

# LIVERPOOL IN A CAMPERVAN

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY: MIKE TRIPPITT

Mike Trippitt heads north to see the sights and hear the sounds of Liverpool before taking a nostalgic trip on a Ferry 'cross the Mersey

**M**y elder sister was a big Beatles fan back in the late sixties. The Fab Four's hits played out from forty-fives on our gramophone and through the wireless. Though I was five years younger and still at primary school the music entered my soul. But even though I've always loved the music of that era I had never been to Liverpool. So, I decided to pay the city of football, scousers and the Merseybeat a visit in my campervan 'George'. I just had to imagine how it would work.

## A TICKET TO RIDE

I had chosen a privately-owned campsite at Formby Point, and on arrival received some good advice from owner Shaun. "Don't drive back into Liverpool from here. Get the train." Next morning therefore I take a leisurely walk to Formby station instead of driving in. By 9.00am I'm at Liverpool's heart: no traffic hold-ups, no stress, and no fears of driving out of town in rush hour tonight.

I knew the importance of planning; I could not

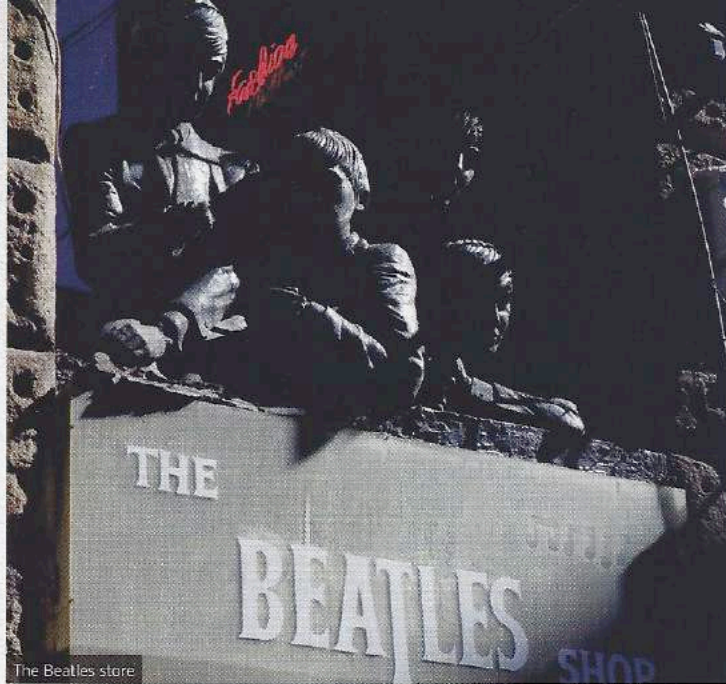
do everything, but I could waste time dithering. Purposefully therefore, I moved directly to Mathew Street, the focus of Liverpool's Cavern Quarter. The walk towards the Cavern Club, where Beatlemania began, was strangely exciting. Inevitably the area cashes in on its heritage. Rubber Soul Beatles Bar, The Beatles Shop, and Lennon's Bar did not exist in the Fab Four's day, but The Grapes Public House where John, Paul, George and Ringo were regulars is still there and the famous Cavern Club remains integral to the Liverpool music scene.

## GOING UNDERGROUND

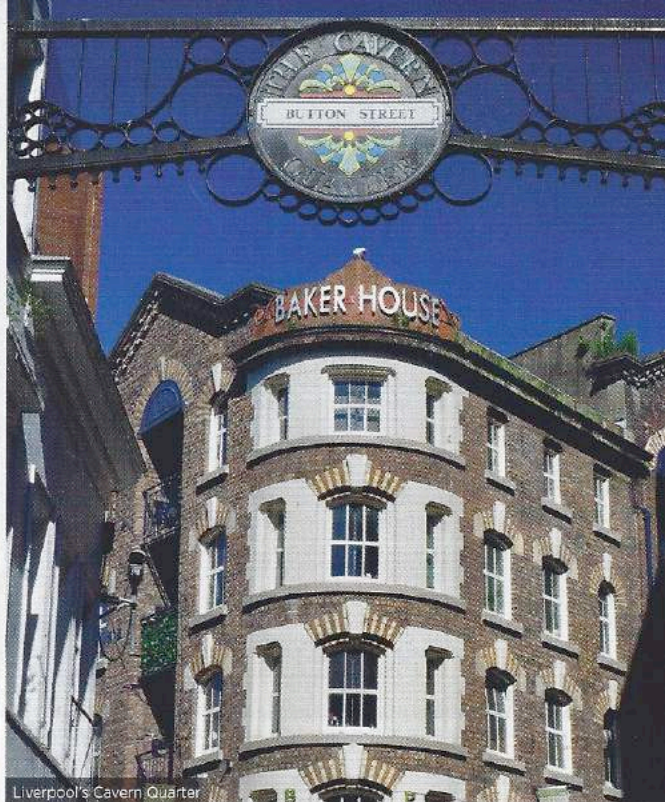
At 10.00am the Cavern Club doors open, and together with a handful of Chinese pilgrims I descend into the brick-arched cellar of the most renowned music club in England. Rumours and untruths circulate online and in print about The Cavern's varied past. Visiting, listening and looking dispels the myths. The club's owners do not pretend that this is the exact same Cavern that The Beatles graced 292 times. "The Beatles

### Where To Stay

George and I stayed at Formby Point Caravan Park, Lifeboat Road, Formby, L37 2EB. Telephone 01704 874367. [www.formbypointcaravanpark.co.uk](http://www.formbypointcaravanpark.co.uk). It's just a 30 minute walk and a 30 minute train ride to Liverpool city centre.



The Beatles store



Liverpool's Cavern Quarter



George at Formby Point campsite



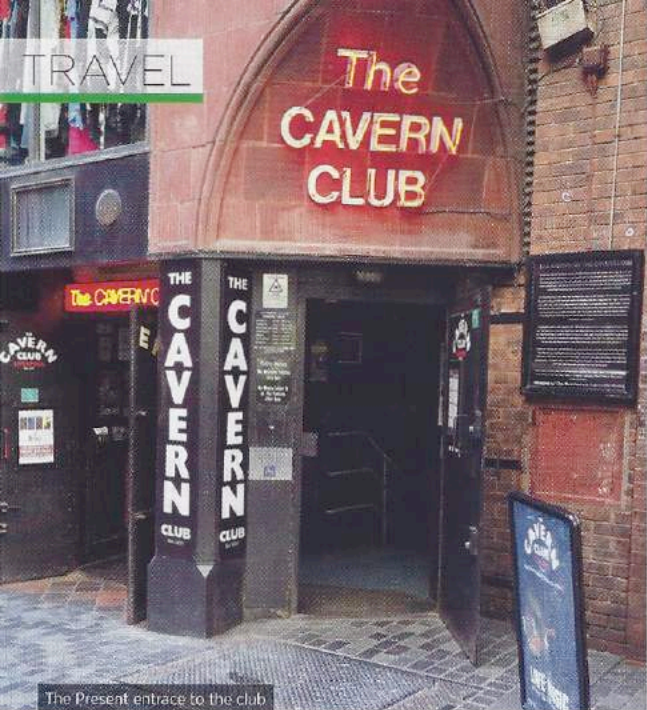
The Beatles Story entrance

never set foot on this stage," says professional tour guide Dale Roberts, who takes visitors on a free behind the scenes tour. The original stage was dismantled and sold in pieces for charity in 1973. With his scouse humour, and an accent he admits "can be difficult to understand", Dale tells us the fascinating history of Merseybeat and of The Cavern. Although the original club was closed and filled in to make way for a ventilation shaft to the underground railway, the site was redeveloped for retail when the shaft wasn't built. The club re-opened. "Fifteen hundred of the original bricks were used to re-construct it, and 70% of the club is on the original footprint," says Dale. The remaining 30% is an additional car park.

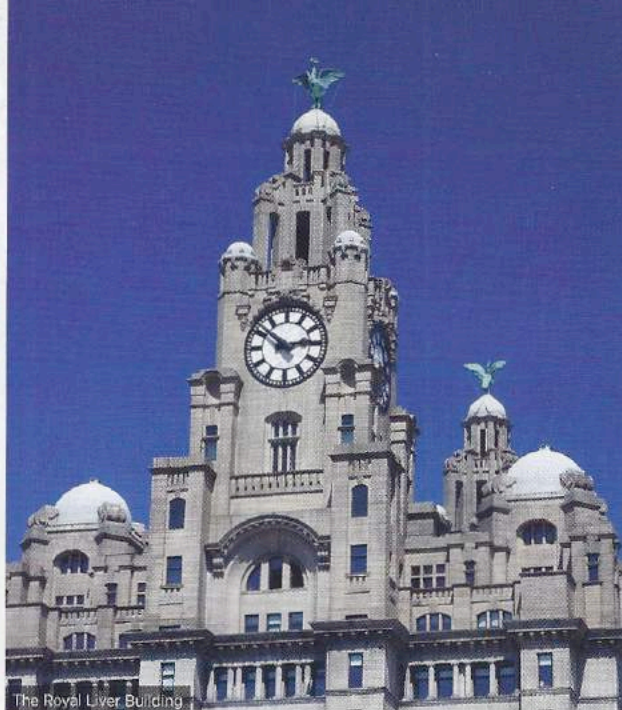
Outside the original entrance, now the clubs

## THE WALK TOWARDS THE CAVERN CLUB, WHERE BEATLEMANIA BEGAN, WAS STRANGELY EXCITING

fire escape, a larger-than-life Cilla Black strikes a pose. Donated to the city by her sons in 2017, the statue is a reminder that The Cavern gave us more than the Beatles. Cilla was famously a cloakroom attendant here, before being spotted by John Lennon and signed by Brian Epstein. Descending the stairs at 8 Mathew Street, we're taken through the artistes changing rooms and onto the main stage. Dale regales us with tales



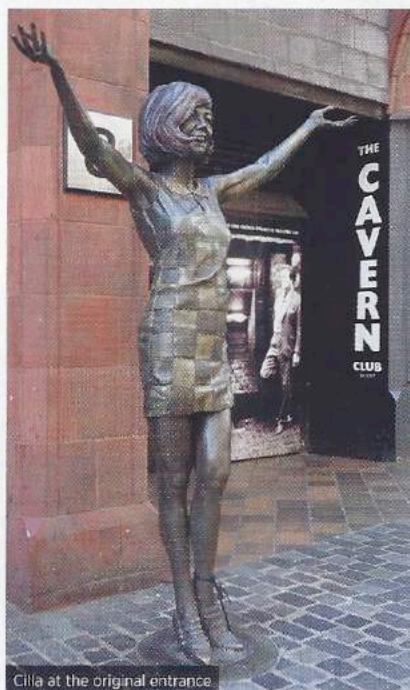
The Present entrance to the club



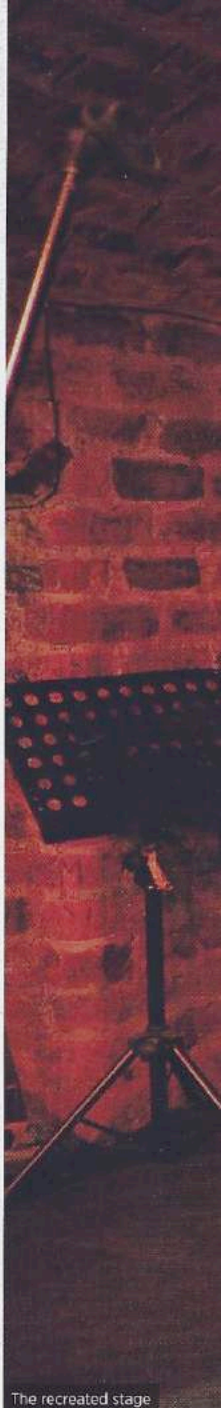
The Royal Liver Building



MV Snowdrop



Cilla at the original entrance



The recreated stage

# I COULD HAVE LINGERED ALL DAY IN THIS LITTLE BACKSTREET, LISTENING TO THE SOUNDS, WATCHING THE FACES, SAMPLING THE FOOD, AND DRINKING THE BEER

and anecdotes along the way, and by the time our tour is over the first live act of the day is already strumming an acoustic guitar.

I could have lingered all day in this little backstreet, listening to the sounds, watching the faces, sampling the food, and drinking the beer. But I had lots to see and more stories to hear, so left the quarter behind and walked through Liverpool's smart, spacious retail centre to its much-loved waterfront.

## LIVER BIRDS

Some Liverpudlians might argue that its maritime skyline—The Royal Liver Building (home to the

Liver Birds), The Cunard Building and the Port of Liverpool Building, known together as "The Three Graces"—is among the most iconic in the world. They'd have a point. The granting of UNESCO World Heritage Site status in 2004 to the former dock area puts it in the company of the Acropolis, the Vatican and Stone Henge.

It is Liverpool's seafaring past that gives its people, their accent and their humour a name. Sailors from Scandinavia came regularly on the merchant ships putting into the port. Inevitably liaisons with local girls occurred and friendships and marriages born. Many sailors settled into a new family and a new life. Those men brought with them Lobsouse, a traditional Scandinavian sailors' dish of salted meat, vegetables and potatoes—a stew, in other words. Not only was that shortened to 'scouse' here, it became synonymous with everything Liverpool, as well as the word for the stew. Later that afternoon, a true scouser with acerbic humour for which they are famed and loved, told me how to cook scouse: "Take the leftovers from last night's scouse, and add a potato." He

**George**  
 "George" is a 2016 VW T6 Camper King Retrotrek ([www.camperking.co.uk](http://www.camperking.co.uk)) supplied by Needingworth Campers ([www.needingworthcampers.com](http://www.needingworthcampers.com)). Though the technology is of the twenty first century, his two-tone exterior and retro interior give him the soul of the nineteen-sixties.



also told me that the female Liver Bird atop the Liver Building faces the sea to watch over sailors, whilst the male faces the city to make sure the pubs and bars open on time!

In the blistering summer's afternoon heat, hundreds have come down to Albert Dock, one of the largest collections of grade I listed buildings in England. These former warehouses now have contemporary use: shops, restaurants, museums and a gallery. Alongside, the Wheel of Liverpool glistens as it turns slowly, whilst barges and sailboats nestling in the dock basin bask in the sunlight.

#### JOHN LENNON REMEMBERED

My appetite for the city's musical past is not satisfied, so I go to The Beatles Story. Housed at Albert Dock and opened in 1990, the museum houses a vast collection of artifacts, memorabilia, instruments and handwritten music that charts the times of The Beatles from their early years through into their solo careers. 300,000 people visit The Beatles Story each year, with over 60% of visitors coming from overseas.

But is there a 'Must See' that stands out from other exhibits? "My personal favourite," says Dave Milner, Marketing and PR Executive at the museum, "is 'John Lennon's Last Piano'. John played this piano on the day that he was shot and killed. He used the instrument throughout his solo career, on albums such as *Double Fantasy* and *Walls And Bridges*, whilst he was based at Record Plant Studio in New York City." The Last Piano, on display until 4th June 2021, is surprisingly ornate, though protected in a glass case. I stare at it and reflect on those shocking events outside New York's Dakota building on 8th December 1980—the 'Kennedy' moment for my generation. I well remember what I was doing when I heard that John Lennon was dead.

**IT'S A PERFECT DAY FOR A BOAT TRIP. THE RIVER RIPPLES GENTLY IN A PLEASANT LIGHT BREEZE UNDER AN AZURE SKY**



Sunset at Formby Point



John Lennon's Last Piano



## FOR THE SECOND NIGHT IN A ROW THE SUN SETS SPECTACULARLY OVER FORMBY'S SAND DUNES - A PERFECT END TO A PERFECT DAY."

Liverpool is not just the home of the Beatles and Cilla. Fifty-eight acts from this city have had number one singles, more than from any other British city. Each act from Lita Roza in 1953 to Jonny Storm and the Teacups in 2018 is commemorated on the city's musical Wall of Fame.

### BOATS AND BUSES

Open-topped tour buses are great for getting about a city and learning more. I choose an hour long one that shows us the cathedrals, the bombed-out church, Victorian hotels, the waterfront and the modern city centre. Others are more Beatles focused. By the time I'm dropped off at the famous pierhead, another iconic 1960s Mersey sound

plays out strong across those waiting to board. 'Ferry Cross the Mersey', Gerry and the Pacemakers 1965 hit, booms from the speakers on the ferry *MV Snowdrop* as she approaches the landing stage. She plies all day long between the city, and Woodside and Seacombe on the Wirral. She's both a scheduled ferry and a pleasure tripper boat.

It's a perfect day for a boat trip. The river ripples gently in a pleasant light breeze under an azure sky. Across the water the scientific research ship *Sir David Attenborough* nears completion at Camell Laird's Birkenhead boatyard. To think, we were in danger of calling the vessel *Boaty McBoatface*. Perhaps the days of naming by public vote are over. It's here, out on the waters of the

Mersey that Liverpool's maritime skyline—famous the world over—stands out. The commercial docks have gone, the shipping has gone, but the history and heritage remain. The view back across the water to the pierhead is sublime. My visit here would not have been complete without *MV Snowdrop*.

### PERFECT DAY

For the second night in a row the sun sets spectacularly over Formby's sand dunes—a perfect end to a perfect day. Using Formby Point campsite and the train proved to be a cheap and simple way of seeing Liverpool. It just needed a bit of thought, effort and imagination. But, as John Lennon himself once said: "It's easy if you try." ■