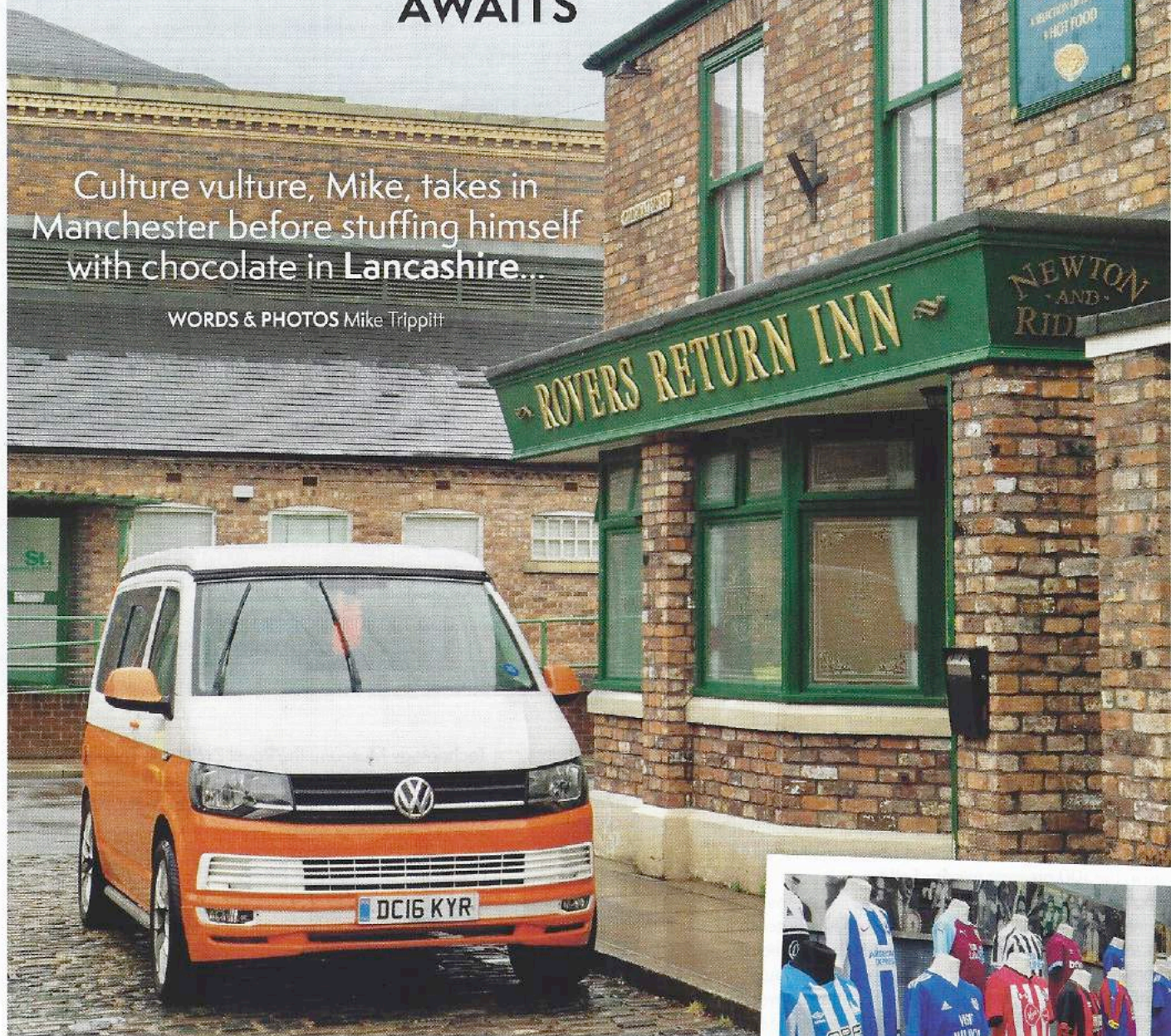


# FOOTBALL GREATS & CORRIE AWAITS

Culture vulture, Mike, takes in Manchester before stuffing himself with chocolate in Lancashire...

WORDS & PHOTOS Mike Trippitt



**L**owry's *Matchstalk Men and Matchstalk Cats and Dogs* walk amongst Manchester and Salford's factories and mills, not their landscapes and campsites. So as George, my campervan, and I amble through the Peak District's heaths, moors, forest and hills, I wonder what will be in store on our city break up north...

For three nights we're staying at Well-i-Hole Farm campsite at Greenfield on the edge of Saddleworth Moor. On the fringes of the South Pennines and just outside the Peak District National Park, it nestles in lush green meadows rising to distant peaks. There's a pub, an Indian restaurant and local amenities all within an easy stroll at Mossley, as well as a riverside walk. But I chose the site for its pleasant 20-minute walk to the railway station, and just

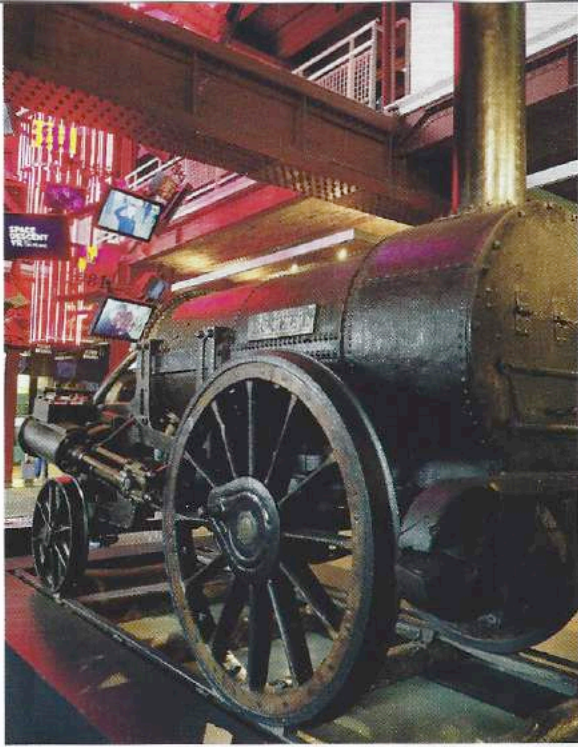
a 20-minute train journey to Manchester. It's my base camp whilst I explore the delights of this city.

A warm bright morning greets the 09:45 into Manchester Piccadilly. I make my way through Vimto Park, where the first batch of the fruity fizzy drink was made on Granby Row in 1908, to the heart of the university adjacent to the famous Canal Street. I've come to see a memorial to Alan Turing. His statue, sitting inconspicuously on a bench in Sackville Place Gardens, is as understated as it is poignant.

Turing, Bletchley Park's most famous codebreaker, and regarded as the father of modern computing, is credited

**ABOVE** George at the Rovers Return; The National Football Stadium





with shortening the Second World War by two years, saving millions of lives. He worked at Manchester University from 1948 for the rest of his life. 50 years on, BBC viewers and listeners voted him Greatest Scientist in a Citizen of the Century poll, and *Time* magazine listed him in the 100 greatest minds of all time.

But in 1952, when homosexuality was illegal, the country he served arrested him and he was prosecuted. His security clearance was removed and he agreed to chemical castration rather than face prison. Although posthumously pardoned in 2013, he was never given the acclaim during his lifetime that his wartime and peacetime achievements warranted, Turing died alone in Manchester at the age of 41. As former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, once said: "You deserved so much better."

Sitting next to Turing at the Sackville Place memorial, the urge to speak to this man is overwhelming. "Sorry," I whisper, before getting up and quietly walking away.

That evening I dine in one of countless fashionable restaurants with a lifelong friend and her husband. Denise is a professional musician living and working in Greater Manchester. I reflect on what I've seen: the art gallery with its impressive mix of classical and modern architecture; the elegant and silent second floor of the Central Library contrasting with the bustle and fun of its multiuse ground floor; the Science and



**ABOVE**  
**CLOCKWISE**  
Stephenson's Rocket at the Science and Technology Museum; The Manchester Skyline; Canal Street, Manchester  
**BELOW** Me, sharing a bench with Alan Turing

Technology Museum; the Royal Exchange Theatre; and the spectacular view from high up in the 20 Stories restaurant where I'd enjoyed a light lunch. But there is still so much more to this city.

### Football's greatest hero

Next day I explore Manchester's streets lined with boutique shops and high street names. It's a compact and uncongested city, with most attractions within easy reach. The city is served by its wonderful Metrolink tram network, from which Manchester's sights can be enjoyed whilst on the move.

Football is integral to Manchester's identity and for the army of United and City fans that come here, both Old Trafford and the Etihad Stadium offer guided tours. But for other football fans, sport fans generally, or those just interested in social history, the National Football Museum is worthy of a half-day visit.

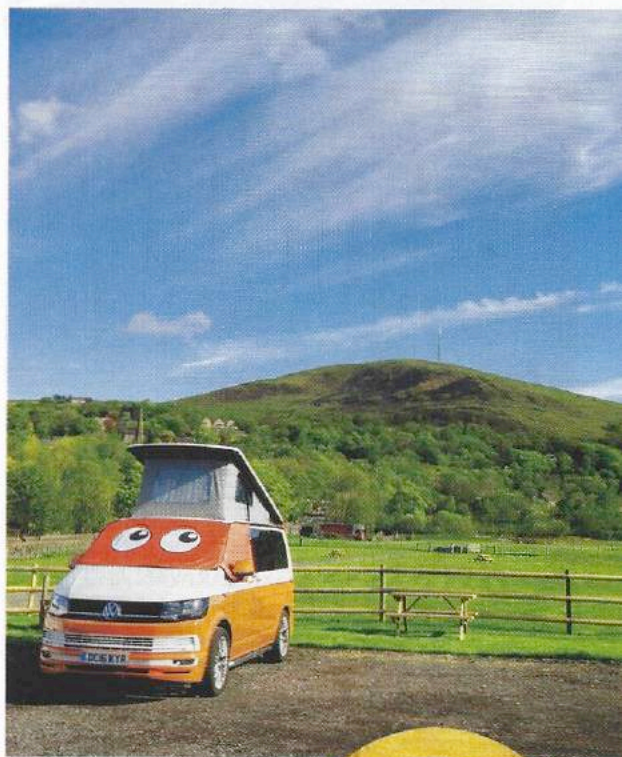
Split into themes rather than timelines, the museum's stories and exhibits show both triumph and disaster. Sections on safety at football grounds, stadia disasters, medical science and broadcasting are fascinating. So, too, the inevitable telling of England's 1966 World Cup triumph, complete with match ball and Geoff Hurst's shirt. But among the trophies, shirts, footballs and other memorabilia housed across four floors, one exhibit stands out: a Victory Cross.





2016 VW T6 Highline  
**CONVERSION TYPE**  
 Camper King Retro Trek  
 supplied to my spec by  
 Needingworth Campers  
[camperking.co.uk](http://camperking.co.uk)  
[needingworthcampers.com](http://needingworthcampers.com)  
**OWNED SINCE 2016**

**LAYOUT** RIB bed and side kitchen  
**TRAVEL SEATS/BERTHS** 4/3  
**WHAT I LOVE ABOUT IT** Although it has the technology and environmental credentials of the modern age, the two-tone orange and white body and retro orange side kitchen give George the soul of the 1960s!



I meet Collections Officer, Dr Alex Jackson, who tells me the story of Donald Simpson Bell.  
 "Donald Bell played professionally for Bradford Park Avenue, helping them to gain promotion to the First Division in the 1913/14 season. When war broke out he asked to be released so he could serve his country. As a Second Lieutenant he fought with the Yorkshire Regiment (Green Howards) in the Battle of the Somme. On 5 July 1916, whilst under heavy fire, and without awaiting orders, Bell rushed across no man's land to attack a German machine gun group that was pinning his company down. For his conspicuous bravery Donald Bell was awarded the Victory Cross, the only English professional footballer to receive the honour" explains Alex.

**Down the Street**

MediaCityUK, on the opposite bank of the River Irwell to the Imperial War Museum and ITV's *Coronation Street* studios, is modern-day Salford: impressive, upbeat, happy and bustling with life.  
 - It's a place to soak up city living and watch people (some famous, most not) go about their daily lives. The BBC's *Breakfast* and *Blue Peter* are made here. There's even a Pudsey Bear to make you smile.

Across the footbridge at the ITV gates, star-spotters often wait to catch a glimpse of, or an autograph from, their favourite actors. While I stand on the bridge admiring the view of both Salford and Trafford, Corrie's Mikey

North, who plays Gary Windass, walks past on his way back to the studio.

"Ow 'do," he says cheerily. I smile in return, resisting the impulse to say "Hello Gary."

*Coronation Street* is in my DNA. I grew up with it as a child living in Yorkshire, so when I planned this trip, I booked onto 'Coronation Street The Tour'.

Next morning, though I would be joining the tour at 9.15am, I arrive early. I've been able to arrange one extra surprise treat...

David Sinclair, General Manager of *Coronation Street* climbs aboard George, settles himself in the passenger seat, and we pull away slowly from ITV's car park. David directs me towards the Tony Warren building, where production, editing and internal filming is done. We turn right through large gates, drive slowly towards the Viaduct Bistro, turn right at D&S Alahan's corner shop, and slowly ease down the cobbles towards the Weatherfield Health Centre. George is on Coronation Street!

I park George outside the Rovers Return. Has a campervan ever been on the hallowed cobbles before? We think not.

**Chuffers and chocolate**

On our last day we make a 45-minute trip from Well-i-Hole to the Caravan and Motorhome Club's Burr Country Park site at Bury. Set in a green oasis on the edge of the town, the site is served by a café, The Brown Cow public



**ABOVE** George at Well-i-Hole Farm campsite; Window at the Rovers

George was permitted on the set of *Coronation Street* and photographed outside the Rovers Return by kind permission of Coronation Street The Tour  
[coronationstreettour.co.uk](http://coronationstreettour.co.uk)



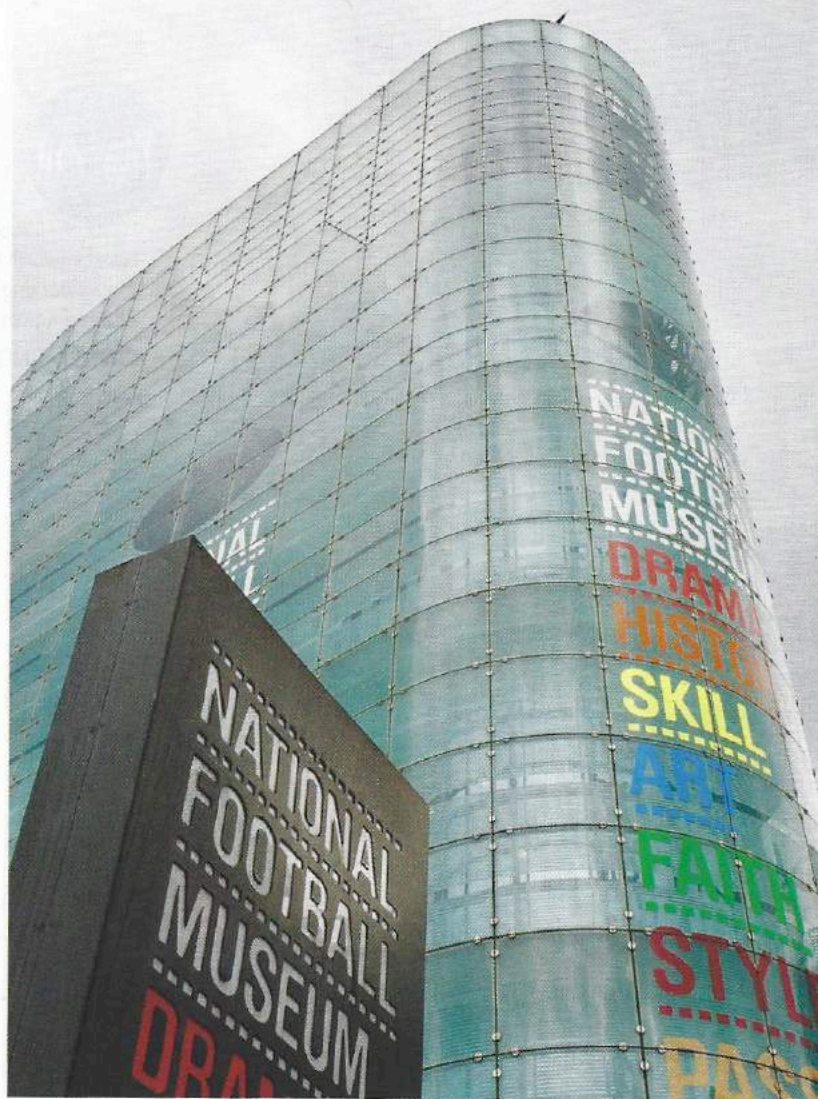


WE ARE THE  
*Music Makers,*  
AND WE ARE THE  
*dreamers of dreams*  
-Willy Wonka



**WELL-I-HOLE FARM CARAVAN & CAMPING**  
Well-I-hole Road, Greenfield, Saddleworth,  
Lancashire OL3 7HY [well-i-holefarm.co.uk](http://well-i-holefarm.co.uk)

**BURRS COUNTRY PARK CARAVAN AND  
MOTORHOME CLUB SITE** Woodhill Road, Bury,  
Lancashire, BL8 1DA [caravanclub.co.uk](http://caravanclub.co.uk)



house, and is close to local amenities. Fishing is permitted in the lakes and streams and the entire 36-acre site is prime dog-walking country. Buses and trains run to Manchester, so this is another site that can be used as a base from which to see the city.

Today, though, it's Lancashire heritage that awaits. Once George is pitched up, I join the 13:06 from Burrs Country Park Halt to travel on the East Lancashire Railway. There's nothing like the evocative smell of smoke and the rattle of wheels on the track to transport passengers back to the glorious days of steam.

The conductor, a bespectacled gentleman dapper in a uniform of black waistcoat, white shirt, black tie and peaked cap, takes my fare. He entertains passengers with tales from an age gone by; his rich Lancashire accent rolling words off his tongue easily. He is every bit the man that historic railways need.

After reaching the end of the line at Rawtenstall, a 30-minute journey from Burrs Country Park, the train trundles back, but this time I alight at Ramsbottom. Here Lancashire's industrial past blends comfortably with the needs of a semi-rural, modern town. Restaurants, boutiques and bistros sit alongside antique shops, artisans and the delightful Jessie May's Vintage Store.

But it's The Chocolate Café that draws me in. The shop downstairs sells a range of chocolates made on the premises, whilst upstairs all things chocolate are on offer.

**ABOVE  
CLOCKWISE**  
The East Lancashire Railway; The National Football Stadium; Inside The Chocolate Café, Ramsbottom

Throwing caution to the wind and a diet out of the window I tuck into a sumptuous piece of chocolate rocky road, washed down with a hot drink of white chocolate and marshmallow. I text a picture of my sins to my wife, Clare, as if confessing. It made me feel better.

There is more to learn about Ramsbottom and chocolate, so I talk to Terri Fletcher, the organiser of the Ramsbottom Chocolate Festival.

"In the first year it was small, just four stalls as a celebration of chocolate," says Terri. "By the next year it had grown, and it's just gained momentum each time. Ramsbottom is a really quirky little place that just loves these events. The local people really get on board. But we also attract people in from different parts of the country, because people do have such a fondness for chocolate."

The festival takes place on the weekend before Easter each year. Manufacturers and stallholders sell chocolate bars, Easter eggs, novelty chocolate, chocolate drinks and liqueurs, and even meat snacks infused with cocoa.

Terri says: "There's always that chocolate theme, but the range grows bigger every year. People's imaginations kind of run away. I think it brings out the Willy Wonka in all our traders. The Chocolate Festival allows their creativity to come out and they do things that are a little bit different. One year we had a limited edition chocolate bar. It was chicken tikka and chocolate. That was a really strange one, but it sold out!"

This feature was written prior to the Coronavirus pandemic. We are publishing it for your enjoyment and to help you plan your future trips.

Readers must follow the latest government advice before leaving their homes. [gov.uk/coronavirus](http://gov.uk/coronavirus)