiry around the audience before the show revealed at least two audience members who'd had private readings with Joe previously.

Actually, no, I know very well my highlight of the evening: it was after the interval, where the crowd - perhaps bored by the incessant questions from the stage, the coarse revelations ("Have you had the snip?", "You like to dress up in women's clothing!"), or the repetitive conclusion that every spirit contacted had nothing more insightful to offer than to "just let you know they are OK" - began talking amongst themselves.

The audience came to see Joe Power for 'an evening of psychic entertainment'. I imagine they were left disappointed on both counts.

Michael Marshall is Vice President of the Merseyside Skeptics Society
merseysideskeptics.org.uk

CARD TRICKS

David Lloyd seeks answers from a Liverpool psychic. What could possibly go wrong?

You have to be in a very dark place before you decide that talking to dead people is your only way out. It's a place I find myself in. And it's a course I've recently been plotting.

It's easy to be cynical in a rational world. The laws of physics bounce and scatter light around you: mass, acceleration and motion beautifully choreographed in a ballet of equal and opposite reactions. You remain, steadfastly, at the core of your very own cosmos. But when an unexpected force corrodes your hardwired belief system – such as the death of a loved one – all bets (and Newtonian laws) are off.

For now, the faint possibility of improbable physics and para-science became the only things worth pursuing. And so I found myself shopping for psychics.

Death's arrival is nothing at all. It's a breath and a silence. But it's as profound as the falling of autumn apples, and so numbingly unfathomable you can feel the cogs in your head whirring and clicking, as if a damaged DVD has been rammed home.

And, as you try to make sense of the nothingness, it renders every rule you'd thoughtlessly obeyed into a sudden and grinding confusion.

The doubt is the crack into which the psychics crawl. Merseyside's not short of psychic fixes. Leasowe has a Sixth Sense Academy, where you can train to become a psychic detective in your spare time. There's a Psychic College near Sefton Park, psychic fairs every other week in a community hall near you, and palm readings and a pint offers at pubs from Crosby to Calderstones. In short, in this town, you're never more than six feet away from someone who sees dead people. But how do you choose a psychic? There's no Trip Advisor to the other world, no Rough Guide, no fingering the goods at John Lewis and keeping the receipt in case, when you get home, you realise it's just not you.

For a psychic shopping trip, I had to follow my hunches. I cold-read the google ads, the purple and black websites complete with flashing GIFs and comic sans, and count the exclamation marks and smileys in the testimonials. My metaphysical leniency did not – and could never – allow for para-normal punctuation.

The world of psychic self promotion is as ethereal as ectoplasm. Trying to trace a good one as slippery as catching spirits in a dream catcher. Like all good urban myths, there's always a friend of a friend who saw some old woman in a caravan who was amazing. She told them everything. And there was no way she could have known...

Fortunately, the virtual realm of the internet is the perfect hunting ground for spooks. And it's here I track down Jo – to a leafy avenue on the Wirral, of all places. On her website, Jo describes herself as a professional psychic (so no Watchdog Rogues' Gallery for her. She's fully accredited). For £25 she promises to assist people from 'all walks of life, with all kinds of problems.' "Many people feel lost and in need of guidance at some time in their life," she says.

"We have lost the understanding of the meaning of life and we have forgotten the secrets of the universe and how we all have unlimited potential to be and do whatever we desire." Who wouldn't pay £25 for the secrets of the universe? I'd pay twice that for the secrets of Penn and Teller.

There was only one secret I wanted to unlock, though. And I'd pay everything I had for that. There's nothing big or clever about grief. It's a longing that rips at the fabric of your sanity. But it's also, obscenely, a companion you're reluctant to shake off. For, while it stalks you, it's also the most reliable conduit to the person you've lost. Seeing a medium is, I figured, as comforting as scratching a deep and nagging itch. If the drugs don't numb the pain, maybe a psychic can.

Jo welcomed me into a handsome, large family home – trickling water sculptures, pewter dragons and polished quartz scattering the surfaces. "I'm not a fortune teller as such," she says, "I believe we have the power to create our own future and would never take away another person's power in the way I have seen many so called psychics do. This doesn't mean I don't make predictions, I've predicted countless situations that prove to be correct time and time again..." Talk about keeping your options open. Is she or isn't she?

My allotted hour would tell. The session begins with a clumsy shuffle of the tarot deck: if my fortune depended on not dropping these cards I've had it at first base. Jo talks of issues surrounding the ownership of a house, of communication problems with a loved one, of misunderstandings and a young man with devilish intent. So far so daytime soap, I think.

Yes, they could relate to me. But, then, they could relate to the fact that I'm crap at shuffling oversized cards with saucy pictures of heaving sorceresses straight out of Skyrim on them. It's after the card session that things start to unravel. The cards are the warm up act, helping Jo to zero in on my spiritual cross-hairs. "Would you like me to go into spirit?" Jo asks. "I've been developing my ability to communicate with our loved ones in spirit and I'll pass on any messages I receive." Well, in for a penny... "This person, I can see him now, he had terrible headaches..."

Jo clutches her head, "and nerve damage all down one side..." Suddenly I am untethered. Jo is seeing Mark. And Mark is dead. The laws of physics have been upturned. Scattered about as carelessly as a tarot deck on an onyx coffee table. "Go on," I say, trying my best to stick to the skeptic line – Don't give them anything. "He's laughing, he's saying you gave him red wine when you shouldn't have..." I fumble at a quick calculation. How many people enjoy red wine? Plenty. How many people who have died would, possibly, have been on medication strong enough to warrant abstinence? A fair few. "...and dark coffee. He loved strong coffee..." Damn. That's cranked my calculations towards the spot on the dial marked 'freaky coincidence at best'.

For an hour, Jo talks of Mark's gratitude for the way I cared for him: "he's telling me you were brilliant. You were his angel." He did use the word brilliant. That's exactly how he described me, I think. I fight back the tears, I pinch my thighs. What's happening here? "I can see you splashing water on his face..." she says. Well, yes, when he was in the hospice I used to shave him.

Now, as a DHL van rumbles past outside and a low autumn sun fleetingly stings my eyes, these private moments are being relayed to me as clearly as if Jo had been lurking in the shadows of the hospice bedroom. Watching us, while we stumbled hopelessly through the final act.

How does that make me feel? Am I comforted? Is this magical thinking, or other-worldly communication? I'm not so sure. I'm reminded of a family friend who lost two sons at Hillsborough and, to this day, sees psychics: unwilling, and unable to be the first to hang up the phone.

There is a process to grief, as there is to life. And that process must end. But what if your dearly departed has a talk time with unlimited minutes? What if. What if...

But I warm to Jo. Despite my lack of sleep and hunger for answers, my barometer is still, I think, accurate. She's warm, caring, and has a steely determination to grope her way to an understanding when my puzzled responses indicate a 'miss'. "It must mean something, they're telling me it's relevant..." she says, when I admit to not knowing a Barbara.

"This is important, the cards say so..." when I'm hesitant over a quarrel with a female friend. As the reading ends, Jo looks obviously moved.

She asks me whether I have any questions. Anything I want to ask? "Does he know I'm here?" I ask. "Of course. And he's giving you a hug. He says he gave you a hug recently, and you felt it, didn't you?" That's the money shot. He did. I did. It was last night, about three in the morning. But surely I was only dreaming? I remember it vividly, as I do the 'common side effects' clause on my antidepressants: bizarre, lucid, and vivid dreams.

I'm caught in a borderland skirmish. But I honestly don't know which side I'm fighting for.

The next day, I meet Michael Marshall, co-founder of the Merseyside Skeptics. I tell him about my experience, of the impressive hits, and the blurring of the boundaries between what I know, and what I feel. But I'm too ashamed to tell him the truth: that, on some level, I witnessed Jo bring the dead to life. In her sunny sitting room. In Prenton.

"Did you get it recorded?" he asks, eagerly. "Well, no, she said she could, but she wasn't sure if she had any batteries..." "Did she give you his name?" Not exactly... "What do you remember, exactly, from the session?" I remember the facts I've just recounted. Maybe a couple more.

Michael doesn't need to say anything. It's to his ultimate credit that he doesn't, then and there in Starbucks, call me an idiot. "So, from an hour's conversation, you've given me, what, six facts?"

"You have to remember," Michael says, fixing me with his gaze, "if a psychic tells you something purporting to come from a loved one, what they're really doing is altering the memories you have of them. And memories are precious. They're the only things we can rely on. They're the proof that remains."

I want to talk about zero point energy, of the quantum soup of subatomic particles that bind us inexorably together. But the angry intersections of the cafe, the harsh cold surfaces and the shrill beeping of smartphones ricocheting around like charged atoms in collider make me realise: a chain store is no place to look for the God particle.

And then I remember. At first, Jo referred to her spiritual connection as 'she' - a sensible guess, I suppose. It was only after my prompting that there was a spiritual sex change.

"We'd love for there to be something in this," Marshall says, "but it comes down to one thing. Evidence. Show us the evidence, and we'd be the first to hold our hands up."

Yeah, it's all nonsense, you tell your pre-grief self. But what if it's not? Wouldn't it be churlish to stick a big 'Return to Sender' on any future communication? Later, at home that evening, I'm still trying to process the doubt and disquiet – and then I remember a simple truth. In life, Mark would never chat to anyone who collected pewter dragons, so there's no way he'd do it in the afterlife. This much I do know. And, as the Cosmos continues to turn, I return to the silence in the house.



Memories are precious. They're the things we can rely on. They're the proof that remains.



Ramsey Streets

Many Ramsey Campbell stories are set in specific Liverpool locations. Here are just seven.

Mackintosh Willy

An old shelter in Newsham Park is the setting for a disturbing tale concerning an old tramp, to whom there is more than meets the eye.

The Companion

A youth is pursued through a fairground in New Brighton by a gang of ne'er-do-wells, taking to a ghost train to escape.

The Brood

An insomniac is unnerved by an old woman standing underneath a lamppost outside his flat on Princes Avenue and resolved to investigate who she is - and why local pets are disappearing.

The Man In The Underpass

A young girl forms a connection with some unusual graffiti in an underpass off West Derby Road.

Creatures of the Pool

Gavin's father has gone missing. As he searches for him and begins to piece together Liverpool's myth and history he starts to realise that the city's connection with what lies in the ground and the water has formed its present. The book is crammed with real-world historical detail on Liverpool.

The Face That Must Die

A homophobic killer stalks the streets of Aigburth and Toxteth in this bleak, hallucinatory thriller.

Calling Card

A miserable tour of Liverpool lends no respite for a woman who lives on Lark Lane, seemingly haunted by a ghost of Christmas past. Commissioned by the Post, it was initially unused, having been deemed too horrible.

SPOOK CITY

Novelist Ramsey Campbell talks to Robin Brown on how Liverpool shaped him as a writer. Photography by Matt Thomas.

I look on from the bay window onto the front lawn and leafy street in Wallasey.

¨Do your neighbours know what you do?"

¨Yes... I haven't been run out of town yet!" replies Ramsey Campbell, a man often referred to as the country's greatest living horror novelist.

I was actually pondering what it might be like to have a well-known author as a neighbour, but Ramsey answers the question as if I'd suggested that perhaps a man of his profession should not be allowed to live in the midst of people. His warm greeting, an Escher-print t-shirt and pair of comfy slippers indicate that nothing could be further from the truth.

Campbell, a writer for half a century, started off writing in a fictional universe; namely a Lovecraftian town called Brichester before being ditched altogether in favour of the author's hometown.

By the time of Creatures of the Pool – described by Campbell as his ultimate Liverpool novel and ultimate SevenStreets novel – it's clear that Liverpool has become as much a character as any of Ramsey's human (or non-human) cast. In his short stories and novels the city takes on a whole new aspect; a city haunted by shadows, connected with its past, harbouring people and things to be avoided.

Campbell's journey to authorship started with a chance encounter with a copy of Weird Tales, a pulpy anthology that was something of a gateway drug to youthful minds attracted to the escapism of science-fiction and horror.

¨It was one of those places that sold sweets and books in Southport on Seabank Road, including these American imports with a half-crown sticker on the front. The cover had a birdlike grotesque in the foreground in this black desert, being approached by two monstrous skeletons with huge skulls. If that was the cover what would it be like inside? At seven I was too young for it and my mother wouldn't let me buy it but the memory of it stayed with me.

¨I picked it up a few years later to find that it's a vulture that's painted quite badly with two human skeletons in the background. But my mind latched on to the original image and wanted it to be stranger - it invented this even more bizarre image. And I've been doing it ever since."

This is something of a trend in Campbell's work; stories rooted in everyday and brought to life by detail where the protagonist gradually realises that something rationally inexplicable is taking place. Whether it's all in the mind of the narrator or main character is often left for the reader to decide.

¨The writing that I enjoy - and the writing that I try to create - is something that makes you look again at something you take for granted. One of my first stories, The Cellars, is essentially a historical document now of Liverpool city centre as the characters walk this route between Bold Street and to Old Hall Street. And I did the walk; I always go and look again, noticing details I'd never seen before that I could use.

In his earlier works Campbell describes a Liverpool not seen for decades; a Liverpool down on its luck – full of blasted landscapes and joblessness. It was fertile ground for a writer who melded landscape and unconscious terrors.

¨In those days I would go to cinemas - The Homer in Great Homer Street and another in Kensington. To get to them you would pass these derelict streets; through this wasteland that Liverpool was in the war.

In The Doll Who Ate His Mother, Liverpool is the main character - this slumbering beast

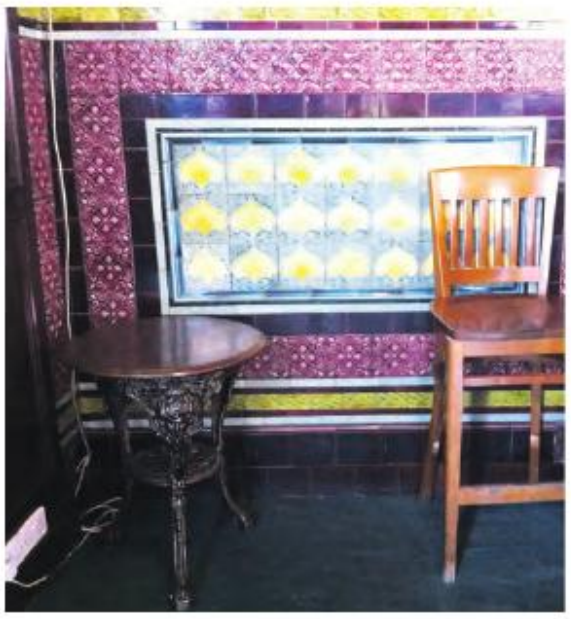
Campbell accepts that Liverpool has very much shaped the writer he has become and though it's tempting to speculate that there is something in the city that has spawned several more renowned genre writers – not least Clive Barker, who has used Liverpool in much of his writing, most obviously in The Forbidden, the story that became Candyman – he seems inclined to regard of it as coincidence, while acknowledging that he played a part in aiding Barker's rise to the top table of horror. However, another luminary of the genre hints at something more fundamental between Liverpool and the writers it spawns, as Campbell says:

¨Stephen King says something in Danse Macabre to the effect that in my first novel, The Doll Who Ate His Mother, Liverpool is the main character; this slumbering beast."

Can a city – its architecture and race memory and scar tissue – affect the minds of the people who live, write and work there? JG Ballard would certainly have something to say about that but it seems that Campbell's work is a synthesis of influences, of which the city is a vital part.

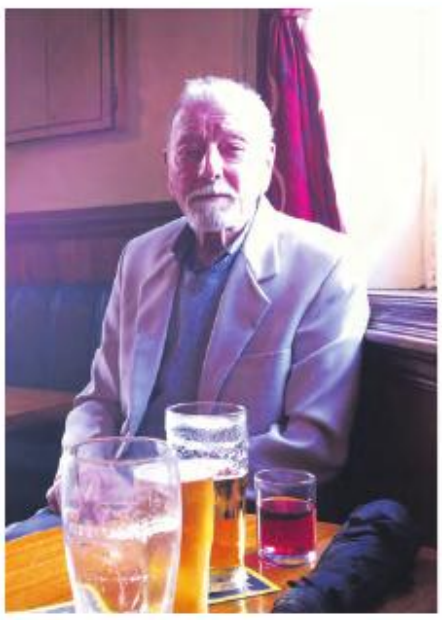
Having digested much of his work over the last 18 months I have begun, as Campbell says, to look again; looking up at the rooftops and facades and down at the flooring and paving, pondering what lies beneath the streets and the rolling Mersey. Liverpool's rich, deep, febrile history is evident in its buildings, its road names and peculiar topography. Whitechapel, Princes Avenue and James Street look different to me now with the added context of Campbell's masterful prose, which lends the suspicion that there is something else at the edge of our perception, something we might glimpse if were we simply to look again. The creeping suspicion that, somehow, something is vaguely wrong.

See Ramsey Campbell reading a new ghost story and and taking questions at Linghams Booksellers in Heswall on Friday 11 October at 6.30 pm. Phone 0151 342 7290 to reserve tickets.



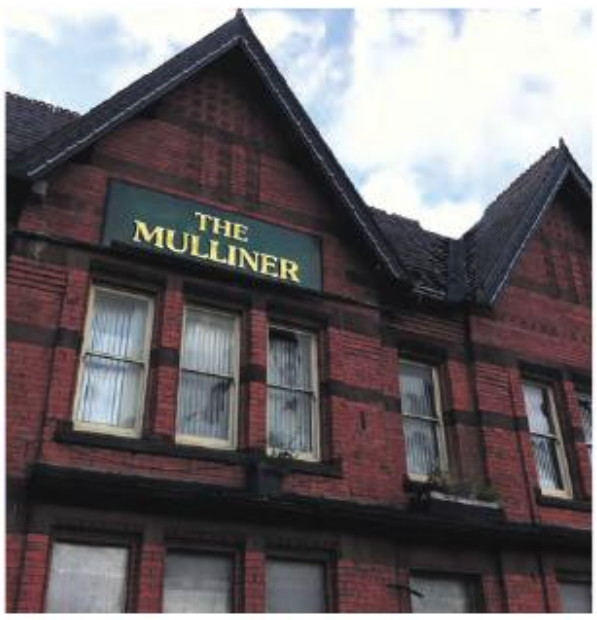












THE SMITHDOWN SIX

Once there were ten pubs on Smithdown Road – a popular pub crawl for students. But the area's stuttering regeneration and changing dynamic has taken a heavy toll on its characterful public houses. Robin Brown reminisces.

The Boundary is well-named, marking the end of Lodge Lane, Tunnel Road, Smithdown Lane and Smithdown Road. Five roads reach deep into Granby, Edge Hill, Allerton, Wavertree and the edgelands of the city centre here, and the The Boundary is a last outpost. The pub has traditionally marked the beginning of the Smithdown Ten – a rite of passage that many students take on, a pint in each, at the end of exams, term or year.

I have completed the pub crawl half a dozen times – the first when there were still ten pubs on Smithdown Road. The last – in recent weeks – was a shadow of its former self. There are now six pubs on Smithdown (The Smithdown Six, incidentally, sounds like a bad thriller) and few are in rude health. The first impressions of The Boundary, however, are optimistic. Despite the electronics, shiny new beer pumps and messages warning that drugs will not be tolerated, very little has probably changed in 100 years; certainly not since I first ventured in.

I ask the barmaid if I can take some photos. "It's such a great old place," I offer, weakly. She shakes her head with a look that speaks volumes. "You should try working here."

She has a point. The pub had a reputation for violence that saw it threatened with closure, but it feels like one of those places where anything could happen. A friend once saw a quadriplegic chap in the front bar laid out on a gurney; apparently unable to speak he would communicate to his mates either side when he was ready for a slurp of beer or a draw on a fag by blinking is right or left eye.

It is a grand old place, though. Amid the 60s pub furniture – now old enough to take on a charm of its own – and betting forms that cover the walls The Boundary is full of authentic period details; huge advertising hoardings lauding the wares of the Matthew Brown Lion Breweries and Sela Very Rare Scotch Whiskey. Not that you'd know it now – if you're looking for beer there's a choice between Tetley's Bitter and ghastly Smoothflow. I sense that the real-ale revolution will bypass The Boundary, and all the better for it.

Next up used to be The New Campfield, certainly my least favourite of the original Ten. It felt like a dangerous place to be; no romanticising for this boozer that felt like a working men's club – all chipboard and formica – now an equally uninviting flat conversion. The pub's only noteworthy feature – its exterior beige tiling – has been painted black.

The Newstead Abbey has what may be the most misleading signage in Liverpool; it features the Augustinian East Midlands priory on the hoarding, creaking in the breeze, complemented by steel window shutters and ashtrays with the covers ripped off. Inside the pub is like an old couple's front room – a true public house that has a small collection of regulars orbiting the bar. Entertainment is streamed off the internet and I hear a story about a different pub in the city with a hooky Sky set-up. These satellite feeds feature a pint glass icon that denotes an authentic channel – the owners of the pub in question had simply tippexed a pint glass onto the flatscreen to fool the Sky sniffers.

The small yard out the back is even more homely. "It's like your Nan's flat," says a companion. It certainly does have a dead-end Sunday afternoon ambiance. Again there is only lager here; a collection of 50s and 60s favourites on the speakers, photos of the regulars on a fancy dress night.

Jack Jones has drunk here for 35 years, slowly moving up Smithdown Road as the pubs closer to his house – the Mulliner and the Albany – have quietly faded away. He can't go far on account of his legs.

Jack has the kind of life story you could write a book about – and it would not make a happy tale. Divorced and with both a son and a step-daughter claimed by cancer at 38, Jack is long retired. He's wearing his Sunday finery and nursing a small collection of drinks.

Jack shrugs matter-of-factly when asked why the pubs have found it hard to exist on Smithdown Road.

"There are a lot of East Europeans that live here now – they don't come to the pubs to drink – and there are less people too." He gestures around the pub.

"A lot of these people came here when the Rob Roy [on Lodge Lane] closed; otherwise it would be empty in here."

The geographical and demographical make-up of Smithdown Road has changed enormously since I first toured these pubs. Once the terraced rows were home to thousands of white working-class families and while Lodge Lane has diversified significantly in the last 50 years the area was still recognisably 'Scouse', just a handful of years ago. Walking down from the crest of the road it is clear that is no longer the case. While nearby Lodge Lane is a poster-boy for the miscegenation of different races and creeds, the top of Smithdown feels segregated into clusters of Muslims, Poles and Anglo-Saxons; it's clear that the latter are abandoning the area.

Row after row of terraces have been demolished in the last five years and, with them, the fortunes of the shops and pubs surrounding them have taken a battering. The New Campfield and The Albany were converted into flats a decade ago but The Mulliner hung on. It now stands alone and boarded up, like an outpost. Beset by buddleia and irresistible entropy, the clock is ticking.

The council owns the building and seems unsure what to do with it, but I'm full of pessimism for the grand old corner pub. And not just the Mulliner; surveying the surrounding area – flattened not by the Luftwaffe but by disastrous urban planning, stuttering regeneration and economic stagnation – on a bleak, miserable Sunday evening would be sobering. By this point I would have had five pints all those years ago. I've had just two so far so feel doubly morose.

Further down the road is the Royal Hotel, undoubtedly the grandest of the pubs on Smithdown Road; a Victorian edifice of brick and ornate tile from an era when buildings were entertainment in their own right. It's a glorious sight and a pub that always seemed busy – it was full of elderly Sikh gentlemen enjoying a Guinness the last time I was there and I'd hoped that the pub might mark the end of the rot. However Sutton Kersh has just sold the building to a developer after it























closed late in 2012. More students flats.

The Royal is Grade-II listed so its fate lies with the planners, but I can't see how it could be any other way. As Smithdown Road's fortunes have waned, so too have the pubs – cheap booze, the loss of traditional pub-goers and the general decline of the area have undoubtedly played a part but we simply don't use pubs in the same way we used to; it's an art we seem to have lost. When asked about the Smithdown Ten the rheumy eyes of the bar staff and regulars looks askance; like so many things in these sad pubs it's a thing of the past.

Next up used to be the Woodcroft, an enigmatic, dangerous pub whose main distinguishing feature in my mind was the Stygian gloom in which it was always shrouded, the curtains undrawn during the day. It had a bad reputation and went through a period where it closed, got burned out and briefly reopened – seemingly on a monthly basis. It's now painted a garish pink and an Indian restaurant; the derelict beer garden the only reminder of what was.

In need of succour – not to mention a decent pint – I press on to the Willowbank, something of an oasis on the dry Smithdown and the beginning of a new frontier, marking an artificial barrier between studentville and the top of Smithdown. The Willow is a regular of mine that serves excellent real ales – generally the only one of the original Ten that made any effort to sell a selection of decent beers – and has jukebox and darts board (I drink a pint of hoppy Golden Pippin). Regulars and students rub along together and the front courtyard heaves with drinkers in Summer. It's not without its edges and kinks, but the cast of regulars – all rejoicing in unlikely nicknames such as Cricket Paul and Politics Dave – are indicative of a public house largely doing the right things.

Beyond Gainsborough Road the tone of Smithdown Road changes significantly. There are shops here, cafes, charity shops. Oomoo and the wonderful Selam Eritrean restaurant nestle alongside takeaways, offies and general dealers promising cheap long-distance phonecalls. When I lived off Smithdown as a student, the pub I frequented most was Kelly's Dispensary. Thankfully busy, it doesn't feel like it left the late 90s. The Stone Roses are on the jukebox, there's table footy and a widescreen showing The Simpsons. The beer isn't up to much but it's nice to be back here – a place where revellers would gather for warm-ups or comedowns back in the day. There's still an aspect of that as the patrons make the most of the arse-end of the weekend with a few quiet pints.

There is literally no one in The Clachan when we arrive; a dead-eyed barman flicks through a paper and Chris Isaak's Wicked Game gives the place a funereal air. Despite the evacuation of students to managed spaces in town, 0151 733 is still student- and graduate-central so it's puzzling – startling even – that the pub is deserted.

"The students aren't here," offers the man behind the bar by way of explanation. Is it better when they're here? A pause. A shrug.

"No."

"Students don't drink in pubs any more," he mumbles; he looks like the most tired man in the world. "No one has any money." We enquire about bar snacks.

"We don't sell any, but you can bring some in from the newsagent next door if you want." He wanders off, reluctant to talk further.

The Clachan is a pub that has given up on a road that feels like it is woozily throwing a few, desperate hooks before conceding to the inevitable. I remember rowdy, colourful nights in the pub's peculiar, diagonal interior. We sit and chat in hushed tones, swapping conspiratorial glances, as if we are in a church. By the time we leave there are two blokes at opposite ends of the bar, just sitting in silence. I know as I leave, one way or another, that I'll never be back in The Clachan again.

There was once a time when, at this point, I would make my uncertain way to the Finch & Firkin with a gang of friends. Nine pints in we may have lost the odd companion, visited a takeaway or two, flirted with some giggling girls, argued about things that didn't matter, swapped some stories with the regulars. Days to tell tales of. Now the combination of the chill atmosphere, a relative lack of alcohol and the numbing realisation that many of the Liverpool pubs I've taken for granted are facing a threat that's existential in nature have sobered me up like a slap in the face.

I sup a pint of Greene King IPA in The Brookhouse – as it is these days. I used to get smashed in here every Thursday night with all my uni friends. Bad karaoke, £1 pints and tequila girls. I was in here the night Manchester United won the Champions League Cup in 1999 and scary blokes on the door asked everyone who they supported on the way out. It was cheap, cheerful and bright yellow. Nowadays The Brookhouse is rather swish inside but I can't make the connection back to the pub I used to know. It's an Ikea show-home that happens to sell beer – the difference to the Boundaries and Newstead Abbeys so vast as to be meaningless.

It's a sad end to a day that I'd hoped would be a pleasant walk down memory lane. But Smithdown – a place I once called home – seems as foreign now as it did when I first arrived in Liverpool, 16 whole years ago. Back then Liverpool was new to me, with places to be discovered and explored; forays such as the Smithdown Ten expanded my geographical and conceptual horizons, eased me into the local idiom. Pubs full of character and characters told me so much about the city that would become my home. That they're falling by the wayside, being lost to uninterested tenants or smashed down as the surrounding areas are CPOd into oblivion isn't sad because of some misty-eyed nostalgia: pubs are the glue that bind communities together; repositories for lore and folk memories; little time capsules amid the transient.

That students can no longer complete this wonderful pub crawl is, in itself, small beer. Its loss should give us pause beyond the usual hand-wringing and eye-rolling that greet the latest eulogy for lost pubs, because they're about so much more than the fabric of them, of ale and banter. To understand them – and many like them – was to understand the city. Every one was a museum of Liverpool.



Recipe of the Month: Jerk Pork

What do the city's top chefs cook at their place? Your cut out and keep guide to the city's best recipes. First up, Camp and Furnace's Food Slamming head chef, Steven Burgess jerks us off to great start.

Serves 4

2 x pork fillets, trimmed and halved, 20 cubes of diced pineapple, 50ml maple syrup
Red chilli x 2 , sliced spring onions, rapeseed oil (30ml), sea salt

Jerk marinade - blend in a food processor:

5 spring onions, 5 sprigs of fresh thyme (about 1 tablespoon chopped) 2 teaspoon salt, 1/2 teaspoon black pepper, 1 tablespoon brown sugar, 2 teaspoon ground allspice, 1 teaspoon nutmeg, 1 teaspoon cinnamon, 2 scotch bonnet peppers, 80ml soy sauce, 2 tablespoon vegetable oil 60ml sherry vinegar, 1 onion, 120ml orange juice, 2 cloves garlic, 1 teaspoon grated ginger.

Put into a container and drop the trimmed pork fillets in and leave to marinade for a day.

The following day, put the oven on 180 degrees (gas mark 3)

Season then fry the marinated pork fillets in a hot pan with rapeseed oil and seal on all sides. Put into the oven for 7 minutes. Whilst the pork is cooking, in another hot pan with very little oil until coloured on all sides then add maple syrup, toss and take off the heat. Once the pork is cooked leave to rest for two minutes

Plate the pineapple into the bowl first, five a portion. Then carve the pork fillet into three small sections and plate on top of the pineapple. Sprinkle the chillies & spring onions on top. Serve with cornbread.

Steven Burgess, Head Chef
Camp and Furnace

In Search of Scouse
by Joe Shooman

The nights are drawing in; the chill is creeping down Duke Street, ready to pounce.

Winter, however, is great for one reason: the joy of a pan of scouse. The dish that gave Liverpudlians its name has as many recipes as there are scouse mams. But where did this welcoming, warming, life-affirming dish originate?

We asked Garston's finest upcoming chef and Celeb Masterchef finalist, Les Dennis, for his take on it.

"It is a winter, heartwarming stew; I remember we didn't have a lot of money growing up. I had a paper round and the Echo on a Friday night was really heavy so I'd come home in the freezing cold, warming myself under the storage heater. Often we'd have blind scouse – the vegetarian option," he laughed.

When there was meat, he said, it "had to to be lamb, didn't it?" and a mass of root veg to warm you up.

"And a lovely bit of crusty bread. But no garlic – we didn't have that when I was a kid," he noted.

Most cultures in Northern Europe have a meat stew – Liverpool's links with Ireland, for example, could give a clue to Scouse's origin. However, it is to Scandinavia that Les attributes the evolution of what in Norwegian is called "labskaus," or "lapskaus," depending on geography.

Kaya Kerstad-Carney, musician, teacher and all-round whirlwind, hails from Narvik in Norwegian's Arctic Circle (right) – where warming foods are often essential. Bit like Garston, really.

"There's three types of lapskaus; Brun (brown), Lys (light) and Suppelapskaus (soup)," she told us.

"As Norway used to be a developing country until way after the war, Lapskaus and the likes were very important dishes as they were cheap and hearty for the climate and wallets. Things have changed a bit in Norway, but lapskaus is still going strong."

The theory is that the dish was brought here by sailors from that area, using up leftovers and cheaper cuts of meat as they visited the area.

"It's mostly a brown one around these parts. It's generally salt meat used in Norway, or whatever you had the day before. Often mixed with ham and other things," explains Kaya.

"We serve it with pickled beetroot but also with lingonberry preserve."

Dennis was recently seen on our screens as one of the finalists in Celebrity Masterchef, an achievement of which he is proud.

"It was the most terrifying thing I've ever done but absolutely worthwhile. I did actually think about making a scouse for the final.

"But it is something we all have in common; a dish we've shared throughout our history in this cosmopolitan melting pot of a city. When you meet a scouser anywhere in the world you may have different football teams, different religions even – but we can all break bread over a pan of scouse."





Bowled Over
Seven Great Scouse Houses

Maggie May's, 90 Bold Street

Scouse like yer mam used to make. Or possibly still does. Served with a spoon, with floury spuds, chunky carrots and melt-in-the-mouth stewing steak. Tesco's now sells bags of the stuff - Scouse in a Pouch. Andrew Lee's been cooking Maggie May's signature dish for 18 years: "It's been our dream to sell Scouse to go for ten years. We tried it in a tin, but it never really worked. This is the real deal," he says.

Roscoe Head, Roscoe Street

Order it the day before - "It's not part of the main menu, because if you do it properly it takes time. But ask us the day before and I'll do you a great pan of Scouse. And I'll save some for my tea, too!" says owner/chef, Carol. We can think of few things better than hunkering down in the back room, nursing a pint and a bowl.

"You don't see Scouse on many pub menus now," Carol says. "It's not the cheap meal it used to be anymore. Most pubs buy their food in, or keep it simple so they can serve two meals for a fiver. You can't cut corners with a decent pan of Scouse."

Metropolitan Cathedral, Mount Pleasant

A bubbling cauldron of freshly made scouse is a secure a fixture here as the stations of the cross. And, in the interests of religious equality, they do a heavenly version at the other end of Hope Street too.

The Granary, India Buildings

"Look, we can't tell you our secrets," says owner Alan Naylor. "But I will tell you this, we'll use lamb or beef in our recipe. Sometimes both. And we're not ashamed to say it."

Mike's Kitchen, County Road, Kirkdale

Always-busy with hungry locals, Mike's Kitchen (which also does a mean full English) is the place to head for the last decent pan of scouse before you hit the M58.

Hanover Hotel, Hanover Street

This spirited city centre institution mightn't ever grace Alistair Sawday's pages, but we doubt it cares too much. Not when the home cooking's as good as this. The Hanover Scouse, enjoyed in McCartney's Bar might just be the most Liverpool thing ever.

Guinea Gap Cafe, Brighton Street, Wallasey

Despite the location, this is no plastic Scouse substitute - but a great refuelling stop, ten minutes' walk from the Seacombe Ferry.



Healthy Eye Candy

Let's be honest here: healthy food can be an *effort* sometimes. We'd much rather be inhaling a barrel full of caramelised pulled pork and mainlining Sprite than set our eyes on an aubergine some days. So we love this 'does what it says on the tin' tumblr blog. Quite simply, a slew of gorgeous images: healthy food that looks utterly delicious and inspiring.

beautifulpicturesofhealthyfood.tumblr.com



Norge Scouse

Norwegian Lapskaus, according to Liverpool-based Norwegian, singer Kaya...

Use as much meat as you have and fill it out with potatoes and vegetables for as many people as you are cooking for. Usually one part meat to three parts veg.

1-2 tbs butter
1-2 onions
1ts salt
1/2 ts pepper
3-4dl stock (or water)
1 Bay leaf
8-10 whole black peppercorns
2tbs flour

1. Cut the meat into portion bites that fit nicely in your mouth

2. Brown on medium/high heat in a little butter, but don't overfill the pan as that will stew the meat.

3. Pour out the fat if applicable in between batches

4. Peel the onion and chop

5. Put the onions and the meat in a large pan (Can be the same as the one you fried your meat in)

6. Add salt, pepper, the stock (or water) and finally the bay leaf and whole peppercorns

7. Chop your vegetables (traditionally carrots, leek, Turnips, cabbage and swedes (not the nationality)

8. Bring to the boil, turn down the heat and simmer for 1-2hrs

9. Mix your flour with some water and add at the end of cooking time (10-15min)

10. Season to taste and serve with pickled beetroot and lingonberry preserve



Eat to the Beat

It used to be all about the music - but now Mojo's about the soul food too, as Mojo Eats adds a menu to the mix - heavy on the sliders (mini burgers) and spicy wings.

"We have always been inspired by the great dive bars of New York City and the simple, quality food they serve. We've really worked hard to put together some tempting and delicious food, and we're particularly proud of our secret hot sauce (served with our wings) which we created from scratch and is super tasty."

We're tempted by the John Lee Hooker burger, with blue cheese. Shame since they stopped the live music, we got the blues.

Mojo
Back Berry Street

Sing, Little Birdy



What's the opposite of Nandos? The Kazimier's October Feasts of Fantasia event. The latest in their occasional series marrying nocturnal feasts with flights of fantasy, The Aviary promises to shake your culinary tail feathers with a promise to flock and swoop and graze. Expect a promenade-style banquet with lashings of Kazimier goodness. And a final farewell to the garden, this summer at least. Two sittings on October 6 and 10. £40 a head.
www.thekazimier.co.uk



Cow and Co and Cakes

Our favourite magazine-store-cum-design-emporium, Cow and Co now serves a limited selection of bagels, cakes and waffles - all washed down with seriously good Origin Coffee - making their Cleveland Square HQ the perfect refuelling joint between town and the Baltic. And, as they stock Almanac and a host of great mags, the reading material's on tap too.

Cow&Cow
Cleveland Square



Apple and Quince Day

October's the time to harvest your apples - and also your quinces. Well, you can't have a good slice of Lunya's Manchego without them. Runcorn's Norton Priory celebrates Britain's lesser-known apples, but it's also home to the National Collection of Tree Quince. The fruit, a furry cousin of the apple and pear, is bitter raw but sweetly delicious cooked and preserved.

"Norton Priory is home to 23 different varieties of quince," says John Budworth, Head Gardener. "It's rare in the UK because it's very susceptible to disease and insect attack. But as it contains pectin it's ideal for making jams and jellies." Try it yourself on this day, with talks, tastings and, erm, 'fruity games'...

16 October,
Norton Priory
Runcorn



A Salt House for Castle Street

Salt House Tapas, our most dependable tapas bar, is expanding - with a new venture set to open this month, in Castle Street. Salt House Bacaro promises a Venetian take on tapas, heavy on seafoods, pizzettas (mini pizzas) and, hurrah, Prosecco. Expect exposed wood, gleaming tile and industrial cool. And, we imagine, another surefooted excursion by the team who've also given us the easy-going Hanover Street Social. Watch this space.



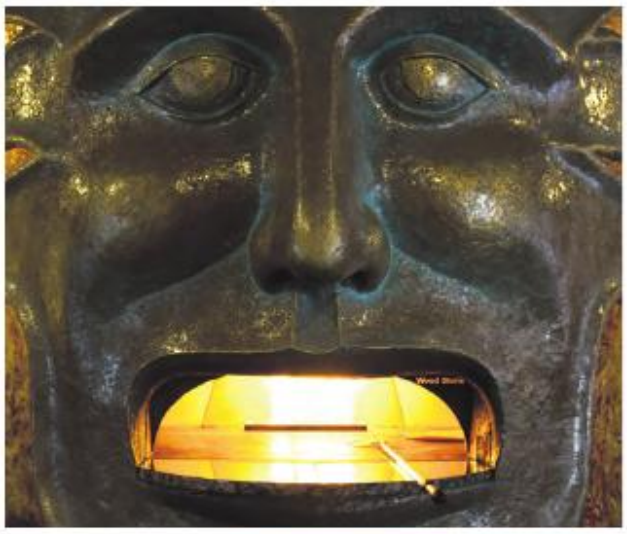
In the Nic of Time

As regular as the falling of Autumn leaves, the Harvey Nichols' pop up store is back in Liverpool ONE. We love it - but, come on guys, make it a permanent fixture, yeah? High-end condiments aren't just for Christmas you know.

Harvey Nichols Pop-Up
Manesty's Lane













MADE WITH LOVE

Il Forno is that rare beast - a showy Italian restaurant where the food lives up to the looks

Despite the shifting fortunes of Duke Street there is a little corner of Liverpool that remains, authentically and enjoyably, Italian.

In an age of jaw-breaking burgers and chain restaurants it's reassuring to see some establishments lavishing time, love and attention on their menu. Slow food - big in Italy - may not, yet, have caught on here, but when it does you can be sure of one thing: Il Forno, will lead the charge.

Pizza dough that takes two days to prove; Italian gelato prepared in the traditional way; meats and olive oil sourced direct from small suppliers in the homeland. Food prepared with love. And the name? Il Forno, meaning The Oven, is no coincidence. The vast centrepiece stone oven - full of the restaurant's pizzas, breads, baked pasta dishes and vegetables - that dominates the room is at the heart of the Italian eaterie, literally and figuratively.

Despite outward appearances – impeccable steel, glass and marble interiors and that oven that looks like it was requisitioned from an Indiana Jones movie – at heart, Il Forno is a family affair - a closely-knit team headed up by Restaurant Manager Donato Cillo and his Head Chef brother, Paulo.

Hailing from Basilicata in Italy's deep south, the brothers' Italian passion for fine food and great service combine to create a dining experience that showcases Italian dining at its laidback best. It's a place you can rely on - for a leisurely lunch, a pre theatre treat or a big family get together, with a number of themed offerings and regular wine-tasting nights exploring the restaurant's wide range of Italian wines - especially the fruity chiantis.

And you can be sure, whatever your order, the ingredients will have been sourced with care. Take Il Forno's Frantoio Biscione extra virgin olive oil - it's from a tiny independent producer in Cancellara, Potenza - the town also happens to be Paulo's birthplace. The place he first set foot in the kitchen of his family restaurant at just 13 - learning how simple ingredients, prepared with skill, could bring dishes to life. How many Italian restaurants do you know who can say their pizza knowhow comes from a Napoli pizza chef? And, no, you can't have the recipe.

The restaurant puts a high premium on its high-quality meats and cheeses, hand-picked from producers located deep within the sun drenched countryside of Parma and Salerno. They're at the core in Il Forno's signature dishes, such as Antipasto Misto Italiano, or Ossobuco Alla Milanese - veal shank braised with rosemary, carrot, orange zest, with risotto. Every two weeks sees a new delivery of gleaming Parma hams, bresaola, salami, speck and mortadella head to Liverpool before an appointment with Il Forno's meat slicer, dispensing wafer-thin morsels of intense antipasti.

Dessert is no afterthought, either. With traditional ice-cream made on the premises by a gelato master and cakes from nearby P&D's deli, there's indulgent treats like Pizza Nutella and tiramisu to delicate pannacotta.

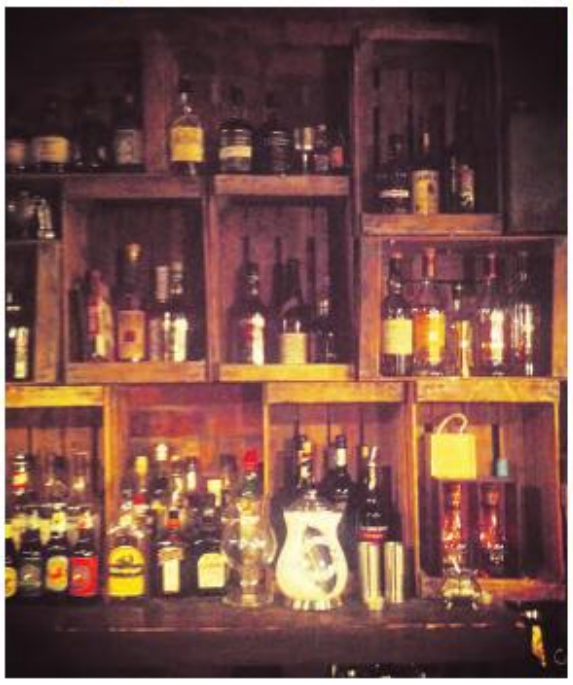
Provenance - it's a word scattered about, usually carelessly. At Il Forno, it means honest food, it means a celebration of home, and the assurance of a meal made with love.

Il Forno
132 Duke Street, Liverpool
www.ilforno.co.uk











HOW TO OPEN A BAR

We spoke to Danny Murphy from Berry and Rye to get his seven essential tips for making your nightlife impresario dreams come true...

1. Find a building

Since our first build (Aloha) we've stumbled upon a formula that comprises looking at existing venues that have closed or are struggling. We then we look to extensively refurbish and rebrand them, while working within the buildings' existing parameters (ie no major structural changes). This helps us to keep costs down. Two major lessons: when it comes to décor, raw is more! For example, bare brick is cheaper and can be more effective than plastering and painting. Secondly, if it's a vacant building try to secure a rent-free period from your landlord while you're opening. After all, it's in their interests for you to succeed. Location is vital, but that doesn't mean you have to open slap bang on the high street. For decent value, try to predict where the market will move to, rather than where it currently is. Or create an offering so unmissable that you could open in the middle of nowhere and still be busy.

2. Find a niche

You either offer something different, or do something better. Ideally, do both! We identified our first concept (the 'tiki' bar) early on, then it fleshed itself out as we went along. Whatever it is, it must be something you're passionate about for it to have substance. For example, what makes us tick is giving people a great night out. We then packaged that in a Hawaiian shirt and surrounded it with lots of rum!

3. Do the legals

There is red tape, but there are plenty of people out there who will help you. A good solicitor is worth their weight in gold; saving you hassle and money. Get them to pick the bones out of your lease before you put ink anywhere near it. Licenses aren't too bad as long as your venue doesn't have a chequered past, or the area isn't subject to restrictions. But do make sure your offer makes sense in the location (e.g. if you plan on playing loud music until all hours of the morning don't choose a venue next to a residential area...or prepare for objections!)

4. Get the cash

We used all three - loans, investors, maxing out our credit cards! When you're passionate and determined you'll do what it takes to get the money to open. Each has an upside and a downside. For us, we used the bank as little as possible, which worked in the long term (no crippling loan repayments) but it was fairly squeaky bum time in the early days. Try to get a month's grace from your suppliers when you open or have a bit in reserve, as cash will be tight in the early days. It will cost more and take longer than you think!

5. Make it look good

So far we have done most of the interior design ourselves due to costs. Plus the fact that we are owner/operators has meant we have been able to add to the venues as we have grown into them. I think our guests have embraced this too. However, designers can be great at keeping you focused on the main thing; bums on seats! Also, if like us you feel that uniformity is the enemy, stay away from 'bar furnishing' companies. You will find many more unique pieces in local antiques and bric-a-brac shops.

6. Get the staff

Staff are THE single most important part of our business. We hire for attitude, and train for skill. And we treat them with respect from the moment they walk through the door. Our senior team are pretty much all people who have been with us from day one or thereabouts and we have a fairly symbiotic relationship; they have grown as we have, and we wouldn't be where we are without them. However, it's always important to let people move on when it is time for a change.

7. Get it out there

We use Liverpool to spread the word. After all it is not a city, just a collection of villages with a few cathedrals. And the villagers love a good night out. In my opinion word of mouth here is quicker and more effective than anywhere else. And whatever you do, talk to your guests! If you're determined enough to open a business that passion will be infectious and will inevitably rub off.

The only other thing I would add is "Why do it all in the first place?" If it is simply for the money chances are it won't work. Ask yourself what gets you out of bed in the morning, and build your business around that. For me, the two things that make a great bar are the people who work there and the people who go there, and what makes me tick is putting a smile on the faces of both.

Berry and Rye
48 Berry Street
(check out their monthly pudding clubs on their Facebook page)

BOOZE NEWS



Image: Katie Lips

The Battle Over Korova

Korova is dead (or sleeping, anyway); long live Korova. Sort of.

The much-missed bar and music venue is making a comeback - but there's a twist. Because while the venue and the name are the same the similarities end there. A completely new team are behind the 'new' Korova - and the originals are not best impressed.

"It is an attempt exploit a five year local, national and international reputation we worked to build," Daniel Hunt told us, while intimating that the original Korova project is far from dead. The last venue to best the name, on Hope Street, burned down in 2010.

As for the people - also responsible for Lago and Brooklyn Mixer - behind the new venue? They promise a basement club for live music they hope will become "one of the best small venues in Liverpool ." Bands including Half Moon Run, The Front Bottoms and The 1975 are already booked and it looks like the venue's operators are intent on carrying on regardless.

With Hunt and Rob Gutmann of the original team hinting at a comeback what are the odds on two venues in Liverpool operating under the Korova name?

Get Fresh: Formby pub lauded

Formby gastropub The Freshfield has been shortlisted for The Campaign For Real Ale (CAMRA) pub of the year contest, having alreadytaken the award for the best Merseyside pub.

The Freshfield will compete against 15 other pubs across the country, following a refurbishment by owners Greene King and relaunch by licensees Simon Cox and Steve Gregory 18 months ago. Amid the leafy private estates of Merseyside's money classes and footballers it's a shrewd move.

And while the shabby chic path is frequently-trod the refit is sympathetic, with a wing of the pub decked out in the paraphernalia of a trad boozer, with piano, board games and a book section to enjoy. All it's missing is a dog.

Food constitutes that traditional modern spin on pub grub - with pies, game, fish, pates and burgers - but really it's the beer that is the star at The Freshfield.

With 14 handpumps and a genuinely interesting range of ales from the local area and beyond, The Freshfield is a good example of how a modern pub can thrive through doing the basics well.

Check-in to Motel

Rob Gutmann is a busy man. Having brought Blue Bar, Korova (see above), Lark Lane's intriguing Low bar and Alma de Cuba to Liverpool he's now embarked on another project.

His new bar, Motel on Fleet Street, opened in September and is typically characterful, a self-styled dive bar with a pot-pouri of punk and comic-book decor, cool music and street food.

No vertical drinking establishment this; Motel has a sleazy, laid back charm - service and quality of drinks is clearly key. It's easy to see people who miss the original Korova, 3345 and Modo of old digging Motel while the addition of another sophisticated bar within the Ropewalks should go towards rebalancing the area's list towards the seamier side of nightlife.

Cains plans new brewery

While Liverpool brewery Cains may currently be mothballed, ambitious plans for a massive redevelopment of the Baltic Triangle site will include a smaller craft-style brewery and retain the existing brewery tap pub.

Owners the Dusanj brothers intend to turn the site into a massive retail and leisure complex, with plans for a four-screen cinema, boutique hotel, food and drink courtyard, upscale supermarket, artisan food hall and a rooftop bar amid the listed redbrick exterior.

All brewing at the plant was halted earlier this year but work is currently scheduled to start on the site in mid-2014, pending council approval.











BLACK ICE

Islands on the top of the world - the Norwegian archipelago of Svalbard is the most northerly inhabited spot on Earth. And, as David Lloyd discovers, the wine list's not bad, either

Like laundry on a final spin I'm thrown around inside a four-by-four with tyres the size of Hampshire. I bite my lip, bang my head, and try to focus on the horizon as I shudder along roads that can only be described as 'off'.

I'm in a land about halfway between Norway and the top of the world. And my journey's just begun.

This is Svalbard, a rocky scatter of islands lost in the high Arctic. I'm travelling from Longyearbyen, its prosperous Norwegian capital, to the mining community of Barentsburg, Russia's forgotten frontier.

Without warning, the track sinks beneath a fresh drift of snow and I'm forced to swap the heated saloon of the truck with its cargo: a muscular red snowmobile.

Occasionally, due to the shift and tumble of the pack ice a glassy smooth hump breaks the surface, like the back of some huge, crystallised whale. While, punctuating the frozen desert's surface, seals loll by blowholes, deer nuzzle for scraps of lichen and, somewhere, polar bears are watching.

It's evening by the time I cross the only Russian border on the globe where visas are not required. I only know I've arrived because a windburned sign reads: "Баренцбург ферма участок' -'Barentsburg farm zone' - a suburb of long, low barns housing chickens, cattle and pigs. The animals provide all the food the 700 residents need to see them through eight months of winter until, with the breaking of the pack ice, the first ships arrive from the Motherland. Barentsburg has no airport and, save for four months of the year is cut off from civilisation. No-one in Barentsburg can afford a snowmobile.

At the centre of town an oversized bust of Lenin casts its frozen stare over the monumental Soviet buildings. A klaxon sounds signalling dinner is about to be served in the communal canteen, and families shuffle out into the snow.

The Ferrari-red livery of my snowmobile blows my cover. A man approaches.

"Can I help you?"

Alexei's a miner from the Ukrainian town of Berdychiv, his thick moustache decorated with ice crystal baubles. He removes a glove to shake my hand.

Alexei insists on giving me a tour of his town. "I'm not hungry," he says, his face smeared with the evidence of another gruelling shift.

Mining, the sole reason for the community's existence, is heavily subsidised. The remnants of old shafts and pit railways give a Klondike air to the huddled settlement. Alexei tells me the miners haven't been paid since last summer but, when the Rubles do arrive, they'll earn 12,000 a month (about £300). Until then, families are granted food credit – there's little else here to spend their money on.

With every season, the amount of low-grade coal coaxed from the town's crumbling mountains reduces. "These mines would have been closed years ago," Alexei says, "but Moscow hopes that, one day, other minerals will be found. Maybe oil." Svalbard may be administered by Norway but, according to a treaty signed in 1920, 11 nations have mineral rights. Russia's gamble – that it's cheaper to keep this brittle community alive than cryogenically freeze it until oil is found – is currently under review. Until then, a matrix of overground heating pipes piled high above the permafrost keeps the Arctic just about at arm's length.

What little coal that makes it to the town's dirty wharf usually ends its journey here, at the shore of the Greenland Sea. Russia doesn't need it, and the mining company have only secured one sale in the past year. A scree of coal blackens the frozen bay.

"Compared to Ukraine, Barentsburg pays well. There are no coalmines where we come from. Russia closed them all," Alexei says.

In summer's endless sunlight, Alexei's two daughters, with the rest of Barentsburg's 50 children, can play basketball at midnight. But they need to be vigilant. Last year, an eight year old was mauled to death by a hungry young polar bear.

As we talk, Alexei proudly points out an Olympic sized heated swimming pool complex and huge, five-storied hotel. It could never hope to fill a single floor. The town's only human-scale development is a memorial for the 140 miners who perished when their plane exploded in the mountains behind Longyearbyen airport ten years ago.

At the hotel bar we meet Tomas, a salesman for the Pernod-Ricard drinks company. "People thought I was mad coming to Svalbard to get business. But you should see how much these people drink." he says.

We order a round of vodkas. Alexei insists on paying.

A high Arctic wind picks up, rattling the windows of the hotel, and launching javelins of icicles into the air. As the vodka delivers its instant spike of heat, Alexei raises his glass.

"To Barentsburg!" he says.



Spitzbergen

Where To Stay

Longyearbyen, Spitzbergen's straggling, pocket-sized capital, is hunkered in a deep valley, beneath towering white peaks. Its brightly coloured houses a striking counterpoint to the shimmering ice. Its clutch of hotels offer surprisingly comfortable accommodation, its bars offering that discombobulating experience of drinking all night long, yet still leaving when the sun's up (at least in summer). Try the Radisson (www.radissonblu.com/hotel-spitsbergen) for rooms with a view over the Longyearbyen Fjord.

Where To Eat

The Huset Restaurant has a wine list bigger than the George V in Paris. Good to see they're not suffering too much up here. The Arctic Special buffet features succulent elk steaks and smoked Arctic char. Delicious.

How To Get Here

Try Discover The World - Artic specialists, based in Cumbria. They offer tailor-made expeditions or group tours. www.discover-the-world.co.uk

More Information: VisitNorway.com









Away Days:
Yorkshire Dales

Often overshadowed by the busier, showier Lakes, The Yorkshire Dales is 90 minutes away and offers the bucolic delights of busy markets, stunning countryside and great food.

Where

Yorkshire. Europe's best tourist attraction - beating off competition from Amsterdam, Barcelona, London and Venice in the World Travel Awards. With the country's largest number of Michelin-starred restaurants outside London, the handsome towns of Harrogate and York nearby and some of the most magnificent countryside the UK has to offer, the Dales is a bit of a no-brainer for a staycation at any time of the year.
The centre of the Dales is Wenselydale, immortalised by Robert Hardy, Christopher Timothy and Peter Davison putting their arms up cow's bottoms in All Creatures Great And Small. The West Dales are bleaker, south Dales within striking distance of Lancashire. North beautifully remote and east paves the way to the classically beautiful rolling countryside of the East Riding and the Yorkshire Moors.

Eat

Fine dining meets pub ambiance in the dining room of The Blue Lion, Leyburn, winner of the Dining Pub of the Year award three times. The George And Dragon in Aysgarth offers a similar level of good British food - adding modern twists to locally-sourced food such as rack of lamb, whole grouse and pigeon. The Wensleydale Heifer in West Witton has taken the AA Sea Fish Pub of the Year award.

Drink

The Dales are served by two famed real-ale breweries, both of which are situated in Masham. The Theakston's and Black Sheep breweries can both be visited and one or the other is likely to be found in virtually every pub in the Dales.

Stay

The Dales are holiday cottage central, with holiday lets from as little as £300 a week - try Sykes (www.sykescottages.co.uk) Skeldale House, Askrigg, is a good B&B (used as Siegfried Farnon's House in All Creatures) (www.skeldalehouse.co.uk). Helmsley, North Yorkshire, is home to the romantic coaching inn-meets-boutique hotel of the Black Swan - all roaring fires and wingback armchairs (www.blackswan-helmsley.co.uk), or try the Fox and Hounds in Sinnington, just up the A170 - a picture-perfect country inn (www.thefoxandhoundsinn.co.uk).

Do and see

The landscape is very much the star attraction in the Dales, with numerous geographical landmarks hewn from the limestone over the millennia. From the Buttertubs (north of Hawes) and Gaping Gill's Stygian depths to the awe-inspiring Malham Cove and Goredale Scar (the latter, supposedly, Tolkein's inspiration for Helm's Deep); and the limestone caverns at Ingleton and numerous waterfall walks (Ingleton Falls, Asygarth Falls and Askrigg's Mill Gill among them) the area is a delight.
The Leyburn Shawl walk provides some of the best views of the Dales' varied landscapes; a circular walk from Malham village takes in both Malham Cove and Goredeale Scar. Over on the eastern edge kids (and big kids) will love Lightwater Valley near Ripon - home to what was once the biggest wood-framed rollercoaster in the world, the bone-shuddering Ultimate.

Getting there

Head up the M6, take Junction 36 or 37 and head right. The journey should take around two hours due to the up-hill-down-dale roads that characterise the area.



Dog Gone

In a city with a dog grooming parlour on every corner, it's perhaps inevitable that Stena Line has launched its upgraded Dog Lodges on its Birkenhead to Belfast route.
"Your Very Important Pooch can now travel in comfort," says Neil Palmer, Route Marketing Manager, "we have space for eight ferry doggie guests," he adds. He's obviously not been on the Friday night sailing. There's loads more. You just gotta know where to look.
The specially heated, security protected lodges come with complimentary food and a designated walking area.

Stena Line
12 Quays Terminal,
Birkenhead
www.stenaline.co.uk



An Island For All Seasons

Chalk another new route up for Liverpool John Lennon Airport, as Larnaca comes online - with Easyjet flights to Larnaca all year long. Cyprus in winter is a tempting proposition: freed from the Ayia Napa massive the island's beaches breathe again. This island enjoys winter temperatures hovering around 20 degrees C at the coast, but it's also home to the most southerly ski lifts in Europe located in the Troodos mountains. The new, twice-weekly flights to Larnaca will start on November 2 with fares from £30.99 one way. Flights will operate on Tuesdays and Saturdays.

www.liverpoolairport.com



Talking of JLA - the airport takes delivery of a new magazine this month, Voyage - which promises to feature honest, impartial guides written by Europe's best bloggers. It's produced and designed by Liverpool's Archetype studio and it's written and edited by, ahem, SevenStreets. Look out for it in the Departure lounge - and let us know what you think!



Thank You Derry Much

Not hopped over to Derry yet to sample its Capital of Culture celebrations? You're missing out. Stroke city's a great place to visit any year but, as its year in the spotlight comes to an end, now's the time to sneak a weekend break. Carol Ann Duffy performs on October 5, and Mark Wallinger's first Irish solo show runs throughout October.

www.cityofculture2013.com

Bargain Break



Fancy a weekend in Krakow? Low Cost Holidays are offering two nights with flights in the three star Hotel Petrus for under £100 (£93 to be precise). Christmas markets and the charming old town are just minutes from your door...

www.lowcostholidays.com

STUFF

You can never have enough. So surround yourself with the best.

















Duly Noted

New term, new notebook. Make it count.

1. Welsh Notebook
notonthehighstreet.com

2. Muji Jotter
muji.com

3. Japanese Board Ring Jotter
Presentandcorrect.com

4. Travel Journal with pockets
Presentandcorrect.com

5. Marimekko Kompotti notebook
John Lewis

6. K Two Lined notebook
John Lewis

7. Quiver pen holder
thepaperie.com

8. Leuchtturm1917 notebooks
thepaperie.com

9. Follow Your Dreams
smythson.com









Snap Happy

Ready for their close up. Three of the year's smartest new pocket cameras.

Panasonic FT 5
With a decent 4.6x optical zoom for a 28-128mm equivalent zoom, a rigid waterproof body and built in Wi-Fi and NFC (near field communication) Panasonic's tech-tastic latest addition to the Lumix line keeps them head and shoulders above the rest. (Price £299)

Canon SX280 HS
The first Canon with the clever Digic 6 processor, this is all about the image quality. With a 20x optical zoom and Wi-Fi connectivity, the image quality is the best in class in the ISO sensitivity range, and the image stabilisation system is a gem. (Price £260)

Samsung Galaxy EK GC 100
Its Android 4.1 operating system makes picture sharing a breeze - and this camera-cum-smartphone, while on the heavy side, is a brave leap forward, with a staggering 21 x optical zoom and a decent app-friendly phone to boot. (Price £389)

The World's Best Pen

We love the online reviews of wirecutter.com, so when they claim the Uniball Jetstream as the 'World's Best Pen', we just have to take it for a test drive. Grab one from John Lewis, and you'll see they're bang on. Fluid, precise, sleek and smooth - they're the James Hunt of pens. But at Formula Four prices - just £3 a pop. Get one. Your notes to the milkman (what else do you use pens for, anyway?) will take on epic proportions.

Uniball Jetstream, from £2.99

More OR Less?

Ceramic Tea Pots

We were taken with a Bluecoat Display Centre teapot (first right). Until we saw the price. So what are the less eye-watering alternatives?



Tea Pot, £385
Bluecoat Display Centre



Hamilton Teapot, £22.50
Marks and Spencer



Puritan Teapot, £25
John Lewis



Denby Heritage, £40
Debenhams

STYLE + SELF

Because, in the end, it's all about you.



Metal Guru

Is it you? It better me. Metallics are shimmering all over the place this season. You should see our shed. It's like Cammell Lairds in here. But with ruched ra-ra skirts and glittery stilettos. So, like Cammell Lairds on dress down Fridays, then.

1. Burst Shoe, £85
Dune

2. Metallic Shift Dress, £55
Asos

3. Metallic Leather Driving Gloves, £22
Accessorize

4. Butterfly, by Matthew Williamson for Debenhams: £85
Debenhams

5. Prowl shoe, £60
Office









Swift Tailor

One chap's mission to make us smarter, one instagram at a time.

James Clayton likes to dress up. And he's not averse to the odd selfie. Put them together and you've got an Instagram account of one stylish young chap: steering the rest of us away from the

"I setup my Instagram account last year as a hobby, posting a few pictures of what I was wearing to work and on the weekends," he says. "Now I've over 4,000 followers and have been invited to lots of A/W collection launches and parties. I don't think there's any such thing as being overdressed..."

James' tips for Autumn/Winter

"Autumn/Winter 2013 for menswear, for me, is all about tailoring. Having popped along to the A/W 13 press event for Next, it was apparent it isn't just me who thinks this. There was a plethora of new style suits, blazers and coats for the dark, cold months. The whole collection is shot through with colour, texture and pattern, from a Prince of Wales check double breasted number, to a woollen, almost mohair, blazer with flecks of burnt orange and brown (right).

"Another big trend for me this season is the print. Whether it be a print shirt, a more bold print blazer, or better still, a pair of patterned print trousers, it's a statement piece that can make you stand out from the crowd. Check out the Dries Van Norten AW13 collection for some inspired designs. I've recently bought a few key pieces from Topman, including a blue print blazer and a pair of black and white print trousers. These are an affordable high-street alternative to catwalk designer pieces.

"Accessories are key. Whether it's a silk pocket square, some wrist candy, or my favourite, some very colourful socks, these finishing touches to a suit can send the look stratospheric. If you can incorporate a print or patterns into these accessories you're onto a winner. A paisley tie or gingham pocket square is bang on trend."

Instagram: OneYoungGent







Tweed Blazer, £90
Next



Grey lambswool blazer, £290
House of Fraser



The Japanese Have A Word For It...

Until now, we thought Kigokochi was a series of cute and collectible Japanese figures. We were, like, way off. It is, in fact, the science of clothing materials. And it's something they take very seriously over in Toko. As you knew they would. Take the new range of Goldwin skiwear - now available exclusively in the UK at Ellis Brigham (Bold Street). On the surface it may well look like a smart ski jacket. But there's a lot going on underneath that waterproof skin. There should be - they're a stinging £499.99.

"The jacket features the four elements that collaborate well and create the best "Kigokochi"," Goldwin say.

It's only when the synergy of these elements - lightness, stretch, warmth, design - combine that true Kigokochi can be attained.

Does it stop you coming back from your snowboarding holiday with a hideously bruised arse, though? No. Keep working on that one, Goldwin.

Men's Hiryu Jacket, £499.99
Ellis Brigham, Bold Street



Skincare Meets Science

If you're in doubt about the claims made by new skincare brand, Environ, just hunt down YouTube videos of its founder, Dr. Des Fernandes, a world-leading South African plastic surgeon. His research into skin cancer prevention has informed this hard-working and science-led range of treatments for skin that's seen, well, better days.

His brigade of vitamin packed serums, creams and lotions is now stocked in Harvey Nichol's Beauty Bazaar - and we're hooked. Think of them like your five a day for your face (and, ladies, your decollete too). We're on a Vitamin C-drenched starter, with an AVST, pentapeptide-potent main, and some collagen-stimulating eye cream from the C-Quence range. And we're looking, if not good, then definitely better.

Environ, Harvey Nichols Beauty Bazaar Liverpool ONE

Insane in the Membrane



Chances are, one or more of your friends are on it. Chances are you've inadvertently flicked over to the infomercial late one night: sweaty, hard bodied yanks gurning in lycra. And yet, as any random YouTube search for "before and after" videos shows, the results do look impressive. Go look. So, does it work?

"Insanity uses a technique known as max interval training," says personal trainer David Bryant. "This is a high intensity blast of mostly cardio-based exercises and, if you follow the form exactly, you will see results. Not especially in muscle building, but definitely in tone and leanness."

But, we ask - hard, toned and ripped? In two months?

"Well, that depends what you bring to it at day one," he says. "The programme isn't for the very out of condition."

As the old joke goes. I wouldn't start from here...

"If you stick to the programme, you'll burn around 800 calories a session," Bryant says. "But you have to sweat. Maximum intensity means working out until you can't do another rep."

The downside?

"Nothing beats the one on one you get from a real trainer. DVD's are great, but you can always turn them off."

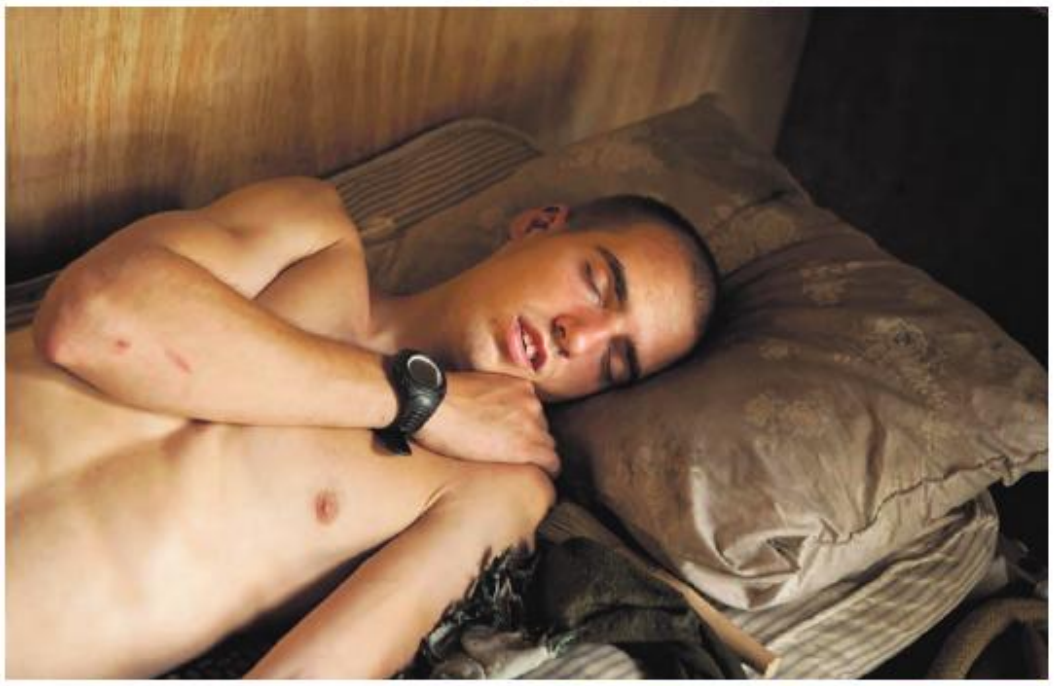
Insanity, £99
www.beachbody.co.uk

UNDERLINED

Want to check out the best of what's going on in your hometown? Here are just some of the highlights, courtesy of our city-hopping tourist sister site, LiverpoolUnderlined.com











ART

Abandon Normal Devices

The itinerant tech/art fest is back in town this year - bringing with it a glittering procession of new cinema, digital culture and art centred in FACT's Wood Street funhouse.

We're drawn to a new installation at FACT, by acclaimed artist/filmmaker Mark Boulos (1). 'Echo' promises to properly mess with our heads. Fusing the latest findings in the world of neuroscience with mind-melting visual trickery and perspective tomfoolery, the piece will transmit a ghostly reflection of the viewer onto a grainy documentary film, and conjure up a spooky spectral image, floating in the ether.

An out of body experience that's guaranteed to leave you dislocated and discombobulated.

The AND Fair is inspired by the World Fairs of old, where inventors will showcase new inventions and discoveries spanning optical illusions, flying machines, biological probes and computer algorithms.

But keep your eyes out for SEFT-1, a road and rail (and potentially sea) vehicle created by Mexican artists – and brothers – Iván Puig and Andrés Padilla Domene, known together as Los Ferronautas (2).

Designed to hijack railway tracks and traverse natural landscapes, the vehicle's a mobile research station, seeking out the history beneath our streets. In Liverpool, they're hoping to make it amphibious, too. Yeah, because we've a great track record of those things around here.

A programme of related talks, films and events - and a symposium on Friday 4 October - wraps around this intriguing strand of an increasingly confident festival.

3-5 October
Various venues and FACT, Wood Street
andfestival.org.uk

Also recommended

Tim Hetherington: You Never See Them Like This

Blistering retrospective of Birkenhead-born Hetherington's war photography (3). Hetherington, killed in Afghanistan two years ago, was a modern day war poet with a camera - his tender, bruised images capture soldiers at their most vulnerable. A must see.
6 Sep - 25 Nov
Open Eye

David Hockney, Early Reflections

As part of Homotopia, Britain's greatest living painter (in our humble opinion) is given the flashback treatment: Hockey's scratchy, urgent and deeply personal early works show an artist grappling with demons and desires.
11 October 3 - 16 March
Walker Art Gallery



MUSIC

Everything Everything

We have a theory, we tell Everything Everything frontman Jon Higgs: that falsetto voices are a northern thing. We reel them off - Isle of Mann's Bee Gees, Cumbria's Wild Beasts, Glasgow's Bronksi Beat, Iceland's Sigur Ros...

"But what about Muse, and Radiohead," the Hexham-born one says, and promptly tramples our theory into the dirt.

Higgs is having one of those golden years where everything is going his way. So who are we to argue?

"If I sing normally I sound rubbish, so, over time I've learned to make that transition to the high notes without sounding completely idiotic," he says of that high latitude larynx, whose Kemosabe calls have reverberated around the SevenStreets shed all year.

And what a year.

"Yeah," Higgs agrees, "it's been non stop. We've played 40 festivals, but honestly, it's all sort of passed us by. We're in and out of countries so fast it's really hard to know where you are. So it's time to go underground again," he laughs.

But not before touring with two of our favourite Liverpool bands - Outfit and All We Are ("We picked them personally. We said 'let's just have fun with this tour, and chose our favourite bands...")

Next up? "We're embracing the chaos. Album three will be bold, chaotic and instinctive. We're not gonna overthink it."

Like the voice, our hopes are high.

13 October,
O2 Academy

Also recommended

Chickenstock

Pete Bentham and his The Dinner Ladies return to curate Liverpool's most alternative music festival, this year featuring more bands and a larger venue - visitors in the past will remember a tiny venue packed well beyond capacity at this underground smash. Expect Bolshy, Loose Moose, Rory & Ned, Sheepy and more.
Sefton Park Cricket Club
October 13



Grand Union Orchestra
12 October, Capstone Theatre

Bright Phoebus Revisited
14 October, Philharmonic Hall

Deptford Goth
19 October, Leaf

Tuung + Loved Ones
20 October, East Village Arts Club



Mellotone, with Trembling Bells, Magic Arm
21 October, Leaf

Alison Moyet
25 October, Philharmonic Hall

Portico Quartet
28 October, Kazimier

Kathryn Roberts and Sean Lakeman
30 October, Philharmonic Hall



CLUBS

Subvert

Liverpool's Subvert enters autumn with a huge show in October, as Kissy Sell Out (above) returns, and the arrival of the breakbeat-tastic Plump DJs in November further elevate Subvert's status as one of our most exciting new club nights - showing that there is, indeed, life at the Albert Dock (Revolution, specifically).
5 Oct, 2 Nov
Subvert,
Revolution, Albert Dock

The Voodoo Ball

"Cast off your shadows, abandon your beliefs, commune with yourselves, commune with the Gods, for a night of the ridiculous and the sublime, a cabaret of kaos, a masquerade of devilish delights, diabolic cow horns and dismembered doll parts..." It's their words, not ours. But who are we to argue. The Voodoo Ball is all that.
26th October
The Kazimier

Cream, 21st Birthday Party

Tell us it's not true? Actually, with a line-up like this, we're sort of glad it is. Join the Nation massive at this, part one of their birthday celebrations, featuring Paul Oakenfold, BT, Seb Fontaine and Danny Rampling. Yes please.
12 October
Nation, Parr Street

DOWN THE ROAD

We love Liverpool. Obviously. But sometimes it's good to go further afield - especially when there's stuff *this* great on

The Warehouse Project

October sees Manchester's embarrassingly brilliant Warehouse Projects show the rest of us how to host a music festival. Expect Dark Swedish electronica from The Knife, and friends on October 25. Hot Chip on 1 Nov, Four Tet on 2 Nov.
thewarehouseproject.com

The Manchester Weekender

MDMA (The Manchester District Music Archive) hosts a special afternoon of music. There's an exploration of Billy Wilder's 1944 film, Double Indemnity, at Cornerhouse, and lots more craft, art, performance and talks throughout the city.
10-13 October

Chester Literary Festival

Expect big names, brilliant workshops and readings from the likes of Kate Adie, Clive James, Paul Morley, Fay Weldon and Frank Cottrell Boyce. And us.
13-27 October
www.chesterliteraturefestival.co.uk

TALKS/EVENTS



Liverpool Waters Seminar

Engage, the city centre residents' champions, has pulled together an intriguing series of seminars examining Peel's Liverpool Waters plans. Starting on Oct 16th every fortnight for three sessions, the seminars promise to prod, poke and otherwise pull apart those gleaming artist's impressions and ask 'what's in it for us?'

"Engage is grasping the proposed redevelopment of Central Docks in a constructive and collaborative manner," says Gerry Proctor. "The Liverpool Waters project by its sheer scale is the opportunity of a lifetime. We're determined to make a positive contribution to the debate. Regenerating a global city is the work of every citizen, not just the professionals."

Rowan Moore, the Guardian's architecture critic, and Prof Michael Hebbert, Professor of Town Planning at University College London speak at the first event.

16 October
Liverpool Medical Institution, Mount Pleasant
Register to attend at engageliverpool.com

Also recommended

Security and Conflict: What does 2020 look like?

Public lectures given by respected thinkers from the fields of politics, media, defence and human rights.
17 October
St George's Hall

On The Verge

Want a career in the performing arts, or want to market your theatre company? This guerilla-style performance fest goes behind the curtain to offer priceless advice.
18-20 October
The Bluecoat

The Allergy and Free From Show

Europe's largest free from event, featuring food, drink, cosmetics, household products. Expert advice on tap (chlorine-free, of course) for those living free from, and those living with, allergies and food intolerances.
26/27 October
BT Convention Centre, Echo Arena









HALLOWE'EN

Farmageddon

Nights are drawing in; a whiff of cordite and firewood in the air and breath fogging in the crisp Autumnal air. It heralds the approach of Halloween and Bonfire Night and with it a little thrill of the approaching Winter.

Halloween is particularly well celebrated in Liverpool, with Farmageddon the cherry on the cake. Back for a seventh consecutive year, the event transforms the kiddie-flavoured Farmer Ted's attraction into something that's decidedly *not* child-friendly.

The event has won international plaudits for its disturbing zombie- and cannibal-themed journey through three themed farm buildings with a sense-muddling mix of zombie apocalypse, survival horror and torture-porn ambiance. If you're likely to be upset by eviscerated corpses, mangled bodies screaming for help and masked ghouls running at you with roaring chainsaws we recommend you skip this one. See what we mean about the kids?

So, Farmageddon is very much a nerve-jangling, adrenaline-spurting adults-only affair, but it's all done with a sense of fun – and pulled off with confidence and verve. Though if there were an outbreak of a zombie virus it's hard to think of a more perfect setting than this remote, quite terrifying outpost on the outskirts of Liverpool.
Farmageddon
Farmer Ted's
farmageddon.co.uk
4 October – 2 November 2013

Also recommended

Ottersghoul

Active Adventures turns to the dark side with a week of frights at the outdoor venue at Otterspool Promenade with an all-new cast and new show.
24 - 31 October
Active Adventures, Otterspool
activeadventuresliverpool.com

Shiverpool

Shiverpool is coming to the party with two city centre tours. The ever-popular Hope Street Shivers tour is bookended by the two cathedrals and includes Liverpool's most famous ghost story, with a visit to the pub afterwards for spirits of a different kind. The Auld City Shivers tour takes places through Liverpool's original seven streets (fancy that) and ends 40 feet below ground in a maze of forgotten bank vaults. Will you make out alive? Hopefully - imagine the forms they'd have to fill in.
Throughout October
shiverpool.co.uk
0151 7092030

The Hauntings of Croxteth Hall

Lovehistory conducts a sleepover at the Georgian mansion, including a meal, tour of the building and - presumably – scaring your fellow visitors with scary voices.
Croxteth Hall
4 October
croxteth.co.uk

Til Death Us Do Part

Croxteth Hall not spooky enough for you? Try a night in Newsham Park's abandoned seaman's orphanage instead.
Newsham Park Hospital
Seaman's Orphanage
12, 26 October
hauntedhappenings.co.uk

Lantern Parade

Still one of Liverpool's best live events – and a wonderful use of Sefton Park – the Lantern Parade is a must for all ages. Follow the parade to its grand finale; always an incredible spectacle.
Sefton Park
1 November



Matt Ford







WHY I CREATED HOMOTOPIA

By Festival Director, Gary Everett



"It felt important to me to contribute something to Liverpool's cultural landscape that had been missing. Raising the visibility of queer art was paramount for me, and given the city's richly diverse and queer cultural heritage it felt like the right thing at the perfect time. Art, engagement and participation were, and remain, at the heart of Homotopia.

I'm immensely proud of the last 10 years, very lucky to have a talented team around me, and eternally thankful that they believe in what we're doing. The organisation is unique as we also are the only UK gay arts and cultural festival that has a year round participation and social justice programme, reaching over 125,000 younger and inter-generational audiences.

Homotopia has remained true to its original vision and we've never compromised, even though we're living in uncertain times. Political and religious extremism are becoming stronger forces in some parts of the world and that is having a profoundly negative effect on society. I passionately believe that art has the potential for social change.

It's really important to develop artists and of course art and of course maintain the high quality of our offer. Liverpool to me is fertile ground for queer art and the last 10 years have proved it...It would have been so easy for me to have tossed the coin and created a rave, or a party in a park but I wanted to do something more meaningful, connecting to the spirit of the city which resonated beyond any gay 'scene'.

So many gay festivals around the UK feel bland, disconnected from the gay community and at worst are commodified and corporate and seem to have lost their way. I hope through our message of art, participation and social justice we connect with gay audiences as well as the wider community. This idea of mainstreaming out of the ghetto and into public spaces is key."

Proudest moment of the last 10 years?

Our hugely successful Tom of Finland retrospective premiering in Liverpool then taking the exhibition back to Turku, Finland. Creating a youth led political and cultural exchange with young people in Liverpool and Warsaw. Curating the year long exhibition of April Ashley (below) has been a truly inspirational and wonderful project. Bringing April's story back to Liverpool in such an epic way has so much potential for greater understanding, positive change and acceptance for the trans community.



Trans Focus

FESTIVALS

Homotopia

Liverpool's fortunate to have a calendar crammed with red-circle events but, for our shilling, none matches Homotopia for its eye-popping blend of high art and high camp, world premieres and deeply personal stories. From Tom of Finland's bulging pants to explorations of gay life in Africa, it's always been a show that packs a powerful punch. This year, its 10th, is the best yet.

Highlights must include Blitz Kids reunited, Boy George and Trademark's world premiere collaboration 'This Way Out', fusing the creative juices of two of our best chroniclers of pop culture. George's intimate, sensual photographs and Trademark (Mark Wardell's) day-glo canvasses explore self, identity and performance - specifically the phenomenon of constructed realities often assumed by those living outside the mainstream.

April Ashley - Britain's first transgendered person - tells her singular, poignant tale in Ashley: Portrait of a Lady, at the Museum of Liverpool. Ashley, originally from Fazakerley, allowed access to her private archive by Curator, Gary Everett who, together with Katy Jones, Curator of Community History at the museum, has created a document of a singular life, and a celebration of the trans community - including a recreation of the Carousel club, where April performed in 1950's Paris. We can't wait.

30 Oct-18 Nov
Homotopia
Various venues
www.homotopia.net

Also recommended

Liverpool Irish Festival

Featuring Christy Moore, Damien Dempsey, Andy Irvine
Various venues
10-20 October
www.liverpoolirishfestival.com

Liverpool Comedy Festival

Featuring Sara Pascoe, Jake Mills, Bill Bailey
Various venues
26 September - 6 October
www.liverpoolcomedyfestival.com

THEATRE

Crime and Punishment

We don't envy anyone adapting Dostoevsky's iconic novel of poverty and crime in 19th Century Russia. Nevertheless, this brand new production has gone down like borscht in a gulag, despite the understandably lengthy running time (150 minutes – you might want to take a cushion) and it's a bold move to kick off the Playhouse's Autumn season – the last before the Everyman makes a glorious return in time for 2014. We caught up with director Dominic Hill ahead of the run.

SS: Crime And Punishment? Why now?

DH: First and foremost it's a great story. But also, the themes that it explores – morality, the rights and wrongs of committing a crime, guilt etc. are as relevant for today as they were 150 years ago. And for me it's also about our responsibility to society and how we cannot live cut off from the rest of the world.

The adaptation process can't be easy for a book of this depth?

No I don't think it was easy but Chris Hannan has done an amazing job. He went through a number of drafts, finessing the focus of the story. In the end we decided very much to focus on Raskolnikov, and ultimately his relationship with Sonya.

Tell us about the cast and design...

They're a great company of actors. Very multi-skilled as well as they all have to sing and play musical instruments. The cast are on stage the whole time so we needed to create a good ensemble of performers. The play is presented on a large empty space, with minimal props and furniture. Mainly through music and lighting we represent location and atmosphere.

Did the cast and crew read it - and how long did it take?

I think most of the cast read it. I guess it depends on how quickly you read!

1-19 October
Liverpool Playhouse
www.everymanplayhouse.com





Tommy Sia, Ken Wah

Also recommended

The Master and Margarita

This new adaptation of the novel follows the love affair of the century, Satan's visit to Moscow, the final days of Christ and a fantastical cast of supernatural and historical figures – courtesy of Lodestar Theatre.
1 - 12 October 2013
Unity Theatre
unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk

Sell a Door presents Ibsen's Ghosts

The celebrated adaptation by Alfred Enoch – Dean Thomas out of Harry Potter – comes to the Capstone.
Capstone Theatre
7 October
thecapstonetheatre.com

Michael Portillo – Life: A Game of Two Halves

The darling of the Tory right turned cosy national treasure ponders his political career and subsequent metamorphosis.
The Brindley
28 October
thebrindley.org

Sons of the Desert

Laurel and Hardy ride again – exactly 60 years since the duo were last on stage in Liverpool. Michael Starke and Roy Brandon are Stan and Ollie in this adaptation of one of the duo's best films.
27 Sept - 26 Oct
Royal Court Liverpool
royalcourtliverpool.co.uk

Mark Thomas: 100 Acts of Minor Dissent

Mark Thomas' wonderful account of the art of mischief-making, with just a little bit of politics.
Liverpool Playhouse
Tue 22 Oct
everymanplayhouse.com

Welsh National Opera's Tosca

If you're looking for a good introduction to opera you can't go far wrong with the fast-paced Tosca. It's got betrayal, tragedy and heaving bosoms, *natch*.
Liverpool Empire
22, 26 October

The Ken Dodd Happiness Show

Still packing them in for his legendary bum-numbing shows.
St Helens Theatre Royal
25 October
sthelenstheatreroyal.com

Translunar Paradise

Grief, loss, memories... Translunar Paradise tells the story of a man who retreats to his own, fictional world to escape the pangs of grief. Mime troupe Theatre ad Infinitum won gushing reviews when they staged this production at the Edinburgh Fringe.

25 October
Unity Theatre
unitytheatreliverpool.co.uk

SEVEN STREETS

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SOUL MAN

Why has one of the world's most successful producers relocated to Liverpool? It's simple, Steve Levine tells David Lloyd: it's all about the music.

It's raining hard in the Baltic. Sheets of autumnal drizzle are bouncing off the corrugated roofs of warehouses, ricocheting around like carelessly fired air rifle pellets. Meanwhile, in the inner sanctum of Steve Levine's Baltic Creative recording studio, all is quiet. Cosy, even.

We sit, surrounded by blinking boxes and faders, screens lit with glowing waveforms, *stuff*. It is the very model of the modern producer's tool kit. And it's outside the M25. About 200 miles outside, give or take a diversion at the Thelwall Viaduct.

That Levine's studio looks so at home here isn't surprising - as digital audio workstations go, this one is more travelled than most. Parts of it has been packed up and reassembled numerous times, as Levine's flitted from London to California and back, seeking out projects to add his console's unmistakable sheen to: the Levine touch that's helped crank up the soul to the soundtrack of all of our lives over the past 30 years.

Levine's decision, to pack up his studio, and home, and relocate in our city says something about this producer and his continued passion for music, and search for inspiration: a long and winding road that, he always knew, would lead to our door.

"It's so competitive in London," he says, "it's turning into a horrible place. Bands become greedy and grasping, not at all pleasant to work with. And studio space? Forget it."

Decision to move made, there was no shopping list of potential new cities for *chez* Levine...

"As soon as our daughters fled the nest, and we realised we were free to move anywhere, there was no question. We were coming to Liverpool," Levine says of his (and partner, studio manager and radio producer Karen's) relocation.

Board member at LIPA, Levine's been a supporter of the city for years, hosting master classes for students: "But I can do more for them if I'm based here," he says, "We're increasing our time at LIPA, and grandly calling it the Steve Levine academy, but it's really just a way for me to pass on what I've learned to the next generation."

If you're looking for a teacher, you've come to the right place.

Levine cut his teeth as an engineer at CBS's London studios; as a fledgling tape op he'd be given studio time with up and coming bands - capturing them as close to live as possible. Bottling the raw energy of proto punks and new wave 'acts most likely to'.

He was there when XTC first rattled through their spiky Swindon power pop and then there was a certain band called The Clash...

"We were the first to get White Riot, and Hammersmith Palais on tape," Levine beams, then proceeds to rifle through a steel filing cabinet to find the yellowing tape, its box lid scrawled with the seminal recording log: September 13, 1977.

"The punk scene was exploding, and CBS were keen to try out some bands, but only in studio 3 on relatively junk equipment - and only with their youngest engineer, me!"

It was a good call.

"Joe (Strummer) was sweet, but it was obvious that Mick (Jones) was in charge," Levine recalls, "he knew exactly what he wanted, and I was just a hired gun. But we captured something special that day..."

CBS agreed, signing the band for a then staggering £100,000.

Feeding from the energy of punk ensured Levine was fired up for his day job - rattling through sessions for bands such as the Angelic Upstarts and the Vibrators - but his heart was always in the legendary soul of Atlantic records, especially under the stewardship of Arif Mardin, the Philly soul of Thom Bell, and the Midas touch of Quincy Jones.

"Every producer is inspired by the records he grew up with, " Levine says, "and for me, it was George Martin, Spector, Joe Meek, and, in the 70s, it was LPs by the Temptations, The Spinners and the Four Tops, made long after their Motown heydays, which were the real masterpieces. Great songs, great production, great engineering - they were the complete package," he says, as he flicks through a rack of LPs, spanning the psychedelic soul of Norman Whitfield, via Alt J and Miles Kane.

It was Levine's predilection for blue-eyed soul that made him prick up his ears when an A&R contact recommended he met Jon Moss, drummer with a new London band called Culture Club.

"They were the real deal," Levine says, "their love of Trojan's reggae, Bowie, Bolan and the Philly soul of Hall and Oates marked them out as people who I knew would be fun to work with."

It was, says Levine, this effortless mixing and matching of cultures that ensured Culture Club were always much more than a sum of their parts - androgyny, cups of tea and all.

"We never said 'let's analyse this and make a copy' it was more a case of our shared back catalogues combined to create something special. Everyone - even George - was diligent about giving their best. Jon was a phenomenal drummer, and the energy was incredible. It was a good time."

The result? One of the 80's defining moments and, stripped of the hype and hysteria, a body of work which sounds as fresh - and audacious - thirty years down the line. Don't believe us? Treat yourself to a blast of Church of the Poison Mind and see.

"I'm an old fashioned producer," says Levine of that time, when studio svengalis such as Trevor Horn were all but replacing the need for the group (hello Frankie) to even show up. For Levine, it's always been about coaxing the best out of whoever was the other side of the big glass window. "It was an exciting time, digital was starting to come in, and the studio tricks at our disposal meant we could do much more. But, for me, the technical stuff just gave us more creative options. It never took the place of a great song," he says, sharing his similarly old-fashioned, but watertight philosophy on who he prefers to work with:

"Good musicians are great, but enthusiasm is better. Give me an enthusiastic rusty guitarist over a virtuouso arse anyday!"

It was a strange time for Levine - his work was number one on both sides of the Atlantic, but the phone was eerily quiet.

"I can look back at my career and say with certainty that this was my least productive time. Everyone assumed I was either too busy, or too expensive!"

This, coupled with a gradual shift in musical tastes away from bands, and more towards the acid house, bedroom-produced electronica of the late 80s meant that the lean times continued into the early nineties.

"I liked all that stuff, but my skills meant that my services were less required, so I left for California," he says - although not before letting out his studio for The Orb's Alex Paterson to record Little Fluffy Clouds.

Much as we're advocates for our city, our interest is piqued when we meet an A-list producer who opts for Smithdown Road over Santa Monica Boulevard. It doesn't happen often.

"But it's not about the location, it's always been about what's inspired me, musically, and Liverpool, right now, does," Levine says.

It was his dalliance with Hollyoaks-championed Daytona Lights that saw Levine making regular trips to our place.

"There was something about how everyone helped each other out, about the feeling that something's happening here," Levine says, "This is definitely a great time for Liverpool music."

Which explains why he, like us, has been championing Natalie McCool (although, to be fair, he's gone a step further, taking over production duties of her shimmering debut album).

"She's great, a true talent. It's just such a shame we don't get the radio support. But I remain optimistic."

And what of the state of his chosen profession? With muso rumblings about the lack of dynamic range suffered upon today's highly compressed recordings (which most trace back to the Arctic Monkey's debut aural assault), and a general shift away from digital in favour of analogue's warm embrace, where does Levine stand?

"Look, all digital isn't bad, just as all analogue isn't good," he says, "and same goes with compression. You need some compression to add character. But it's all about how you get the best out of the performance."

He proceeds to play back a few bars of a new Natalie McCool track he's working on.

It sounds warm, rich, soulful and true. It sounds like classic Steve Levine.

CAMP AND FURNACE

DAY ELECTRIC KITCHEN NIGHT

Sound / Light / Drinking / Dining

A Saturday sensory pop-up

Launches 26th October

Camp and Furnace
67 Greenland Street / Liverpool
campandfurnace.com

What's on at Liverpool Philharmonic

LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC

Ardal O'Hanlon
Saturday 2 November 8pm

Tickets £20, £26

Madeleine Peyroux
Tuesday 3 December 7.30pm

Tickets £24, £30

Kate Rusby at Christmas
Tuesday 10 December 7.30pm

Tickets £24, £30 (£15 under 16s)

homotopia 10th Anniversary

Sandi Toksvig: My Valentine
Tuesday 5 November 8pm

Tickets £20, £26

John Waters: This Filthy World
Friday 8 November 8pm

Tickets £20, £26



Box Office
liverpoolphil.com
0151 709 3789

Image: Kate Rusby

Celebrate the festive season with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**

Winter Wonderland
Saturday 14 & Friday 20 December 7.30pm

Carl Davis and star vocalists begin the countdown to Christmas with the ultimate musical selection box, featuring family favourites *Sleigh Ride*, *White Christmas* and *Santa Claus is Coming to Town*.

The Spirit of Christmas
Tuesday 17 / Thursday 19 / Saturday 21 / Sunday 22 / Monday 23 December 7.30pm

Get ready for a good old festive singalong with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Choir** in our traditional carol concert, hosted by Classic FM's **John Suchet** and featuring the Norwegian brother-and-sister phenomenon **Mari and Håkon Samuelsen**.

Family Concert:
Rudolph on Hope Street
Friday 20 December 4.15pm
Saturday 21 & Sunday 22 December 11.30am & 2.30pm

Bring those red noses for a one-hour holiday extravaganza for the whole family. It'll be a high energy event as we invite audiences to singalong to Christmas favourites including *When Santa Got Stuck Up the Chimney*, *White Christmas*, and of course *Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer*.

Mancini Magic & Hollywood Greats
Monday 30 December 7.30pm

Take a trip down *Moon River* from *Breakfast At Tiffany's*, and have *Two for the Road* with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra** in a night of music by one of America's greatest film and TV composers, Henry Mancini.

A Hollywood New Year's Eve
Tuesday 31 December 7.30pm

Celebrate the last night of 2013 with the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra**. It will be a night of pure showbiz glamour, a glittering hit parade of classic tunes from the music of Disney, Strauss' *Die Fledermaus* overture, John Barry's theme to *James Bond* and the music of John Williams amongst others.

Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl 12
Film with Live Orchestra
Friday 3 January 7.30pm & Saturday 4 January 2.30pm

Pirates of the Caribbean is one of the most enjoyable adventure movies of recent years. But we'll bet you've never seen it like this, as Cap'n Jack and the crew of the Black Pearl set sail to the swashbuckling score, played live by a full symphony orchestra.

Handel's Messiah
Saturday 11 January 7pm

The combined forces of the **Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra** and **Choir**, and a superb cast of singers under the baton of baroque music expert **Ottavio Dantone** perform some of the most uplifting music of all time.

