

BENCH

A day or so after my speil to the council, Andrew Gooding & Suzanne asked if I'd like to paint a bench for the town centre. Of course, I said yes. I'd painted a couple of benches for my local city centre in Southampton. And the brief was simple - include five lines form a poem by another Bloodaxe star, Benjamin Zephaniah. Well, what an honour! I still saddens me that Handsworth's finest is no longer with us.

After a bit of toing & froing, I was in the Old Gaol last week, with a big jumper on, painting away, & after three days, it was done & dusted. So, quite soon, somewhere near Queen's Hall I believe, you'll be able to plonk yourself down on a hand painted bench by me. Care to join me? Because after all... 'People need people'...



SOME HEXHAM WORDS

Dialect is important. Words peculiar to a certain place.

I love 'em...

Here's two I learned from my marras at Gateway into the Community...



YAG



JOOGLE

Any more?

There must be...

Give them to me please...

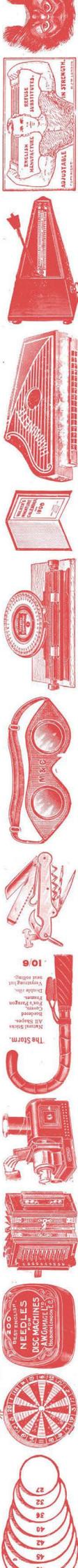
HAUNTED HEXHAM & STRANGE-GOINGS-ON

I've been given the go ahead to explore ghostly happenings in the area. So come on then, any spooky stories for me? There's the legend of the Hexham Heads of course. Somebody mentioned a ghost at Dilston castle... any more details? Any stories of witches? I'm about to read a book called Witch Light, which starts off in Hexham... Witches, I believe, are cool right now...



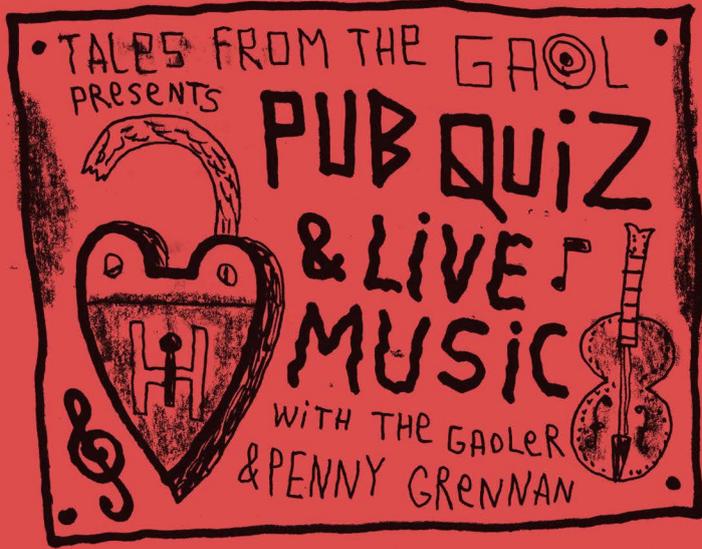
HEXHAM HEADS





EVENTS

I'm hatching plans for wee events on my visits (hopefully one a month). Who'd fancy a pub quiz in March, hosted by me? Don't know where yet, but when I do, I'll send out a mid-month bulletin. There will of course be prizes. And live music too. Entry will be free, but in return I need more Hexhamshire stories please. Don't forget, although my transformation is on the Old Gaol, the historical side of that is sort of taking care of itself. But the museum will include several displays that are simply a celebration of Hexham & thereabouts - Allendale, Corbridge, etc. Give me tales of local heroes, recipes, dialect, good & bad folks, anything that helps me make prints & paintings for the museum... more details about the quiz to come soon...



BURNING OF THE WOLF

Someone recently mentioned the Allen Valleys Folk Festival – sounds wonderful. And it seems each year they make & burn a giant wooden wolf. Is this a Hexhamshire Up Helly Aa?

During my last project in your neck of the woods, Northumberland Folk, I became obsessed with the largely unsolved tale of the Allendale Wolf. So, maybe see some of you at the folk festival, ringside seat for the fire in September...



OTHER LEADS

Two local characters were mentioned; Thelma & Sammy, who would walk to Newcastle every day – no one knows why...

There's the serial funeral goer – Wha's Deid...

Any stories about Devil's Water? A taxi driver said I should lift my feet from the ground when I cross it...

Jane Dotchin rode a horse to Scotland...

Some rumours of an Allendale Highwayman...

The Wheelbarrow races in Corbridge...

These are some of the notes I have in my sketchbook. If anyone has any more information on these snippets, get in touch...

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or instagram @youarethefolk





BANDSTAND

Of the many interesting stories I've been given, this one jumps out...
 A fine gentleman, who shall remain nameless, but we will here on in call Mr Hexham, crawled inside the bandstand one Sunday (the date is unimportant, but it was several decades ago), & he played some music on a record player to entertain the park-goers. Imagine if you can, the park is suddenly filled with Handel's Water Music, courtesy of our mysterious Mr Hexham...
 Fact, as they say, can be a good deal stranger, more entertaining, & so much more charming, than fiction...



POETRY CIRCLE

I was delighted to receive some wonderful verse from The Poetry Circle, who meet in the library once a month. Line upon line with sharp observations about Hexham & it's history. From the famous Tans (gloves, not the browning of one's skin), to local statues, tricky to get to. One poet, Rosemary Mitchell-Schuitevoerder has even written a bespoke poem about the Old Gaol itself. Here's wee taster...

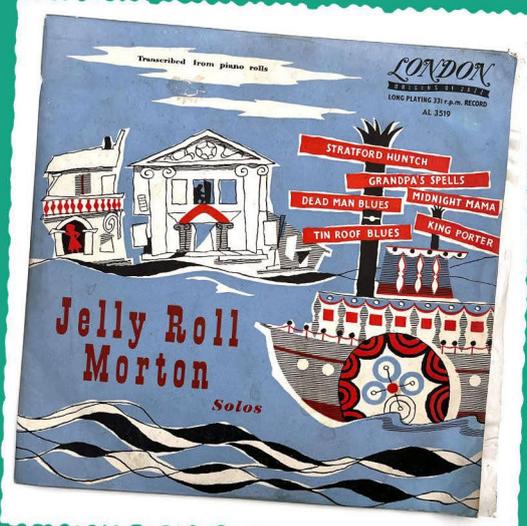
'In the dungeon the poorest of the poor were held, unlike their richer brothers on the floor above, uncelled. They were the Reivers who rustled cattle or settled feuds in horse-led battle.'

Great stuff, keep it coming...



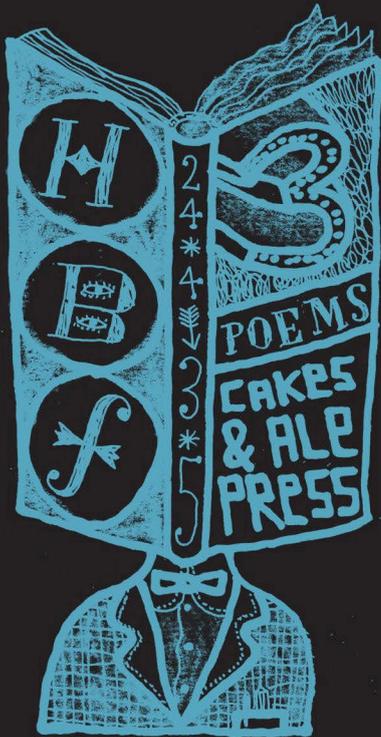
NORTH EAST TREATS

Everytime I'm up I always find treats to take back home. From books in the charity shops to hot vinyl from Snap records. But this time, I bought, rather sadly, some stuff, including this 10 inch stomper, from the Vintage Emporium, a few days before it closed down. Jelly Roll Morton, no less (who isn't from Hexham... or Corbridge either)...



SELL BY AUCTION FURNITURE

BOOK FESTIVAL



I'll be publishing a new poetry book, under my own imprint, the Cakes & Ale Press, in time for Hexham Book Festival, probably with three poems about the area. One will be penned by the amazing Harry Gallagher, who I've worked with before. We published a book called A Kiss for your Soul - 17 Northumbrian Poems for Northumberland Folk, which has now sold out twice - third edition coming soon. And I'll be hosting four workshops at the Old Gaol when the book festival is on. The idea is you'll make your very own unique dustjacket for your copy of my new book, using screen-printing, marker pens, stencils etc.

We can't go wrong... more details soon...

PRINTED EPHEMERA

Whilst visiting, for the last time, the Vintage Emporium, I also bought another Victorian poster to add to my collection. The owner told me the story how when they opened the shop, there was a secret cubby hole with a huge cache of these letterpress posters. Once upon a time, every town had at least one such printer, ready to spring into action to announce sales of goods, or music hall shows, or public meetings. When I did a project in Hartlepool in 2022/3, their printer was John Procter & Sons (many of those posters are collected in a wonderful book called Victorian Delights By local historian Robert Wood). So it seems your printing maestro was called Christopher Armstrong, of 19 Market Place. But there's something about the texture of these posters that's wonderful, as the blackest of inks hits the cheap paper, & here we are, all this time later, still admiring them... Does anyone know anything else about this print workshop? If I'd had the money, I would have bought all the the Vintage Emporium were selling...



MORE NEXT MONTH...
OR POSSIBLY SOONER...

