



Another Place

Mike Trippitt and 'George' steal a few of days in the northwest, and discover miles of beaches, mysterious men looking out to sea, a nineteenth century pier and a gem of a museum   Mike Trippitt

Although a northerner, I'm unfamiliar with England's northwest coast. Until a fellow campervan owner recommended it recently, Formby Point Caravan Park, and the beauty of the beaches here had passed me by.

On arrival, expectations are exceeded. The site sits pleasingly in woodland just off Lifeboat Road. Its touring pitches give easy access to paths through sand dunes to the sea. Once my VW T6 camper George is pitched, the beach calls.

Soft, fine sand bound with coarse marine grass makes the 500-metre walk over dunes arduous at times, but it's worth the effort. The undulating landscape gives way to a sandy beach and

vast sky. Wind turbines stand out white on the horizon against a cloudless blue. For a mile or so along the shore the occasional dog walker and jogger shares the vast space. Although The Wirral and Merseyside, seven miles south are in view, the isolation is tangible. By the time George and I are reunited a rich golden sunset has eased into a deep purple twilight.

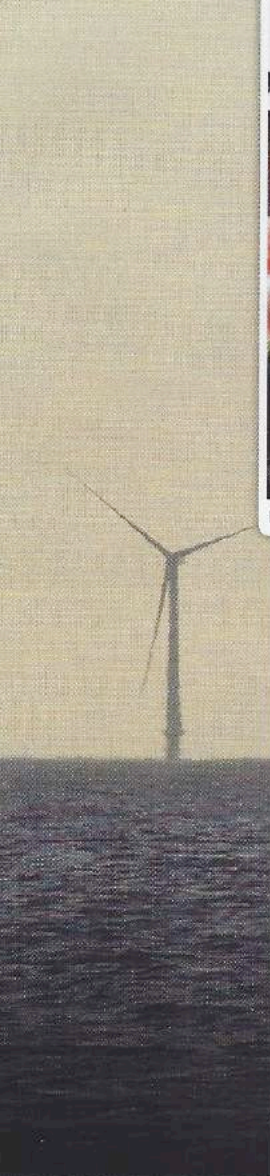
The next day, another glorious sunset graces Crosby beach, halfway between Liverpool and Formby, overlooking Bootle to the east and Wallesey over the river. Though it is classed as a 'non-swimming' beach due to the dangers of tides and soft sands, its expanse and vistas beguile thousands on summer days. Since 2005, Crosby beach has been

home to Sir Antony Gormley's 'Another Place'. 100 cast-iron life-size figures stretch along three kilometres of shore. Some are up to 1 kilometre out to sea and disappear under high tide. According to visitliverpool.com, each is 'staring at the horizon in silent expectation'. Gormley's art installation is as at home here as the Ferry 'cross the Mersey and The Liver Birds. Perhaps after fourteen years it is just as loved. For an hour I walk among the statues as the sun drops in the west. It's enjoyable, but do I understand 'Another Place'? Maybe not.

The old Lancashire county rises up in these parts from the flat lands of beaches and estuaries to a fringe of dunes and sandhills. This provides both a barrier against the sea, and a barren landscape on which development or agriculture has proved difficult over centuries. It was in these coastal undulations, especially in Scotland, that the game of golf thrived where nothing else could. The dry, sandy soil of Formby and



Fountains outside The Atkinson



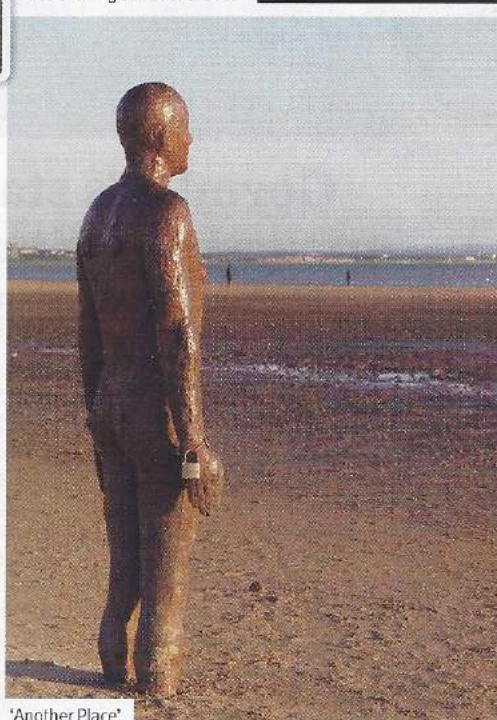
Royal mower



Late evening sun over the Pier



George on Ainsdale Beach



'Another Place'



Southport is home to no less than seven golf courses and links. The most renowned, Royal Birkdale Golf Club, lies south of Southport at Birkdale Hills. Founded in 1889, Birkdale Golf Club became 'Royal' by command of King George VI in 1951. It has hosted the Open Championship ten times and the Ladies British Open Championship six times, though no British golfer has ever won those tournaments at Birkdale.

A left turn off the A565 onto Coastal Road, leads to Southport through Ainsdale and Birkdale Sandhills towards the golf club. It's an extraordinary landscape: windswept, severe and bare, yet imposing and breath-taking. It's also where motorists can park their vehicles on the beach. At Ainsdale George and I drive onto the firm reddish sand. There are miles of it stretching up and down the coast and towards a distant surf. The sea retreats almost to the horizon at low water, making it safe to park. It is of course controlled, and it's not free! But it's beautiful, and a great place to spend a

Known as 'The Lawn Ranger' I met Brian Radam at his 'British Lawnmower Museum'

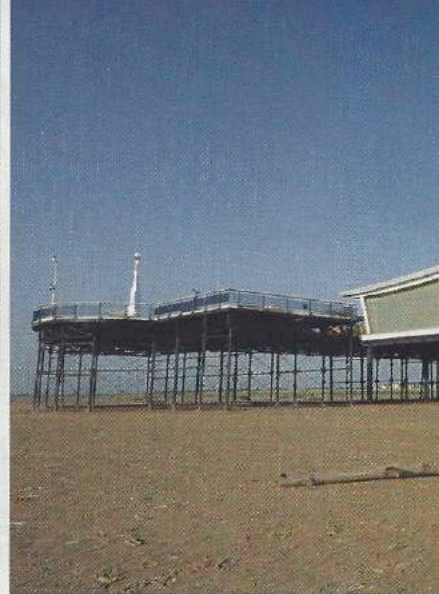
few hours with a campervan.

Southport basks under a clear sky and warm sunshine when we arrive. The Caravan and Motorhome Club site on The Esplanade will be our halt for the night. It's a short walk to the beach, Pleasureland Amusement Park and the town. First though, I meet Brian Radam, author of the *Haynes Lawnmower Manual* (a practical guide to choosing, using and maintaining a lawnmower), a renowned expert on historic lawnmowers and curator of The British Lawnmower Museum. That there is a lawnmower museum is news; that it is in Southport is a surprise. Known as 'The Lawn Ranger', Brian has been involved in the lawnmower industry since the 1960s and loves all things mechanical. His enthusiasm for lawnmowers and their history is astonishingly infectious, and he tells

me how the first lawnmower came about. "It was invented by Edwin Beard-Budding in 1830. He never set out to make a lawn mower. He worked in a textile mill in Stroud. The mill owner had received an order for guardsmen's uniforms and asked Beard-Budding to make him a machine to cut the tufts and nobbles of the cloth to make it perfectly smooth. What he invented was a spinning blade over a fixed blade and he found that it cut grass very efficiently." It remains the basic design of the modern lawnmower, and there's a replica of the first at the museum, built by motorcycle racer and TV presenter Guy Martin. Two hundred restored machines of special interest are on display at the museum, though the collection runs to over one thousand. Manufacturers



Southport's Marine Lake



Gormley's statues are apparently "Staring at the horizon in silent expectation"

not normally associated with mowers built some: Royal Enfield, Rolls Royce, Hawker Sidley and Perkins Diesel. The museum also possesses many original patents and blueprints. Among the collection is one from Lord's Cricket Ground and a sit-on mower that belonged to the Prince and Princess of Wales, as well as models previously owned by the

likes of Brian May, Paul O' Grady and Nicholas Parsons. There's even Eric Morecambe's old Qualcast Electric Super Panther from the 1970s that was once included in Lancaster Life magazine's 'A history of Lancashire in Seventy Objects'. Brian knows the story well. "When it was collected by the refuse man on a sunny afternoon Eric was celebrating the birth of

Where We Stayed

Formby Point
Caravan Park
Lifeboat Road
Formby
L37 2EB
www.formbypointcaravanpark.co.uk

Southport Caravan
Club Site
The Esplanade
Southport
Merseyside
PR8 1RX
www.caravanclub.co.uk



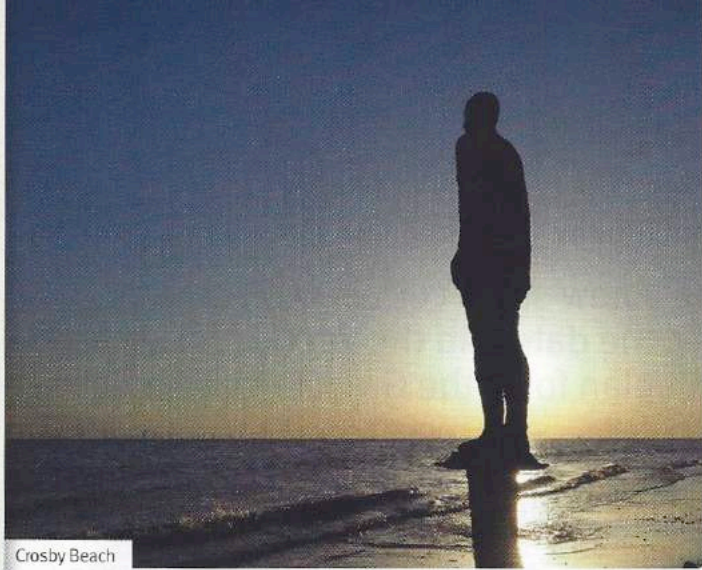
The British Lawnmower Museum



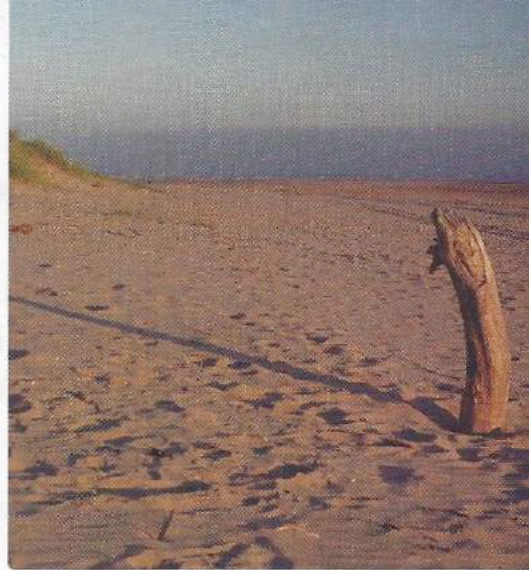
George at Formby Point campsite



The Pier at low tide



Crosby Beach



Formby Point

Antony Gormley's 'Another Place'

The 100 statues are made from 17 body-casts taken of the artist's body. They were originally displayed at Cuxhaven, Germany. Planning permission for them to remain permanently at Crosby was eventually given in 2007.

On his website the artist says: "The idea was to test time and tide, stillness and movement, and somehow engage with the daily life of the beach. This was no exercise in romantic escapism."

his first baby. He was on the lawn writing 'It's a boy' in the lawn with weed killer. I think Bart Simpson copied him a few years later!" Enthusiasts of mechanical engineering will enjoy an hour at this quirky little museum talking with Brian. I certainly did, but alas, I still have no interest in gardening. Cutting my lawn will always remain a chore.

Southport has a mix of seaside attractions: amusements, restaurants and bars, funfairs, souvenir shops, a model village and miles of sandy beach. Uniquely, its Marine Lake not only provides a waterfront away from the beach, but also accommodates a variety of waterborne activities, including rowing boats and motorboats for hire. During a walk over Marine Parade Bridge in the early evening sunlight, paddleboarders move easily across the water below. The sea is a long way over the sands from here.

"Southport Pier", claims the local council, "is the oldest iron pier in the country and the second longest too". There's no doubting it's an impressive engineering feat, but land reclamation and the marine lake, make half its

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length reach over the town, not the beach or the sea. In fact, from its start on The Promenade I stroll the length of it, around the pier head and back, without ever setting foot on it, or without getting my feet wet. That cannot be said of all piers. The pier opened in 1860 and has undergone major restoration works throughout its history. The current pier pavilion, a licensed wedding venue, opened in 2002, but sadly the pier's tramway, that had re-opened in 2005, closed in 2015 to reduce wear on the structure and maintenance costs. A journey from one end to the other and back, 2000m in all, has to be undertaken on foot.

Before dinner and a stroll back along the front to the campsite I take a look inside The Atkinson. Built in the late nineteenth century with money donated to Southport Corporation by William Atkinson, a cotton manufacturer who first holidayed in and then lived in Southport, The Atkinson was

originally a library and art gallery. It's an impressive building at the heart of the town that's now home to a library, exhibition space, museum, café, studio and theatre. Tonight, live on stage, 1980s duo 'Hue and Cry' will be performing on their 'Bitter Suite' tour. Can it really be thirty years since the Kane brothers topped the chart with their album of the same name. I wonder, as I walk back into the sunshine of the town centre, whether they are still 'Looking for Linda'.

I've enjoyed Southport in the warmth and sunshine. Those bars and restaurants that have tables outside create a café culture and give a European air to this unassuming Lancashire town. With plenty to see and do along the coast, and with twenty-two miles of outstanding beaches close by, Formby Point and Southport should not be overlooked when considering places to visit on a hot summer day. ☺