

The Northern Echo

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The lifestyle magazine
for the North-East

JULY 2004

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Premier Stage Productions Ltd is delighted to announce the return of the Bananas in Pyjamas to the British stage! This brand new show, "Its singing time!" promises to be a real treat for all Bananas fans young and old. With a strong emphasis on singing and dressing up, this show will feature well-known nursery rhymes such as Wee Willie Winkie, Baa Baa Black Sheep, Old MacDonald and Little Miss Muffet to name but a few. The mischievous twins, B1 and B2, will delight as they decide the very best way to have fun is to play tricks on Amy, Lulu and Morgan, their teddy bear friends; and what is Rat in a Hat up to? No good as usual we expect... Family tickets available.

Engie Benjy



Friday 20th - Saturday 21st August
1:00pm & 3:30pm

The answer is easy; come along to the theatre to meet Engie Benjy, Jollop the dog and Don the Van in person live on stage! Not only that: they will be joined on the day by Astronaut Al and Spaceship, Pilot Pete and Plane and Messenger Mo and Bike. Follow a series of hilarious antics as Engie Benjy calls on all the boys and girls to help solve all the problems and crazy puzzles. Life is never dull with Jollop around! (better hold onto your popcorn and Engie Juice - this dog is always hungry!) This show is from Premier Stage Productions who brought us Mr. Men and Dream Street. Family tickets available.

Gala Theatre
 Millennium Place, Durham, DH1 1WA
 www.galadurham.co.uk
Gala BOX OFFICE: 0191 332 4041 GROUP BOOKINGS: 0191 332 4045

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 a Gannett Company,
 Priestgate, Darlington
 DL1 1NF
 (01325) 381313

ADVERTISING
 Trish Taylor
 (01325) 505 233
 trish.taylor@nne.co.uk

EDITORIAL
 Jenny Needham
 (01325) 505082
 jenny.needham@nne.co.uk

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sharon griffiths

“These days I am a scarlet woman, with a pair of bright red walking shoes

OH Nancy Sinatra, where are you now? Remember These Boots Are Made For Walking?, though I think in the video on Top of the Pops back in 1966 the boots were high-heeled and perilous and probably not much good for striding over a dale.

But boots really made for walking are much more fun than they ever were. So are the clothes. And so, come to that, is walking...

Walking is the ideal exercise. No need for designer Lycra or bats, rackets, clubs, a large field and 21 other people to play with. No smelly changing rooms, shared showers and – oh joy – not a whiff of team spirit. No “play up, play up and play the game” or “letting the side down”. Just you. With maybe a chosen companion or two as an optional extra.

You don’t even need to be super fit. All you need is a pair of legs in reasonable working order, and something comfortable on your feet.

And that is now the easy bit.

Forget the old idea of hiking boots that looked as though you were going to do a 12 hour shift down the pit. Those boots weighed a ton, were made from rock hard leather and took so long to wear in that your blisters developed blisters.

They are museum pieces. Use them as plant pots. Today’s hiking boots are as light as a feather, instantly wearable and instead of dragging you down with their lead weight, literally put a spring in your step and make walking a pleasure, not a penance.

And when it comes to shoes...

These days I am a scarlet woman, with a pair of bright red walking shoes. They look a bit like desert boots but as they are Italian, they would make deserts look stylish. And they reduced me to a dither of indecision. For as well as the usual boring walking shoe colour they are also available baby blue and a nice bright pink. And for a moment in the shoe shop in Hawes, I considered getting in touch with my inner Barbie. (Barbie actually does have a hiking outfit among the hundreds of others in her extremely extensive wardrobe.)

For years walkers were confined to an extremely narrow range of colours – light

sludge, dark sludge and something the colour of cowpats. And although at least half the people striding out were women, manufacturers refused to recognise the fact. It doesn’t do much for your self esteem when you tug on a waterproof to find yourself described as “Medium man”.

But now the hills are alive with every colour of the rainbow. No longer do you have to look as though you’re trying to blend in with a bog. Pinks and purples, lemons and jades, turquoises and primrose. Walking shops have as much merchandise directed at women and as men. Fit, finish and style have all improved beyond recognition. This stuff is not only high performance, it’s actually comfortable.

And Barbie isn’t the only one with a bright pink backpack.

Clothes and equipment have improved out of all recognition in the last generation and the improved cut and colour of clothes is only a bonus really. But an important bonus.

Because it reminds us that walking is not a mere endurance test, not a grim and serious ritual taken – like cod liver oil – just because it’s good for you. And that you don’t have to look like Worzel Gummidge’s sister while you’re doing it – though I’m afraid I sometimes still do. Even walking socks are now smaller, softer, thinner and more comfortable, instead of being great hairy things designed for great hairy legs.

Walking is fun and if you’re dressed in bright cheerful colours and bouncing along in comfortable shoes, it all adds immensely to the pleasure. You can forget about your feet and just enjoy the view.

The bonus too is that exercise is cheering. Lifts your mood far better than pills. And how can anyone feel miserable with bright red shoes and a purple backpack?

More women than ever are walking. It’s why the shops have started catering for us. What’s more, more women are walking in ones and twos and small groups, without any men. It’s a sort of outdoor version of reading groups. You get conversation, exercise that’s effective but fairly effortless, pleasant surroundings and come home fitter, firmer and immensely cheered up.

Definitely worth getting your boots on for.

NE window shopping



BEJEWELLED



THE stunning necklaces above were made by Helen Rennison and Sue Ley, otherwise known as Heart and Soul. The two women, who are based in Richmond, started off selling their hand-made pieces to friends but found the response was phenomenal. They use amber, gold, rose quartz, jasper, jade, tiger-eye... and each piece has a heart in it somewhere. Necklaces sell from £60, bracelets from around £30. (01325) 718336.

SHOPPERS at the MetroCentre have noticed that the newest store to the malls is a real gem. Market Cross Jewellers, a well-established chain of high street jewellers originally from Guisborough, have opened in the Green Mall, the first of the 13 branches to be based in a major out-of-town shopping centre. The store specialises in high quality and designer jewellery and watches.

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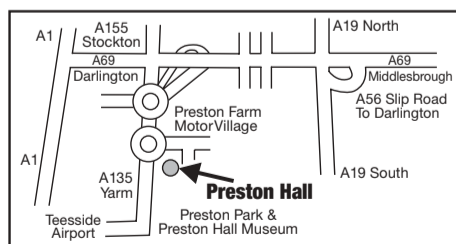


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Tranquility: peace and beauty on the banks of the River Esk



NE leisure



It's summer and time to enjoy the beautiful countryside of the North-East. The Northern Echo Walks Correspondent MARK REID extols the joys of a good walk and offers some tips on the equipment to take with you

The great outdoors

THERE are few things in life that can beat a long day spent walking across the hills of Northern England followed by a refreshing drink and delicious meal in a local village pub. We have some of the finest walking country in Britain right on our doorstep, with the Yorkshire Dales, Lake District, North York Moors and Northumberland National Parks within easy reach, as well as Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty such as the North Pennines, Nidderdale and Northumberland's coastline.

For me, walking is all about the experience; the journey, not the destination. Something always happens along the way, something that will stay as a precious memory for years to come, whether it be a farmer working his sheepdog on a hillside, the 'cackle' of a red grouse as it takes flight high on the heather moors, the vivid colour of a hay meadow in June, the smell of a coal fire drifting in the air on a cool autumnal afternoon, the first lambs of spring... a well-planned walk can turn a day out into a memorable experience.

Walking is now our most popular pastime. It is also extremely good for you. A brisk walk will burn up 100 calories per mile, which equates to around 300 calories an hour. This, in turn, will increase your body's metabolic rate and help weight loss, as well as lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels. It is also a great aerobic exercise; if you walk regularly, your lungs, heart and overall fitness will benefit. You will also feel less stressed, younger and healthier as endorphins are released into your bloodstream.

But there is much more to walking than how many calories you are burning off and how far you have walked. In addition to these great health benefits, you will also be surrounded by beautiful scenery, you will be able to fill your lungs with clean, fresh air, experience the weather and seasons, be in the company of friends, enjoy nature at close hand and relax at a traditional country pub. Then there are the views, mountain peaks, waterfalls, hay meadows, history and heritage all around, which combine together to help relax your body, mind and spirit. I have yet to meet someone who feels stressed after spending a day walking through the Yorkshire Dales.

TOP TIPS FOR PLANNING AN ENJOYABLE WALK

- Never underestimate the strenuous nature of walking, particularly when this is combined with high ground and the elements. Do not attempt to complete a walk that is beyond your skill, experience or level of fitness.
- When walking through the hills of Northern England, you will average no more than two-and-a-half miles an hour.
- Check the weather forecast before setting out and always walk in a group as this is not only much safer but also much more sociable – spending four hours walking on your own is not much fun.
- A First Aid kit is a good idea, but don't fill it with unnecessary stuff. Sunburn, stings, cuts and sprains are the most common injuries.
- Keep your hands out of your pockets and look where you are going.
- Set objectives for a walk, such as a hill summit, a great view or a village pub.
- Look for interesting and contrasting terrain on the map, such as tightly packed contours, woodland, rivers or moorland.
- Know your limits – more than 12 miles is a full day's walk.
- Plan a climb into your walk to gain perspective and great views. It is better to plan a short and sharp climb at the beginning of your walk and a long, gradual descent.
- On a circular route, walk towards the west in the morning and the east in the afternoon. That way, you will have the sun behind you all day, bathing the countryside in front of you in light.

MARK'S FAVOURITE WALKS: See overleaf ►

ESSENTIAL GEAR

YOUR boots are the most important thing, so make sure that they are waterproof and comfortable, with good ankle support and sturdy soles. The wrong footwear can mean every step is blisteringly painful – and you will make more than 26,000 strides on a 12-mile walk.

● Take a detailed Ordnance Survey 1:25,000 scale map with you, and learn how to read it. If you are heading into remote countryside then also carry a compass.

● **Waterproof and windproof clothing will keep you dry and warm; there is no such thing as bad weather, only the wrong clothes.**

● Drink plenty of water, as you can sweat up to a litre of fluid every hour on a warm day. Snack food is important to keep energy levels up.

These are the basics, everything else is added extras. You can spend a small fortune on accessories, just choose the appropriate equipment for your walk.

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NE leisure

Walks Correspondent MARK REID picks four of his favourite trails to try this summer

YORKSHIRE DALES: Upper Swaledale

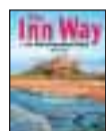
THIS walk encapsulates the magic and beauty of the Yorkshire Dales with hay meadows, riverside walks, field walls and barns, woodland, waterfalls, windswept summits and superlative views. From Muker in the heart of Upper Swaledale, walk northwards up through the spectacular glaciated valley, keeping close to England's fastest flowing river, along meandering paths across traditional hay meadows up to reach a series of waterfalls set in a narrow wooded gorge near the hamlet of Keld. From Keld, follow a superb track up over Kison Hill with breathtaking views across Swaledale towards the high fells of Lovely Seat and Great Shunner Fell, with a memorable final descent back to Muker.

Distance: 5 ½ miles

Time: 2 ½ hours

Map: OS Explorer OL30

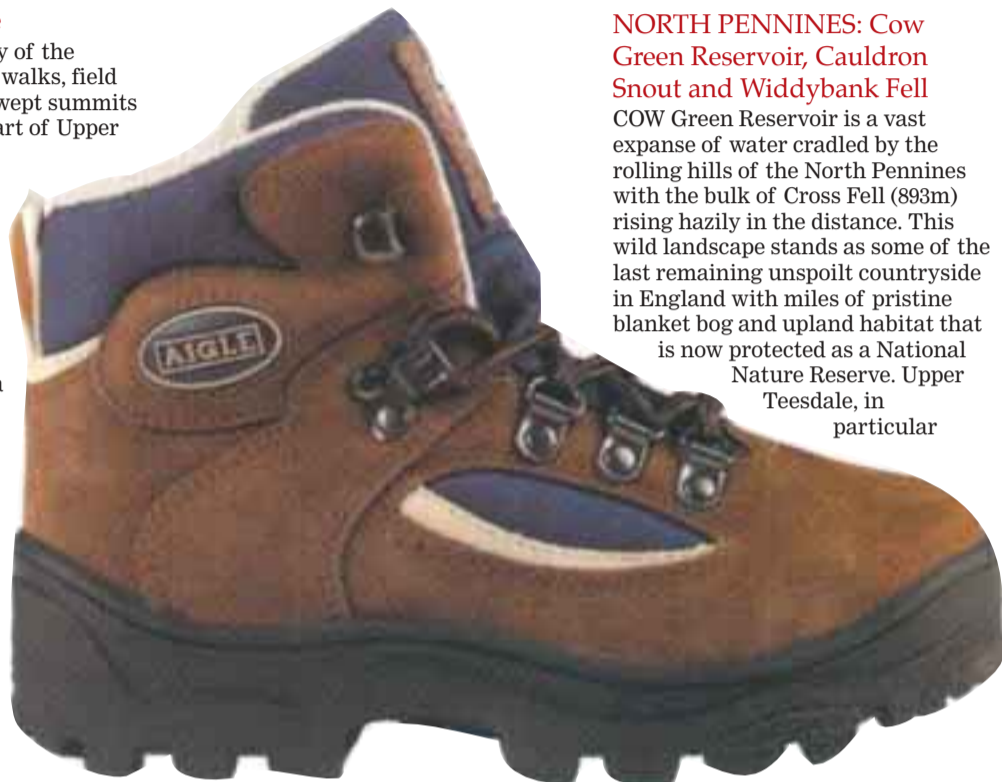
Pubs: Farmers Arms at Muker.



Mark Reid is The Northern Echo's Walks Correspondent and the author of The Inn Way series of guidebooks. His latest book is The Inn Way...to

Northumberland. See www.innway.co.uk for more details.

His walks column is in the 7Days section of The Northern Echo every Thursday.



NORTH PENNINES: Cow Green Reservoir, Cauldron Snout and Widdybank Fell

COW Green Reservoir is a vast expanse of water cradled by the rolling hills of the North Pennines with the bulk of Cross Fell (893m) rising hazily in the distance. This wild landscape stands as some of the last remaining unspoilt countryside in England with miles of pristine blanket bog and upland habitat that is now protected as a National Nature Reserve. Upper Teesdale, in particular

Widdybank Fell, is renowned throughout the world for its unique variety of Alpine-Arctic plants known as the Teesdale Assemblage, which are only found here due to the high altitude combined with the rare Sugar Limestone rock – these plants are relics of the last Ice Age. From Cow Green Reservoir, a path leads down alongside the spectacular Cauldron Snout waterfall, where the River Tees tumbles 200-ft over a series of huge rock ledges formed from the Great Whin Sill. The walk from here beneath the Great Whin Sill outcrops of Falcon Clints, towards Widdy Bank Farm is a delight, with wonderful river scenery and some exciting terrain to negotiate. The final section of this walk follows the unenclosed road as it gently climbs back over Widdybank Fell towards Cow Green Reservoir, with the remains of abandoned lead mines all around.

Distance: 7 ½ miles

Time: 4 hours

Maps: OS Explorer OL 31

Pubs: Pub at Langdon Beck

NORTH YORK MOORS: Egton Bridge and Beck Hole

EGTON Bridge, one of the prettiest villages in the North York Moors, is known as "the village missed by the Reformation" and stands as perhaps the most famous Catholic parish in the country. From Egton Bridge, follow the old Toll Road alongside the River Esk to Grosmont. This is a steam-train lover's paradise with the station, sidings and yards of the North Yorkshire Moors Railway dominating the village. From Grosmont, follow the Rail Trail south into the thickly-wooded Murk Esk Valley, walking along the original track-bed of Stephenson's railway to reach the idyllic hamlet of Beck Hole, which boasts one of England's finest country inns. From Beck Hole, head back along the Rail Trail for a short distance then climb up through the forest, passing Murk Esk Cottage out of the Murk Esk Valley, from where we follow the line of the Roman Road across Lease Rigg before footpaths take us back down into Egton Bridge.

Distance: 7 miles

Time: 3 ½ hours

Maps: OS Explorer OL 27

Pubs: Birch Hall Inn at Beck Hole, as well as pubs at Egton Bridge and Grosmont.

NORTHUMBERLAND: Breamish Valley Hillforts

THIS well-marked circular walk starts at the National Park Centre at Ingram and takes in some of the finest prehistoric remains in Northumberland, set in the magnificent surroundings of the Breamish Valley in the heart of the Cheviot Hills. Few people live in this area now, but in prehistoric times, the population was much greater, with many small communities of people living in defensive settlements and forts high up on the hills. The rough terrain of the Breamish Valley has meant that much of the landscape has escaped the plough and so remained untouched, leaving an abundance of remains, ranging from hillforts to burial mounds, with ancient field systems and settlements dating back to the Bronze Age. There are well-preserved Iron Age hillforts on Wether Hill and Cochrane Pike, as well as an Iron Age defensive settlement overlooking Middledean Burn. The highlight of this walk is the Iron Age hillfort of Brough Law, set on a promontory of land high above the Breamish Valley, complete with its original stone ramparts.

Distance: 5 ½ miles

Time: 3 hours

Maps: OS Explorer Sheet OL 16

Refreshments: Northumberland National Park Visitor Centre at Ingram.



Above: Aigle Confins boot, £20, available from www.youngexplorers.co.uk

Left: the Merrell Helium Ventilator trail walking and hiking shoe, £59.99, from Blacks. Call 0800 214 890 for stockists www.blacks.co.uk

A Great Day Out



FREE Admission with every full paying adult

NE is delighted to team up with the Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre in Washington to offer readers an opportunity to have a great day out for all the family.

WWT Washington is home to hundreds of ducks, geese, swans and flamingos. Situated on the north bank of the River Wear, the centre boasts the largest colony of Grey Heron in the region and a developing colony of Common Tern. Highlights include a visit to the Waterfowl Nursery where you can watch day-old ducklings take their first wobbly steps (May to July), the Hawthorn Wood Feeding Station (October to March) and the Glaxo Wellcome Wetland Discovery Centre (all year).

The Waterside Cafe has an excellent reputation for home cooked food. Relax and learn on a great family day out.

For a fantastic day out, just cut out this advert, and take it along to the Washington Wildfowl & Wetlands Centre.

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Reader Offer



Consett revisited

Consett is experiencing a Renaissance and home buyers are snapping up properties in the former steel town. CHRISTEN PEARS reports on a housing development that epitomises its new spirit

TWENTY years ago, Consett was a sorry place. The steelworks had closed, unemployment had rocketed and the heart had been torn out of the town. Today, it couldn't be more different, with hundreds of people flocking to the area to buy the new houses that seem to springing up all over.

Drive along the bypass that edges the old steelworks site and you'll see dozens of new houses – the former bus depot just behind the town is now home to a smart, new estate, and nearby is Derwent Garden Village, built on a former Northumbrian Water brownfield site.

The development has been created by Durham-based Rivergreen Developments, an environmentally friendly ethos. Rivergreen has set up a partnership with Northumbrian Water that will enable residents to buy water butts and compost bins at a reduced rate.

It also benefits from cutting-edge interior design, with designers from Ward Robinson creating the two show houses. The Newcastle-based company is usually associated with state of the art office complexes and the interiors of some of the region's best-known restaurants, including Fisherman's Lodge, Treacle Moon, Café 21 and Bistro 21.

Designers Jill Holst and Karen Walker, who worked together on the interior design of Seaham Hall Hotel, put the finishing touches to the show houses at Derwent Garden Village, as well as selecting the fireplaces, flooring, wall tiles and lights in the other homes on the development.

"It's very unusual for us to get involved with this kind of project. We are usually employed to design hotels, restaurants and prestigious office complexes," says Jill. "We rarely use our expertise to create a home environment, so these show homes are special in that respect."

She describes the look as "warm and contemporary" and hopes people visiting the development will be inspired by what they see and take some of the ideas away with them.

Everything in the show houses has been hand-picked by Jill and Karen, from the cookbooks in the kitchens to the toys in the children's bedrooms.

Both designers found the project a refreshing and enjoyable change. Jill says: "It's been really good fun working on the

show homes because it's like creating a place to live for people who don't exist. We create characters in our mind who might live in the house and then design their environment around their make-believe lives.

"We set their tables, make their beds, hang pictures on their walls and put books on their shelves. The only thing we don't do is fill their cupboards."

The designers have created two different homes for two different types of families. The three-bedroom properties are designed with a younger family in mind, while the four-bedroom ones are for the mature family, possibly a professional couple who need guest accommodation occasionally or would like to turn one of the bedrooms into a study.

Another exciting element to Derwent Garden Village is that one of the homes will boast a medal-winning garden from the Chelsea Flower Show. Award-winning landscape architect Alan Capper, of Newcastle-based Kent Design, is installing his Catwalk Garden.

The garden created huge interest at Chelsea last year, when supermodel Jodie Kidd used it for a photo shoot. Alan has also created the gardens of the show homes, using plants which will encourage wildlife and enhance the environment.

● Prices start at less than £100,000 for one-bedroom apartments and go up to £140,000 to £1750,000 for four-bedroom detached houses. For more information call 0191-3831174 or visit the website at www.rivergreen.co.uk



Cutting edge: designs by Holst and Walker

6 OF THE BEST

INFLATABLE POOLS

KIDDIE DIP

Helicopter Pool (£10) www.elc.co.uk

LITTLE ones might be scared to death of lots of adult splashing activity, so it's best to give them their own space. And what better than this fabulous helicopter pool complete with removable rotors and steering wheel so they can't escape?



the slightly larger garden and big enough for family fun. The panels are the perfect complement for all your flowers and plants too.



BEGINNER SWIMMER

12 foot pool (£199) www.gadgetstuff.co.uk

WE adults might not be able to swim in these pools but at 12 feet, the kids will be able to master their doggy paddle – with supervision, of course. This one comes with an easy drain system and even a filter unit.



BIG BATH

Family pool (£40) www.elc.co.uk

A GREAT-sized pool for dad to slip into

after a hard day at work, or for a couple of tearaway teenage types to get soaked in. The wide, sturdy walls mean most of the water stays where it should.

SNAPPY SPLASHER

Quick Pool (£99.95) www.firebox.com

AT almost 11ft long by 6ft wide, this sturdy PVC pool can withstand all manner of messing around. With its handy charger, it takes just four minutes to inflate it.



WAVES OF COLOUR

Rainbow pool (£59.99) www.argos.co.uk

THIS brightly-coloured octagonal pool is for

MONSTER FOR THE MANY-HEADED

18 foot pool (£495) www.poolstore.co.uk

FRIENDS, relatives, neighbours... you really are going to have to invite them all around before this monster is at bursting point. I have never seen an inflatable this size before: great fun, and if anyone decides to buy one could you please let me know.



Peter Jenkinson



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NE interiors



Howzat for a family home

JO STEVENS visits a happy and energetic home, which is often bursting at the seams with family and friends

If you didn't know where to look, you would never find the house. But drive down an unprepossessing private road, a mere stone's throw from a bustling shopping centre, turn the corner and there's a "magic garden" kind of moment. It's another world.

I announce my arrival on the intercom and high wrought iron gates begin to swing open onto the courtyard of this late Victorian family home.

Mid-morning and it's a hive of activity. A handyman attends to the gates, a gardener busies himself with tidying jobs, three noisy dogs and two children briefly inspect the stranger in their midst before promptly resuming their activities, and out comes the lady of the house, Debbie Newton, in a stripy chef's apron. The welcome feels warm, relaxed, genuine. I am introduced to the two impeccably mannered children, ten-year-old Thomas and his sister Emily, aged eight. We all repair to the kitchen, where Debbie's husband John has been practising his cricket technique.

Debbie, John and their children moved into the house in 1998, making them only the third family to live here since Queen Victoria ruled the Empire. It was built in 1893. Strong cricketing connections began with the original owner, a solicitor, lover of rural pursuits, and fanatical devotee of cricket, who donated land for the nearby cricket club and had a son who played for

Durham County. John and Debbie met through the RAF, where Debbie's father and John were both officers, while Debbie worked for the Ministry of Defence. When John left the service to take over his father's haulage business, he managed to prise Debbie away from her beloved Devon. They married and made their home in County Durham. "It took me a little while to settle," Debbie admits, "but now I really love the North-East and want my children to grow up here."

This large kitchen, with its sturdy furniture and interesting collections, is obviously a place where serious cooking goes on. The Newtons like nothing better than having the house filled with family and friends. They think nothing of laying on a party for 90 people. On millennium night, they had 50 guests staying and children's sleepovers have meant 18 children camping out in the dining room. The food and drinks shopping is John's

task. He brings back truckloads and they both enjoy the cooking.

We take a look round the three reception rooms, where all those magnificent features so redolent of the large, 19th century house are displayed. Great high ceilings, mouldings, cornices, deep skirting boards and, of course, original fireplaces. Despite its grandeur the family room is cosy and comfortable, a place to relax and mull over the day's events. I notice a picture of the church in Otterton, Devon, where Debbie was christened. In

Continued on page 10





From top: the sitting room; Debbie in the kitchen; the dining room

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NE interiors



Bright and beautiful: the children's bedrooms, above; right: the drawing room; below right: lap of luxury in the master bedroom – a free-standing bath in the bay window



Pictures: DAVID WOOD



► Continued from page 8



an armchair by the fire, the family cat snores on.

The focal point in the dining room is the enormous original stained glass window. This room is a popular gathering place when family come to stay. More than 40 people gathered here for Christmas dinner, which went on into the night and, as Emily helpfully points out, where "lots of people drank lots of port".

The sitting room, leading into the garden, tends to be used more in summer. Debbie has lifted the carpet in here and sanded and stained the floors, giving a light, airy feel. There are framed pictures of RAF Hercules planes to remind John of earlier times and, throughout the house, lots of pictures of Emily and Thomas. "I can't think of any pictures I could buy that would be more important to me than those of my children," says Debbie, as Emily challenges me to find her in a school group photograph taken at Durham High School. Thomas is a day pupil at Barnard Castle School and would love to board on a weekly basis. "But we're not ready to part with him just yet," says Debbie.

The spacious landing leads to seven large bedrooms, all with open fireplaces, two bathrooms and a shower room. The master bedroom has a free-standing claw bath in front of the glorious bay window. "We couldn't bear to break into the walls," says Debbie. "And it's lovely to relax in the bath with your favourite music or TV programme in absolute peace."

Thomas suddenly appears and directs me to his enormous bedroom. Cricket may be important but rugby is the name of the

game. I admire pictures of his absolute hero. "Dad took me to Australia for the final and we were standing just behind Jonny Wilkinson when he scored the winner. It was the best thing ever!" Thomas switches on his computer and we make our way out to Emily's lovely room. Emily is a writer and keeps a daily diary. Naturally, she has a desk where she practises her art and will probably be a famous writer some day.

This is an energetically happy place. Almost an Enid Blyton world for well-travelled children with interests galore. And with the gardener an honorary grandpa, oodles of friends, feasts and get togethers, and an acre of garden to bounce around, who wouldn't want to live here?

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SHARON GRIFFITHS reports on the new collection of furnishings from the National Trust

Craftsmanship and quality: left – the burr walnut on pine mirror copied from an 18th century version found in Beatrix Potter's house; below – a throw in Knole's Drawing Room fabric draped over the Trafalgar sofa by Duresta

Heritage in your home

A TOUCH of class has never been easier. If a visit to an historic house has inspired you to turn yours into a stately home, then there's a new brand to look for – The National Trust.

Proving that they produce far more than posh jam and pot pourri, they've just launched a new Home Collection of furniture and fabrics. These have been produced by partners in collaboration with the Trust, resulting in ranges inspired by the spirit and style of items found in the Trust's houses.

The ranges are not cheap but are produced to very high standards, with painstaking attention to detail, and they positively exude class.

For the past ten years, the Trust has worked successfully with paint manufacturers Farrow and Ball. They are now first call for those wanting the muted paint shades of Jane Austen's day or the rich bold colours loved by the Victorians.

Now upholsterers Duresta have produced the Trafalgar Sofa, and the Lanhydrock Chair, based on furniture from NT properties. Bylaw have reproduced a walnut veneered mirror, among other items (copied from one from Beatrix Potter's house in Cumbria), a Townend cricket table and a Greyfriars chest. There are fabrics from Knole, carpet from Uppark and cushions from Hardwick Great Hall.

"The National Trust is about more than just having a nice day out," says Isabel Saiz, licensing manager for the Trust. "It is also about inspiring future generations, helping them to learn about our heritage and to think about design. We have chosen our partners very carefully for their high standards as our aim is to promote quality design and craftsmanship."

The National Trust will not sell the products themselves – though don't rule that out in the future. Instead, they will be sold by their partners as part of their ranges, but with the National Trust logo. For every product sold, the partners make a payment to the National Trust, which goes directly towards supporting

conservation work. So far partners include Duresta, Old Charm, Bylaw, Brintons and Zoffany, as well as Farrow and Ball. Coming soon will be beds by Hypnos and kitchens by Mark Wilkinson.

"We are taking things quite slowly because we want to be sure to get it right," says Isabel. "We have brainstorming sessions about what might work. Staff in our properties make notes of the things that visitors particularly admire and we see if there is a way of using that inspiration.

"But we have over 400 properties, many of them crammed with many very beautiful things. It will be a long time before we run out of ideas."

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NE gardening IN ASSOCIATION WITH **Poundland**

Down to earth

Katrina Palmer and Steve Barker have restored a neglected kitchen garden into a successful organic fruit and vegetable business. SARAH FRENCH reports on a growing partnership



THE narrow track with its thick crop of grass down the centre leading to a row of low, run-down, stone stores does nothing to prepare you for the garden of Bluebell Organics.

Dressed in a chunky cardi with appropriate daisy motifs, Katrina Palmer, one of the partners in the business, leads the way through the second of the row's green painted doors.

It is truly an entry to a secret garden, opening to reveal two acres of crops surrounded by a fine brick wall, some of which dates back to the 18th century. The first plants we come to are rows of lettuces, from the deepest purple to the brightest green. These are followed by beans and peas which lead on to potatoes, spinach and beetroot, both the conventional and golden and stripy varieties. Across the way are the first leaves of ten different varieties of courgettes, squash and pumpkins.

Mixed among them all is a fine crop of weeds, a constant battle for Katrina and her partner Steve Barker, but also a constant they've come to terms with over the last three years. "It was wall-to-wall nettles and docks when we first came but we cleared those and then planted a few crops. It looked perfect that April but it was a question of seeing what emerged. We soon found out that we had a ten year population of weeds," explains Katrina.

Of course, being organic they couldn't just pour a few gallons of weedkiller over the lot and so started their constant round of rotavating and hand-weeding to keep them at bay. "As long as we get them when they're small and they don't get a chance to seed, we can more or less keep on top of them," says Katrina. "As long as it doesn't rain."

In the top corner of the garden is a 70-year-old apple orchard, mostly bramleys, although Katrina and Steve have added eating apples, plums and damsons. "When we had our first open day a lady from the village came who told us she was the daughter of the man who planted the oldest trees, so that's how we know their age," explains Katrina.

In those days, it was the kitchen garden for the Hall at Forcett, just west of Darlington, and continued to be used until about ten years ago when it was left derelict.

Originally from Guildford in Surrey, Katrina had been working on an organic box delivery scheme in Wales, where she also got training in growing vegetables. Ready to move on, the man responsible for the Forcett garden at the time contacted her and invited her north. She soon met Steve, from Morton-on-Swale, who was working on a local box scheme.

Friday is delivery day when Katrina hits the road with boxes of produce for their 54 customers from Middleton-in-Teesdale to Catterick. They supplement their own items with non-English produce like bananas and oranges, sourced from an organic wholesaler at Wetherby. And then there are the farmers' markets. The first Saturday of the month is Barnard Castle, then it's over to Orton in Cumbria and Hexham the following week. The third

Saturday is Richmond and Brough, and the final weekend of the month is Stanhope.

Alongside the staples of potatoes, carrots, cabbages and the like, they also sell more unusual varieties like African horned cucumbers that they grow alongside capsicums in the polytunnel. Nearby, the south-facing greenhouse is about to produce a good crop of tomatoes and chillies.

"People tell us our carrots are the best they've ever tasted and we find that once they've had those they'll try other things," says Katrina. "I like to look through the catalogues to find things that look a bit more interesting that we can grow for a laugh."

While they grow some potatoes and brassicas themselves, a new partnership with Steve Ward at Morton-on-Swale means they can grow them on a field scale. As well as the crops, they also sell soups, preserves, chutneys and apple juice, with the orchard's abundant crop pressed by hand.

As the manager of the Barnard Castle and Stanhope farmers' markets, Katrina is passionate about them being what they say they are. "We sometimes get people coming up and asking 'did you grow this yourself?' That shows they don't really understand the concept or that they are suspicious of where the products are from.

"Not all farmers' markets follow the rules but all our members are only allowed to sell their own products, whether it's fruit and veg, eggs or meat."

Confusion over what is and what isn't organic also threatens to undermine those who follow the concept to the letter. At Bluebell they only use manure from the Forcett Hall cows and to be registered organic they have to be fully compliant with the Soil Association regulations. Inspectors visit once a year and spend an entire day going through the paperwork of the business.

"For every batch of jam, for instance, there's a page of information about the growing and harvesting of the fruit and purchase information about any other ingredients supported by receipts. Our recipes have to be approved by them and we have to show copies of certificates for our suppliers," explains Katrina.

It's no wonder they're listed as 'Super Heroes' in TV chef Rick Stein's book based on the BBC Food Heroes series, on which they also appeared.

And with that, it's back to the garden and the latest battle to win the war of the weeds.

● **A box of organic fruit and vegetables from Bluebell Organics costs £8.50. For more information telephone 01325 718841 or e-mail katrina@bluebell30.fsbusiness.co.uk**

BLUEBELL ORGANICS' TOP TIPS FOR GROWING ORGANIC

Don't give up or become disheartened if things don't grow. Be prepared for failures but don't let them put you off. Something will always surprise you.

Keep on top of the weeds when they're young. Pull them out when they're small and never let them seed.

Never be frightened to ask for advice – everyone has to start somewhere.

Check your crops every day and intervene where necessary – this is the most important job.

Think of alternative uses for what you are growing, especially if certain crops are particularly successful.

... and a final tip for those battling with carrot fly – 'companion plant' with garlic in between your rows of carrots or use an organic garlic spray – the smell confuses the fly.

gadget man



Hardest working gizmo on the block

● Don't miss Burton's Bytes - game reviews in The Northern Echo every Friday

EVER heard the old saying: Jack of all trades, master of none? Well dabs.com, the UK's leading online retailer of computing and technology products is about to launch an exciting new digital camera which is so multi-functional, it makes other gadgets look one dimensional and, frankly, lazy.

The BenQ DCS30 digital camera, available from Dabs is a good-looking device, capable of taking high quality digital photographs. Samsung tried something similar a couple of years back but that device flopped mainly due to the poor picture quality. The advance of technology means manufacturers can now specify imaging devices with far greater resolution.

The BenQ may not threaten the digital SLR for image quality, but for simple snaps it's fine. Even better, it has a reasonable 14 MB of built-in memory for storing your shots - although lots more is needed if you plan to use the other playback functions. And with up to 6 megapixel resolution and 3X optical zoom, you can look forward to superior image quality.

But the gorgeous silver camera is earning a reputation as the hardest working gadget around, as it also functions as a MP3 player, FM radio and camcorder. That's right - this camera plays music, radio, and even allows you to upload tunes to its in-built 'Qmusic' software to create your own personal soundtrack.

As if that weren't enough, this multifarious snapper doubles up as a fully functional camcorder, storing over an hour's worth of footage. Add to that the ability to mark your photos with 20 second 'voice-tags', and you have one of the coolest new toys on earth.

Weighing in at a positively svelte 180 grams, the DCS30 can be purchased from www.dabs.com for a mere £183.30.

NOT content carrying your tunes about in a camera? How about on your wrist? With the latest LAKS Memory Music watch, you can listen to up to 60 personal favourite songs, display your most important messages, and transfer your data to any computer for editing.

You can carry your favourite music on your wrist. Via a discreet MP3 player, you can record and play up to 60 songs. That corresponds to a playing time of four to five hours, and the battery is charged via the integrated USB cable. Depending on the model, the memory capacity of the LAKS Memory Music can be 256 MB, 128 MB, 64 MB or 32 MB.

The 1.5 metre long cable of the headphones allow maximum freedom of movement and an integrated voice recorder can be used to record meetings,

messages, songs or your own reminders.

The USB socket built into the wriststrap

makes it possible to transfer this data easily to any PC and edit it.

The LAKS Memory Music is a practical, multifunctional device with a dynamic design, equipped with a high quality watch. The four functions run independently. The successful LAKS memory, the so-called "hard disk for your wrist", is already very popular and has so far been sold successfully in 23 countries.

● Available direct from LAKS, 1010 Vienna, Kärntnerstrasse 16 or online at www.LAKS.com.

Above: the BenQ DCS3



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NE Hotbed 2004
A decade of world-class culture

SINCE the beginning of the decade the region has experienced phenomenal change. New life has been breathed into the area, attracting new businesses, jobs and investment.

There is no doubt that the North-East has seen the value of regional image, tourism and culture as a catalyst for growth and that is why One NorthEast has pledged its support to the ambitious culture10 programme.

Culture10 celebrates the very best that the region has to offer. It recognises the hotbed of talent, creativity and ideas we have right here on our doorstep and creates a platform to make sure this talent can be seen on an international level.

But culture is not only an economic driver, it is a way of helping the region pull together with a joint vision of making the North-East one of the best places to live and work. Already, through the culture10 programme, we have seen a range of world-class events linking up NewcastleGateshead, Northumberland, Sunderland and the Tees Valley. These events are helping to raise further the profile of the region on an international scale and attract more visitors from all over the world.



by ALAN CLARKE
Chief executive of the regional development agency One NorthEast

We see this programme as a way of widening the excitement, enthusiasm and engagement that started with the City of Culture bid and a way to build on the momentum which helped to give the North-East a reputation as a world-class destination.

Research financed by One NorthEast following the bid announcement revealed that by maintaining the momentum of bidding the region could still achieve much more. With a forecasted economic impact of £1.2bn and 24,000 jobs by 2010 – this was certainly the proof we needed to invest in culture10.

Another persuasive argument for our supporting cultural activity in the region was to be found in a report into business activity, published in 2003. This showed that the North-East was bucking the national trend, being the only region in the UK to show an expansion of private-sector employment. The researchers attributed part of this to a change in perceptions and the heightened profile of the area.

Also in terms of the number of new hi-tech business start-ups, the North-East was the most active region outside of London during this time. An increasing number of these fledgling firms finding a fertile base in the region are the 'creative industries'.

There is no doubt that culture plays a major part in what drives people to come here and stay here, but so does innovative housing, attractive landscapes and quality of life advantages that we need to keep exploiting in the North-East.

This is very much part of One NorthEast's role, to work with partners such as Newcastle Gateshead Initiative to bolster the image of the North, and in doing so, attract inward investors, students, relocators and visitors.



An aerial view of the Bowes Museum, above, and one of the posters by French artist Toulouse-Lautrec.

Join the culture club

HOTBED 2004: CAN YOU DIG IT?

NEWCASTLE Gateshead Initiative has announced the next phase of its marketing campaign for the area. Entitled Hotbed 2004, the campaign focuses on the themes of garden, fashion and design and forms part of the £140m culture10 programme announced last year for creating a decade of world-class culture in the North-East.

The themes coincide with international tourism body VisitBritain's plans to mark the 200th anniversary of the Royal Horticultural Society with a programme of events celebrating a Year of Gardening. In addition, it is the 50th anniversary of the fashion school at Northumbria University.

Says Tania Robinson, Newcastle Gateshead Initiative marketing manager: "The Buzzin campaign we created a couple of years ago successfully met our initial objective of putting NewcastleGateshead on the map. With the area's profile now so much more heightened, it's now time to move onto the next phase of development.

"The idea of Hotbed 2004 was chosen in conjunction with our design agency, Different, to reflect that NewcastleGateshead is now a hotbed of talent, creativity, energy and ideas. "By building upon the momentum created

by Buzzin we aim to communicate this new message to our established target market of potential visitors within a three-hour travel time of the city, with emphasis on Scotland, the North-West and South-East.

"Within the next few weeks, we plan to roll out the Hotbed 2004 campaign nationally. But in addition to this national activity it's also essential that we engage local people, bring them up to speed with new developments and encourage them to participate."

Says Neil Rami, chief executive of Newcastle Gateshead Initiative, the city's destination marketing agency: "This campaign, together with the events programme planned for the summer, will reinforce NewcastleGateshead's position as a world-class city break destination."

Newcastle Gateshead Initiative will also be promoting Hotbed 2004 to audiences further afield in some of its key international markets such as Ireland, Spain, Germany, Norway and Denmark, at exhibitions and directly with European journalists.

The target for the 2004 campaign is to attract over 200,000 international visitors to the area, generating more than £60m for the local economy.

BEAMISH OPEN AIR MUSEUM

FOR me it was the taste of jam tarts straight from the oven at Home Farm. A friend recalls the smell of sugar cooking in the sweet shop while another remembers feeling her way down the dark coal seam at the colliery. And, once seen, the gruesome tools in the dentist's are never forgotten by anyone.

A trip to Beamish has always been more than a visit to a museum. For most people, especially those who went as children, it's a sensory experience that stays with you for years to come.

On a busy day in summer up to 1,600 school children visit; some even come dressed for the part in caps and waistcoats. The popularity of Beamish for schools and other groups has helped it add another award to its collection – the 2004 Group Travel Award for the Best UK Attraction For A Long Visit.

While Beamish is a unique experience for first-time visitors, the constant changes and additions mean it's always worth a return trip.

Arriving just before 10am and on a personal guided tour with museum director Miriam Harte, we bump into the staff having their pre-opening briefing. But this is no ordinary place of work – the staff, dressed in period costume, are gathered in the cobbled town street and when the briefing is over, they step across the tram lines and into

character behind the counters of the print shop, the grocers, the drapers and the bank.

"A lot of our success is down to the experience, knowledge and enthusiasm of our staff and how they engage with visitors," says Miriam.

"It's a very involving way of interpreting history for people, it really brings it to life."

All of which has helped Beamish be named Living Museum of the Year 2004 by the Good Britain Guide Awards.

The bank, sponsored by Barclays, has opened since my last visit. Next door, work is underway on a new attraction, due to open at Easter 2006. The 1913 Masonic Temple, transported from Park Terrace in Sunderland, will include an exhibition detailing the influence of the Masonic movement in the region.

The building will be attached to the bank with through access to create a large function space, the main feature of which will be a spectacular carved fireplace from the Mansion House in Newcastle. A new tram shelter is also being built and the carriage house and working forge are also relatively new additions, having opened in 2002.

Sarah French

● Beamish is open from April-October 10am-5pm (last admission 3pm) and November-March 10am-4pm. Tel: 0191 370 4000 or visit www.beamish.org.uk



THE BOWES MUSEUM: A HIDDEN TREASURE

THE Bowes Museum is a hidden treasure, a jewel in the heart of beautiful Teesdale. The majestic château stands proud in the historic market town of Barnard Castle. Purpose-built in the 19th century by John and Josephine Bowes, an astounding 15,000 objects were purchased between 1862 and 1874 and the museum opened to the public in 1892.

John and Josephine filled the museum with treasures. At every turn you can see important and precious works from all over Europe, and each piece has its own story to tell. However, it is the 230-year-old Silver Swan that is the best-loved object in the museum. The Silver Swan is an English silver automaton, a unique attraction that was bought by the Bowes in 1872 for £200. The life-size model is still in working order and is operated at the museum on a daily basis.

The diverse collection spans three floors of the magnificent building and contains items too numerous to list. Whether it is paintings by Canaletto or Goya, porcelain produced at Sèvres, or marquetry attributed to André-Charles Boulle, it can all be found at The Bowes Museum, which has received "designated" status from the Government in recognition of the outstanding collection.

Visitors to The Bowes Museum today can not only learn John and Josephine's wonderful story and marvel at the fascinating collections, but can also enjoy an exciting programme of exhibitions. Activities in the park and a superb cafe and shop have helped bring the museum singing and dancing into the 21st century. The magnificent legacy that John and Josephine left to the people of Teesdale has been cared for to retain its charm and intrigue yet sympathetic developments have made the attraction a popular, vibrant

and exciting day out for even the most discerning visitor.

There is no doubt that this truly unique and inspiring museum deserves the title of a World Class Visitor Attraction.

CURRENT AND FUTURE EXHIBITIONS In the Footsteps of El Greco

Until 12 Sept

Acclaimed regional artist Antony Clark has created new work for this major show. This body of work has been inspired by Clark's recent visits to Spain, Italy and Greece and by several artists in The Bowes Museum's collection including El Greco and Goya.

'Recollection' Yorkshire Sculptors Group

Until Sept 12

This active group of artists are producing a range of mixed media sculptures inspired by items from The Bowes Museum's collection for this challenging and thought-provoking contemporary show.

Toulouse-Lautrec and the Art of the French Poster

Sept 11 - Jan 9

Recreating much of the exhibition held in London in 1894, focusing on the 19th century fashion for poster art from Paris. Highlights are Toulouse-Lautrec and his famous larger-than-life images which advertised products and theatre shows. Loans from the Victoria & Albert Museum.

Contact:

The Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, Co Durham, DL12 8NP

T: 01833 690606

F: 01833 637163

E: info@bowesmuseum.org.uk

www.bowesmuseum.org.uk

Opening times: Open Daily 11am-5pm; closed December 24 and 25 and January 1

Admission

Adults £6

Concessions £5

Under 16s Free

Toulouse-Lautrec which will be on show this summer



Beamish: an artist's impression of how the Masonic Lodge will look, and the interior of the Sun Inn

Lindisfarne Gospel Garden

INSPIRED by the 8th-century Northumbrian Lindisfarne Gospels, the Silver award-winning Newcastle City Council garden from the 2003 Chelsea Flower Show is being given pride of place on Lindisfarne.

Opening of the Laing Art Gallery

TO mark its centenary in April 2004, the Laing Art Gallery has undergone an exciting refurbishment funded largely by Northern Rock Foundation and the Barbour Trust. The refurbishment includes a new watercolour gallery to feature the Laing's internationally important collections, a refurbished gallery to feature highlights from the gallery's stunning collection of 18th and 19th century paintings and a new art resource area. The marble hall and rotunda have been restored back to their former glory.

WHAT'S ON

THE VERY BEST IN DESIGN, GARDENS, EVENTS, ART AND SPORT

Sunburst in Saltwell Park, Gateshead (July-September)

A SUMMER of celebrations has been lined up to mark the re-opening of historic Saltwell Park in Gateshead - dubbed the "people's park". It has been restored to its original glory thanks to a £9.6m scheme funded by Heritage Lottery Fund and Gateshead Council. Celebrations include the official opening of Saltwell Towers, the once derelict grade 2 listed mansion at the heart of the park, now restored as a visitor centre and café. A summer of fun activities for all ages will also mark the re-opening.

The re-opening of Leazes Park (September)

SEPTEMBER this year will see the official opening of this historic Newcastle park after its £4.9m refurbishment. Its smart new look, inspired by the past, has been funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Newcastle City Council.

Exhibition Park, Newcastle

IN late summer, Exhibition Park will provide the backdrop for "Extreme", a celebration of youth culture and style.

Scott Henshall (September/October)

TOP British Designer Scott Henshall has been working in association with Newcastle Gateshead Initiative to bring his next stunning collection to Leazes Park in October.

Trailer made (July)

A HIGH-tech designer caravan will be entirely refitted and furnished by designers and craftspeople based in the region. The

caravan will showcase commissioned work from a range of different design media including, furniture, metal work and fine art. The caravan will tour extensively throughout 2004 visiting parks and gardens throughout the North-East.

Gateshead Summer Flower Show

THE biggest horticultural show in the North, with dozens of award winning displays and floral exhibits all under canvas.

Plantmania! at Sunderland Museum and Winter Garden (Until early September)

TO celebrate the 200th anniversary of the Royal Horticultural Society, this exhibition explores the relationship between people and plants as seen through the eyes of artists over the last 500 years. Including a fascinating and colourful selection of oil paintings, watercolours, costume, ceramics, glass and contemporary craft, Plantmania! explores a range of themes, including In Search of the Exotic, The Indoor Garden and Mystery, Romance and Symbolism.





EUROPEAN NATIONS DRAGON BOAT CHAMPIONSHIPS

SPECTATORS are being invited to make some noise to welcome the crews from ten European countries taking part in this year's Dragon Boat Championships held on the River Tees at Stockton.

The spectacular races over 250m, 500m and 2,000m will launch the Year of the Tees, a celebration to promote the river to everyone from watersports beginners to experienced crews and riverbank walkers.

Dragon boat racing is one of the fastest growing sports in the world and teams from Sweden, Ukraine, Hungary, Czech Republic, Poland, Switzerland, Norway, Russia, Germany and the UK will compete in Stockton.

The boats originate from the Chinese belief that each river and lake had guardian dragons living deep beneath the water. The festivals began to bring bountiful crops after rice had been planted.

Originally built from teak, today's boats are made of fibreglass and range from 30ft to 100ft long. They all feature a fierce and colourful dragon's head at the prow and a tail at the stern.

A crew can consist of 12-20 paddlers in pairs, a drummer and steerperson. Success and speed depend on teamwork as the paddlers follow the pacers, listen to the beat of the drum and focus on their stroke.

The Stockton championships will be the first time the Ukraine team has competed outside their own country and the first time the junior team from Russia has competed outside eastern Europe.

As well as the championship-standard international crews, people from local businesses and organisations will also be taking part in 200m races on July 31 and August 1.

Recreational crews with no experience should provide some extra entertainment for the crowds, although they'll each get a qualified helm to steer the boat.

An opening ceremony at the Tees Barrage will launch the championships on July 30. Between 7.15pm and 8.15pm a parade of teams will be followed by the Chinese drumming group Red Poppy who wowed the crowds at last year's Riverside Festival.

SUNDERLAND INTERNATIONAL AIRSHOW

IT'S fast, it's furious and it's free! Since first taking off 16 years ago, the Sunderland International Airshow has grown into a must-see event for all the family.

The largest free airshow in Europe, it attracts more than one million spectators, half of whom travel from outside the North-East.

And this year promises to be a land, sea and air spectacular with the Army, Royal Navy and Royal Air Force, as well as the Belgian and Dutch Air Forces, all supplying awesome machines for the show.

The show runs from 10am to 6pm on July 24 and 25, with the flying programme running from 1.15pm to 5.30pm on Saturday and from noon to 4pm on Sunday.

The ever popular Red Arrows will provide the climax on Saturday and launch the flying programme on Sunday, performing their breathtaking aerobatics over the North Sea.

Top fashion designers at Belsay Hall, Northumberland

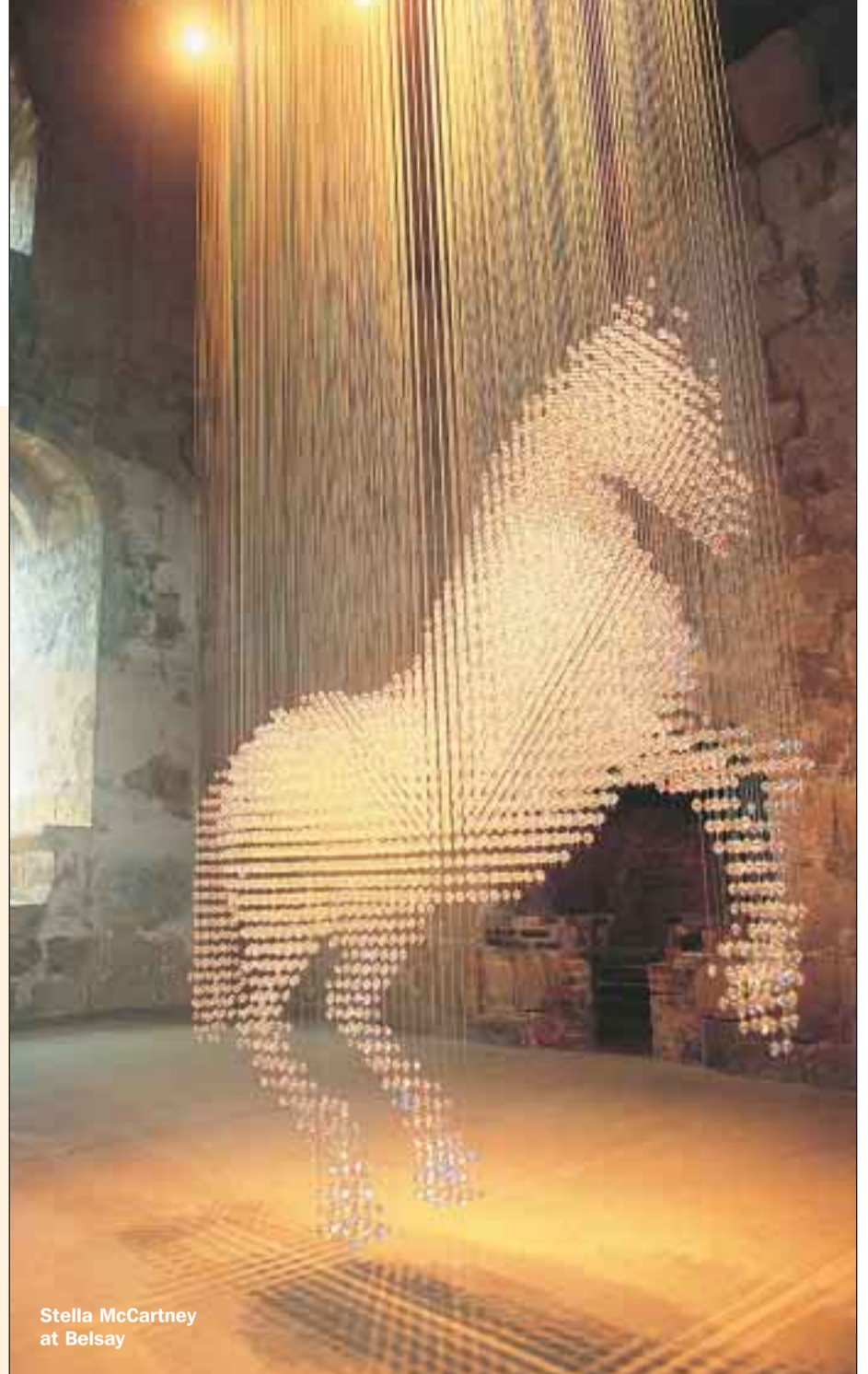
ENGLISH Heritage recently invited 12 of Britain's most innovative and enigmatic fashion designers to respond to the magnificent neo-classical mansion Belsay Hall, its 14th century castle and grade 1 listed gardens, with art installations rather than garments. The flagship exhibition, Fashion at Belsay (FAB) displays their art throughout its vast empty rooms and landscaped grounds.

The exhibition showcases new art installations by some of the most spectacular and avant-garde fashion designers of today – Alexander McQueen, Hamish Morrow, Stella McCartney, Julie Verhoeven, Clements Ribeiro, Zandra Rhodes, Paul Smith, Eley Kishimoto and 6a Architects, Jean Muir, Georgina Goodman, Shelley Fox and Agent Provocateur.

FAB gives some of Britain's best fashion designers the chance to branch out and position themselves in the world of contemporary art. Each designer has created an installation in response to the historic surroundings of Belsay, fusing an atmospheric, futuristic environment within the imposing classical setting.

FAB shows fashion designers at their most creative, applauding fashion as one of the most influential elements of design in our society today – beautiful, challenging and constantly changing our ideas about our world and ourselves. The exhibition is funded by Arts Council England North East and The Northern Rock Foundation, it is curated by Judith King. The exhibition runs until September 30.

Belsay Hall also has 30 acres of glorious gardens, included at Grade I on The Register of Parks and Gardens, partly for their magnificent quarry gardens and rare bulb meadows. The rhododendron garden alone covers two



Stella McCartney at Belsay

acres and can be viewed from the house and the terrace.

The spectacular gardens were created in the 19th century by Sir Charles Monk who built and designed the hall, and his grandson Sir Arthur Middleton. The stone used to build the hall was taken from the estate quarry and Sir Charles also used this stone for his extraordinary Quarry Garden. All through the year, exotic plants and evergreens flourish in the Quarry Garden amid cliffs which rise higher as you go deeper into the hillside.

Belsay Hall is 14 miles north-west of Newcastle on the A696. By air: Newcastle Airport is eight miles away. By train: Morpeth station is 10 miles away. By bus: contact Traveline 0870 6082608.

● Belsay Hall, Northumberland O1661 881 636. Admission to FAB is included in the entrance price to Belsay Hall, open daily from 10am to 6pm. Adults £5, concessions £3.80, children £2.50, family £12.50. Exhibition catalogues are £5.



The seafront at Roker and Seaburn provide the perfect viewing deck for front line fighter jets. A GR4 Tornado, a Hawk and Jaguar will be in the air, along with a Sea Harrier.

The Battle of Britain memorial fly-past

will include a Lancaster bomber.

At sea, HMS Ocean will once again amaze the crowds with a demonstration of its capabilities, along with naval helicopters and the Royal Marines.

Back on dry land, the attractions will

Left: The Red Arrows in action at Sunderland

stretch one and half miles along the seafront with displays and exhibitions from all the services including Apache and Sea King helicopters and full size replicas of a Red Arrows Hawk and a Tornado.

As well as climbing on the models, youngsters can look the part with camouflage face-painting.

Another new attraction this year will be the Royal Navy Field Gun Team which will perform in Cliff Park, while Recreation Park will be full of retailers.

Network Ticketing is once again sponsoring Sunderland's pioneering 'lost children' system. Wristbands to attach to children with their name and a mobile telephone number to call in case they get lost can be picked up from stewards, police officers and information points.

Parking is limited on the seafront so drivers are recommended to use the Metro or the Park and Rides at Fulwell Quarry and the Downhill Sports Complex. The cost is £3. For more information, call 0191 553 2000, or visit www.sunderland-



Art for everyone: the climax of the Stockton International Riverside Festival is a concert by Will Young, left. Above: Architects of Art performing Arcazaar

evening of Kerrang Live music. The weekend reaches a climax on July 25 when Pop Idol star Will Young headlines a fantastic concert.

Over at Trinity Gardens, the award-winning No Fit State Circus will touch down for its performances in a futuristic tent.

From July 29, street theatre takes centre stage, from the bizarre to the beautiful, the surreal to the simply spectacular.

Bollywood meets town hall bureaucracy in Nutkhut's comedy of cultural confusion The Maharajah's Banquet, while leading Dutch company The Lunatics will perform Wandermen, with a cast including four men, 19 babies and a ferris wheel.

The Fringe Festival moves this year from Green Dragon Yard to the FringeWorld tent in Trinity Gardens, which will host a showcase of the best emerging local, regional and national talent.

The ever-popular Community Carnival and Parade takes to Stockton High Street at noon on July 31. Thousands of people are expected to line the streets and follow the procession of Crinolines In The Jungle to Trinity Gardens.

The Festival ends on August 1 with Ballroom Blitz in the High Street and a display from Fantastic Fireworks.

● **For more information, visit www.sirf.co.uk or call 01642 528130.**



FESTIVAL OF FOOTBALL

AN international festival of world-class football comes to NewcastleGateshead this summer, supported by Newcastle Gateshead Initiative's culture10 programme.

Launched for the first time this year, the NewcastleGateshead Cup will see top European football clubs (Feyenoord, Sporting Lisbon, Newcastle United and Glasgow Rangers) competing at St James' Park over a single weekend: July 31-August 1.

Both local people and visitors from around the UK and overseas will have the opportunity to purchase tickets for the competition, making top-class football at St James' Park more accessible than ever before. Taking place during the summer holidays, the tournament is designed to appeal to all ages, with families able to enjoy major football matches in a relaxed, festival atmosphere.

The schedule of games for the NewcastleGateshead Cup:

Saturday, July 31
NewcastleGateshead Cup semi-finals
Feyenoord v Sporting Lisbon 12.30 pm
Newcastle United v Glasgow Rangers 3pm

Sunday, August 1
Third/fourth place play-off 12.30 pm
NewcastleGateshead Cup Final 3pm

Tickets
Adult: one day (Sat or Sun) £25, two days £40. Concessions (senior citizen and juvenile £10, £15)
For ticket information call 0191 2611571

STOCKTON INTERNATIONAL RIVERSIDE FESTIVAL

SIRF's up, and at least two of the acts at the 17th Stockton International Riverside Festival will be encouraging the audience to test the water.

Factoria Mascaró's Dance and Get Wet!, a blend of modern dance and flamenco, uses water as a bridge between the performers and the audience, while a crane and a tank of water feature in Berlin group Labyrinth's spectacular and highly skilled outdoor circus performance Twins And

Friends. These are just two of the UK premieres at this year's festival.

Also coming to Stockton for the first time are Friches Theatre Urbain, one of France's leading street theatre companies, with their version of Macbeth.

The Festival runs from July 29 to August 1, but the entertainment starts the weekend before with music for all tastes. The current wave of disco mania continues on July 23 with a night of 70s music from Hot Chocolate, Gwen Dickey from Rose Royce and the Atlantic Soul Messengers.

On Saturday, a host of bands take to the riverside stage for a free afternoon and

THE ALNWICK GARDEN

ALNWICK Garden, the largest garden build of its kind in Europe for 100 years, has much to offer this year. With the creation of three new gardens in autumn 2004 and Treetopia, one of the world's largest wooden treehouses, visitors will find the experience fascinating. The Poison Garden showcases some of mother nature's most deadly plants; the Serpent Garden, hewn from holly, contains seven different stunning water features designed by renowned water sculptor William Pye, and finally, the bamboo Labyrinth Garden demonstrates the talents of the world's leading maze designer Adrian Fisher. The most magical of all will be the Tree House, a complex of wooden buildings covering an area of around the size of two Olympic-sized swimming pools linked by a series of walkways "floating" in the trees.

The Alnwick Garden is also offering a programme of exciting arts and education events for you to watch and take part in. For more information on these events or booking please call 01665 511350 or check out the new website: www.alnwick-garden.com



One of the stunning water features at in the substantial gardens at Alnwick





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me and my wardrobe



With five children to look after, a shop to run and ballet classes three times a week, Julie Campbell's wardrobe is pared down and practical. The 31-year-old dancer runs Drum, the art furniture store on Darlington's Grange Road, with her husband Neville

jacket. I'd wanted one since I was a teenager. I would have paid more for the amount of wear I've had out of it. It's just going to last forever.

How would you describe your look?

I've asked my friends about this and the only world I can come up with is chaotic. I don't buy clothes for the label. I'm certainly not trendy. I buy them because I like the look of them and they're comfortable.

What's your favourite item of clothing?

Probably my Levi's. I don't think you can go wrong with a really good, well-fitting pair of Levi's. They're just fabulous. I wear them until they're worn out and then I go out and buy another pair.

What's your worst buy?

It's a grey cashmere poncho which I thought was gorgeous but when I took it home and showed it to the kids, they were absolutely appalled. They would agree to me wearing it in the house but not picking them up from school. I had to take it back.

What's the most you've ever spent on an item of clothing?

It was £400 on a leather and sheepskin flying

What are your favourite shops?

My favourite clothes shop is Coco dress agency on Darlington's Grange Road. That's where I get most of my clothes. It's good quality designer wear at brilliant prices. I can always get a bargain when I go in.

Which celebrity's style do you admire and why?

Kate Moss. She wears these really quirky items but somehow they always look right on her. They always hang together as an outfit and she looks fantastic. I would love to wear things like that but it's just not practical for me.

Drum Art Furniture, 22 Grange Road, Darlington (01325) 362363. The shop in an art deco former billiard hall sells an eclectic mix of African and other ethnic art furniture.

Clockwise from main picture: Moschino dress from Coco; Levi's from Binns and Mulberry shirt from Coco; trousers from French Connection and Topshop blouse

I wear my Levi's until they're worn out and then I go out and buy another pair

NE out on the town

The North-East's answer to Trinny and Susannah take to the bars and clubs of the region in search of style and individuality



LES LANGLEY

McCourt & McKay

ATLANTIC BAR AND CLUB

THIS month we were on home territory so decided to give our regular club a visit, the Atlantic Bar and Club. It is situated in Duke Street, Darlington, and has just successfully whizzed through its first year. What we like about it is that it works on a membership entrance, plays really cool music, a mix of soul and R'n'B and is generally a friendly mix of all ages.

It is open seven nights a week and all day on a weekend. Friday and Saturday are its busiest nights. Howard Donald, Kerri Chandler and Jazzy Jeff are regular guest DJs but even if they're not on, you can always guarantee good music that will lure you onto the dance floor. The bar is a separate chill-out area offering an imaginative list of fine wines and champagnes.

Anyone who visits the club will recognise 37-year-old LES LANGLEY, owner of the club. We thought Les deserved a picture because he does have a good sense of style mixing smart with casual. Les was wearing a shirt by Poetic Justice, Evisu Jeans and shoes by Prada. He generally likes to shop at Changes in Middlesbrough and Cruise in Newcastle.

Les loves to watch football as well as play it and fitness is very important to him. He keeps fit by training five times a week and drinking lots of water.

ADAM ROBERTSON is 22 and a drummer in a band. Whenever he isn't working away from home, he likes to pop into the club because it has good music and atmosphere.

Adam was wearing Jeans by Union in Newcastle and a T-Shirt - which had a lovely bit of stitched detail on, from... some random shop in London! He generally likes to shop in Newcastle or Manchester and doesn't go for particular labels - if he likes it he buys it.



ADAM ROBERTSON

PETER SMITH is a sales assistant at Leggs Menswear in Skinnergate, Darlington. Peter has certainly done Leggs proud as he looked extremely

well turned out without being "over the top". The outfit was a good quality mix with shoes by Tsubo, jeans by Michiko Koshino, a T-shirt by Seal Kay, shirt and jacket by Guide London and all from under one roof - Leggs. As well as working in Leggs he also likes to shop there as the majority of labels are quite unique to the area and there is a limited number of stock for each item.



PETER SMITH

ANN FRENCH is 21 and works in Clerical. She enjoys the Atlantic mainly because her friends go there and she likes the music.

Ann's toned figure was complemented by top and trousers from Elan, shoes from House of Frazer and an YSL bag. She likes to shop in Newcastle, and her favourite shop is Prada Sport.

Ann uses false tan to give a healthy glow and false eyelashes to make her eyes seem wide-awake even when she doesn't feel it. Her favourite beauty products are YSL and Bourjois lips.

ANNA SUMMERSON designs her own fashion label, Embellis, as well as just opening a Fashion House in Northumberland Street, Newcastle. Anna was wearing Gucci shoes, Seven jeans, a top by her own label Embellis accessorised with a lovely beaded cape.

Her shop stocks her favourite brands that are unique to Newcastle, Lulu and Red, Gotham Angels, Pink Soda and Pocket Venus to name but a few.

When asked her secret beauty tip she replied "lip gloss, glitter and a smile."

● The Atlantic Bar and Club, Duke Street, Darlington. To join call: 07767 771541

● Judie McCourt, of TV and radio fame, and make-up and hair artist Allison McKay, run AM Creative Productions, which specialises in creative event management and the production of photographic images for advertising amcreativeproductions.com



ANNA SUMMERSON



ANN FRENCH



NICOLA JEAVONS

NICOLA JEAVONS, 31, is a call centre manager. She likes the music and social scene in the Atlantic. Her top is from Elan and jeans by Diesel from Leggs. Nicola particularly likes to shop in Leggs because she can get good quality labels and because there is limited stock on each item.

We were very impressed by Nicola's exercise regime - she attends the gym every morning before work for circuit training, a four-mile run or swimming sixty lengths. Nicola has a glow in her skin and personality, which she credits to exercise and drinking lots of water.



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NORTHALLERTON



Chain reaction

As big high street names move in and old favourites complete major refurbishments, SARAH FRENCH recommends Northallerton for some summer shopping

MARKET towns may have existed for centuries but it's been a roller coaster ride for some with competition first from out-of-town shopping centres, followed more recently by city centre revamps.

Traditionally, towns like Northallerton have never tried to offer the full-on Saturday shopping experience. While it may be the main centre for people from outlying rural areas, for visitors its attraction has always been the independent shops, the one-offs where you go to buy something different. It's been about quality rather than quantity.

From the shop owners' points of view, that meant there was always a limit to the number of customers who visited, the length of time they'd stay and, consequently, the amount of cash they left behind.

That was until now. The market towns needed more, and in Northallerton's case, it's got more.

The national chains, having saturated every large town high street, realised some market towns were just big enough to be a potential hotbed of new business. Northallerton is one that's been on the hitlist of several. In the last few months, North Yorkshire's 'capital' has welcomed the likes of Laura Ashley, WH Smith, Body Shop and Ottakar's. Boots, Dorothy Perkins, Benetton and Woolworths have been there for ages, so the new nationals are in good company.

Whether we like it or not, the big names serve to give places like Northallerton credibility as 'proper' shopping centres without the need for giant out of town premises.

Laura Ashley, which opened in South Parade in November 2003 in a former motors centre, says there is room for more. Store manager Jane Stephenson says: "We are doing fantastically well, to the point where we are the top store in the region, and we're drawing customers from York, Middlesbrough, Durham and other big centres. Northallerton has a lot going for it and people like coming here. The market is great, everybody is friendly and, most of all, people feel safe. There is no trouble and there's a nice atmosphere."

All this can only be good news for the independents that remain the backbone of the town. Bettys teasshop, which is always a popular draw for visitors, is finally expanding out of its skinny premises into the bigger building next door but one.

Barkers, Northallerton's department store which has kept up with the times to fill the slot taken by House of Fraser and John Lewis in the cities, is also raising its game with a refurbishment of its homeware, menswear, accessories and cards and gifts departments. The alterations, which are due to finish in September, will also make access easier for wheelchairs and pushchairs.

Managing director Charles Barker says: "There is a huge range of retailers in Northallerton now and the names that are coming are good names. It makes the town more attractive for people to visit."

With most of its shops, tearooms and restaurants spread along the High Street, shopping in Northallerton is easy, but visitors shouldn't miss little gems like Barkers Arcade which has the kind of shops that make the town different.

If you spend £5 in Northallerton Bookshop you can get a free cuppa over at



Barkers, and who can walk by Bellina chocolates without being lured inside?

Recent new additions at the end of the High Street are the Silver Shop, great for gifts, which is just around the corner from Fired Earth, a must if you're planning home improvements.

One of the most recent additions at the other end of town is interiors and gift store Eastern Origins which, after abandoning Richmond in favour of Darlington, has found there is life in market towns after all. Indeed, Richmond would do well to take a look at what is going on with its North Yorkshire neighbour so it can attract the kind of shops and restaurants to complement features like the river, castle and market place that no doubt Northallerton would love to have.

After Eastern Origins, it's time for a relaxing lunch at The Café then back up the High Street to Lewis and Cooper, a must for foodies, where you can pick up all those obscure ingredients required by magazine recipes.

Finally, no market town would be



Clockwise from top left: Furniture Express, which used to be Durham Pine; a general view of the busy high street; Laura Ashley; the new homeware department at Barkers; Boyes

complete without its market and Northallerton has one of the best in the area. Best of all, the town really does welcome visitors by making that all-important concession of free parking.

It's no wonder that Monsoon and Marks & Spencer are keen to come. It looks like the chain reaction is set to continue.

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NE beauty



Men only: John and Maggie McCall at their new salon

Groom for improvement

The North-East's first all-male grooming emporium opens its doors this month. CHRISTEN PEARS reports

IT'S a far cry from his role as chief fire officer for Northumberland County Council but John McCall is embracing the world of male grooming. He tried all the treatments, he knows the business inside out and he's just opened the region's first male grooming salon this month.

Gone are the days when men shunned the beauty parlour for fear of being branded soft or girly. Thanks to the likes of David Beckham, it's now cool for guys to pop in for a massage or a facial, and the male grooming sector has grown by a staggering 80 per cent over the last two years. The market for male skin care is the fastest growing in Europe and men, with British men spending £102 every month on beauty treatments and keeping fit.

The Locker Room, which opened its doors on July 15, is based in Newcastle's Groat Market and offers traditional barbering services alongside a range of modern therapy treatments. The decor is masculine and there's even a computer for busy executives who want to catch up on their emails while they wait.

John, who took early retirement from his post as chief fire officer at the beginning of the year, was looking for a new venture. He had the idea for The Locker Room two years ago while trekking the 96 miles along the West Highland Way with a friend. The pair were feeling tired and footsore and promised themselves a massage when they reached Glasgow. Everywhere was booked up but during their search, they discovered a male-only spa.

"That was the first time I'd heard of the concept but it really got me thinking and I started researching the market," says John.

He discovered that although the number of men having health and beauty treatments was increasing, there were only three male grooming and therapy centres in the UK, in London, Belfast and Glasgow.

He says: "Men are becoming more interested in

grooming but they are put off by unisex salons which are always geared towards women. They feel inhibited and it makes a lot of the women uncomfortable as well."

Once he had spotted a niche in the market, John and his wife Maggie began to develop the business, creating a stylish environment where men would feel comfortable going for a treatment. After more than 20 years in public service, part of the challenge was seeing whether he could cut it in the private sector, but he admits he has been totally sucked into his new role. He's certainly extremely knowledgeable about the treatments on offer. "Trying them out's one of the perks of the job," he says.

The Locker Room offers a range of services including hair styling, wet shaving, facials, tanning, waxing and manicures, as well as wellbeing treatments such as massage, aromatherapy, flotation and health checks. There will also be treatment packages for special occasions - stag nights, birthdays, parties.

The emporium is open to everyone from 16 to 60, although it will probably attract business executives and younger men who seem to be particularly interested in body image and wellbeing. The media has dubbed them 'metrosexuals' - men who live in urban areas who, although they are tough in the boardroom, spend as much time in the bathroom as their girlfriends.

John says: "In the past I think a lot of men have avoided this kind of thing because it's been seen as a bit of a taboo. It's a cultural thing. That is changing, particularly among the 25 to 40-year-olds, and that has a lot to do with David Beckham and people like that. They're recognising the importance of looking good and feeling good, which is something women have known about for a long time."

● The Locker Room opens on July 15. For more information or to book an appointment, call 0191-233 9555.



Smooth operator

DR RITA Rakus is her own best advert. She's 54, looks ten years younger and is in the business of helping other men and women look ten years younger too. She has been injecting "fillers" into people's faces for 12 years now, smoothing out in a few minutes the wrinkles and fine lines it has taken years to accrue.

Dr Rita readily admits she's had some help pushing back the years. A few years ago she had an operation to remove the bags under her eyes, and she's had some non-surgical injections – "a bit of botox, a bit of Perlane, a combination of things. I never use any treatments that I haven't had myself" – but the result is very natural, without any of the tight skin syndrome often associated with surgical facelifts.

Botox was first on the scene, but there are a number of fillers to choose from now. "Very fine lines are sometimes difficult to deal with using traditional fillers, but now Restylane has brought out this super fine one called Touch, which is great for tiny lines," says Dr Rita.

Dr Rita is medically trained and was one of the first practitioners of the non-surgical facelift. She gained a name for herself working with the stars as the "Lip Queen of London" and is based in Knightsbridge, but travels, syringe at the ready, to work in beauty salons throughout the country. I caught up with her at the CACI Beauty Oasis, just off Grange Road in Darlington.

"It used to be that people outside the capital were nervous of this sort of treatment, but the North is almost taking over from London now," she says. The age and sex of her client base has changed too. "The number of men having treatment is growing, it's probably between five and ten per cent," she says. "People are using it younger too, as a preventive treatment. When lines first start, you can still stretch them, but as they get deeper, it's more difficult to treat them."

Her oldest patients are in their early 80s, though she says age isn't really the issue. "The amount of treatment needed will depend on a number of factors – genetics, sun damage and how the person has looked after their skin."

Despite her job, Dr Rita's philosophy extends beyond the syringe. She's a huge fan of Eva Fraser's facial exercises – "that's why men do better; it's all those faces they pull when they shave every day" – and warns of the dangers and ageing effects of sun damage. A regular cleanse and moisturising routine is also

important. But if after all that care, genetics and wear and tear start to get the better of you, Dr Rita's there to help. "There's no doubt people are tending to have more of these treatments and starting earlier," she says.

Dr Rita always takes people through a thorough consultation to find out what they're after. "Some want it to look so subtle their partner won't notice, some have their partner sitting next to them. Some have a fixed idea of what they want doing, others want to know what I can do for them."

Then she finds out how they'd like to approach the treatment, all at once or in stages. "The most important thing is to work with your patient and find out exactly what they're comfortable with," she says.

If they might have any allergies, she recommends Restylane or Perlane, natural products which are less likely to cause reactions.

Patients are also given strict aftercare instructions – because it takes a few hours for Botox to lock in you mustn't go to sleep on your front, don't wear a baseball cap over the treatment area, don't go out and have a massage, etcetera...

"If someone is cautious, I would rather put less filler in, then top it up at a later date," says Dr Rita. "And though you do meet some people who have gone overboard, most of my patients are very sensible and just want a subtle freshen up where no-one really notices. That is the real skill of the injector. It's also, of course, a matter of what your budget is. Some people have just one treatment and spend £300-£400 a year, while others have one or two shots of Botox plus fillers and are spending £500-£1,000 a year."

Dr Rita's recommendation is to have natural type product, then if anything does go wrong, it's easier to fix. "There are other products that include silicone, but none last so much longer it's worth your while taking the risk. Perlane can last up to a year."

"The good thing about the treatment is that if you decide you want to age naturally, you can stop having the injections, but if a deep line does appear, you know you can do something about it rather than looking obsessively in the mirror and worrying about it."

And we all know what worry does for wrinkles...

● Dr Rita Rakus will be at the CACI Beauty Oasis next on Friday, August 6 Call CACI on (01325) 489970 or Dr Rita direct on 0207 460 7324 to book.

JENNY NEEDHAM meets Dr Rita Rakus, a leading light in the increasingly popular business of wrinkle-busting

Experienced: Dr Rakus, above, has been injecting fillers into people's faces for 12 years now

LIFE COACH

FRIENDSHIPS BRING THE SUNSHINE IN

SN'T it amazing to see how our mood changes for the better on a warm, sunny day? People also bring sunshine into our lives. Being with people who are warm and care for us is like basking in the sun.



We all wish for sunny days especially when life seems hard. That's when we need our friends the most. True friends are there for us even when we're not being kind friends to ourselves. But there is a danger than we can become trapped in a "why does it always rain on me?" type of thinking. If we carry on long enough with this attitude, we even lose the people that we came to rely on for friendship and support.

So while you're sunning yourself this summer, think of how you treat your friends. Be careful not to take them for granted. And if you're thinking you don't really have many friends, remember to make friends and be a friend. As Marlene Dietrich once said: "It's the friends you can call up at 4am that matter."

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NE motoring

Time to get your top off

IAN LAMMING goes on a Mini adventure to discover the pleasures of being topless

WE BRITS love our soft tops – come rain or shine. No one seems to know why, but open air motoring is part of the British psyche. Yet with our fair share of inclement weather, hoods generally have to stay in place.

Ironic then that a British icon (okay it's owned by BMW, but it is built here) should be launched in heat so fierce that it was impossible to get the roof down.

New Mini was launched in cool Britannia three years ago, Mini Diesel last year in the exotic surroundings of the Isle of Man, but for Mini Convertible, BMW chose the parched plains of southern Spain – and 38 degrees C of asphalt-melting sunshine.

A nice idea but one that posed a couple of problems. Brits wilt in the heat and so, it seems, do British cars. Spanish sunshine played havoc, managing to do something nasty to the electric hood mechanisms on the Mini Convertible which prevented them from being lowered at all. Embarrassment all round but, according to those nice people at BMW, it was a glitch in the pre-production cars we were driving that had already been sorted out back at the factory. Anyway how many times is the weather likely to reach the dizzy heights of 38 in the UK? A few cooling miles down the road and the hood was prepared to work, which it duly did, lowering neatly away in 15 seconds, revealing azure skies and the reason we Brits love our open-top motoring.

Taking your top off transforms an otherwise dreary existence. As far as the Mini is concerned, it brightens a claustrophobic interior, one that has one too many annoying blind spots.

Down, life becomes fun again and the Mini's characteristic spirit wins through. The throaty exhaust note bumbles from the rear, the go-kart responses take on new verve, the cheeky looks attract admiring glances – and the sunburnt forehead hammers home the need to slap on a big factor sun cream. So that's why they put Mini caps in the cars...

Topless even helps you forgive the Mini for its poor performance. Ironic but true, the Mini Convertible may look less metal but actually weighs a whopping

100kg more than its tin-topped sibling.

The benefits of that weight are evident; Mini Con shows no signs of flexing like many soft-tops do. The roof mechanism is solid and there are comforting rollover hoops. It feels solid on the road, strong and very well made.

But carrying that amount of weight is always going to affect performance, which it does. The 170bhp Cooper S will be launched later this year. The 90bhp Mini One and 115bhp Mini Cooper are little different and both chronically underpowered.

Tall gearing robs them of any further chance to perform well and whatever gear you are in, you have to wait an age for the torque to emerge. This makes overtaking a heart-stopping affair. In fact, it's best not to bother, simply relax and enjoy the sun. Extra weight and the extra revs needed to shift it will undoubtedly hit economy – and there are no plans for a Mini Convertible Diesel.

None of this matters one jot with the public, of course, who buy with their eyes, their hearts and their need to fulfil a particular image. The order books confirm this and out of the 6,500 convertibles destined for the UK this year, most have already gone. Frustrating if you are not one of the lucky buyers, but good news if you are as it will keep second hand values high.

The whole Mini concept has been a licence to print money for BMW in a way Beetle never quite managed it for VW. In the past three years 100,000 have been sold around the globe, showing there is a market for British workmanship.

Mini Convertible can only add another successful leg to the Mini adventure and in the UK is expected to account for 20 per cent of sales.

Prices start at £13,325 for the One; £14,625 for the Cooper and £17,595 for the Cooper S, with the usual bucket load of accessories available for all three.

Hood down, sun up, it's difficult not to be wooed by the charms of the new drop top. Sun down, hood up, it's a different matter, as things do get a little pokey inside. But sun bearing down, hood stuck up, the red faces had nothing to do with the weather.



Of the 6,500 convertibles destined for the UK, most have already been snapped up



NE connections
IN ASSOCIATION WITH



CHRISTINE FIELDHOUSE and family spend a weekend at Slaley Hall, which manages to cater for golfers, hen nights, romantic couples and children, all under the same roof



Tee time for tinies too

NOTHING makes my blood run colder than an invitation to dine in a smart restaurant with my four-year-old son, Jack. It's the thought of chicken nuggets and spaghetti hoops landing on a diner's lap and all that swinging on chairs, not to mention pulling of tablecloths.

So when we were invited along to visit De Vere Slaley Hall near Hexham in Northumberland, the butterflies kicked in. When a leaflet pictured a couple sitting in an intimately-lit bar, beneath an opulent chandelier, I began to wonder just how prepared this alleged child-friendly place was for our energetic boy.

But we took the plunge and my husband Ian, Jack and I booked into a suite for a weekend in the country. Slaley Hall is set in 1,000 acres of Northumbrian forest and moorland, and is probably best-known for its two top-notch golf courses.

The Hall was developed in the late 1800s and in the 1940s was maintained as a vast sporting estate for hunting, shooting and fishing. Nowadays it is plush and sumptuous, with many original fireplaces and rooms so spacious even little boys can be seen and not heard.

The England football squad has stayed at the hotel and used the full-sized football pitch. But golf is the Hall's big sport, and guests can play the Hunting championship course, which features in the PGA European Tour, or the Priestman course, which looks out over the Tyne Valley.

Our suite comprised two adjoining rooms – one with a king-size bed and bathroom, one with a single campbed and shower room. The biggest attraction in our room for Jack was the PlayStation. Within minutes he was excelling at the asteroid game, which, at £2.95 per 30 minutes, bought us a break and kept Jack very happy.

But it would have been a shame to be in such a beautiful place and stay in and blast asteroids, so we took a leaflet of short walks in the Hall grounds and ventured out. The walks are signed – the "purple" walk is shorter and boasts views of the Cheviot Hills to the north and the Pennines to the south and west on a fine day.

We chose the "orange" walk, a three-and-a-half mile yomp through woodlands and pastures, through the hamlet of Colpitts Grange and around the edge of the Priestman golf course. It was a bracing

morning out in the fresh air.

We tried out the pool, part of the fantastic leisure club, which also features a well-equipped gym, treatment rooms and hot tubs. As ever, the pool slide was a big favourite and the waterfall came a close second. Jack would have stayed in there all weekend, and on Sunday morning when there was a splash session with floats and balls, he was delighted.

We each used the gym and I had an Espa scalp massage, a half-hour treatment, which soothes away any tension and left my hair looking shiny and healthy. It's best to book early as appointments get snapped up in advance by golfing widows and widowers.

The hotel has a choice of eating places – the restaurant is best for lingering over a cosy meal, while the Clubhouse is great for a few drinks and the chance to eat while watching sport on the big screen. Sunday lunch in the Clubhouse is a very reasonable roast at about £6.

My worse fears were never realised. Mealtimes were happy occasions and everyone welcomed Jack into the restaurant, diners and staff alike. The children's menu was available in the restaurant and the Clubhouse, and proved a huge hit with Jack. He adored the Golden Tiddlers (fish-shaped cod in breadcrumbs) so much he had them for two meals.



We had a meal for three in the restaurant, where we enjoyed our goats cheese salad starters and braised beef and duck in blackcurrant sauce main courses.

On our second night we used the babysitting service, Safehands, and booked trainee psychiatric nurse Danielle to look after Jack while we enjoyed a meal alone. Jack isn't great with total strangers, but he bonded well with Danielle after she revealed some knowledge of Ninja Turtles.

Our "night out" started in the cocktail bar where I enjoyed The Hunter, a highly-alcoholic concoction, which stirred up my appetite for delicious corn-fed chicken and a chocolate cheesecake dessert. We returned for a post-dinner cocktail too. A two-course meal in the restaurant costs from about £18. There is an extensive wine list.

Breakfasts were sheer foodie heaven but although the food was exquisite, Slaley Hall will be remembered as the place that managed to incorporate children into a luxury hotel. I rarely say this to any parent – take the kids!

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FIRE									DRIVER
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CRAZY									STONE
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BLACK									BREAK
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COMIC									POKER
RACIOUS									ROOM
LOOSE									RINGING



Name the star pictured on the left ?

ANSWERS
Celebrity wordmatch: Peter, Window, Engine, Collar, Paving, Jack, Coffee, Indian, White, Strip, Living, Change and the hidden celebrity is Roman Keating
Star: Tim Henman

WORDwise

The word may sound familiar, but do you know what it means?

GILLIE

- A** A female ferret
- B** A Scottish manservant
- C** A stream

ANSWER

B: A Scottish manservant

IMPOSSIPUZZLE

Mr. and Mrs. Johnson have two boys and a teenage girl. The girl's age is about midway between her brothers, and if you divide the sum of the squares of the boys' ages by their sum, you get her age. How old was Betty?

SOLUTION

17 years old.

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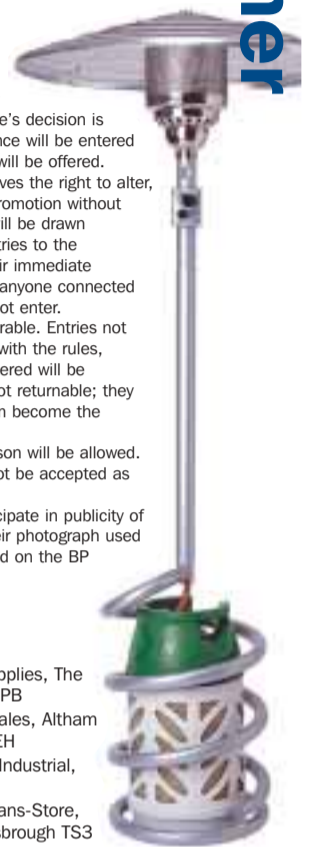
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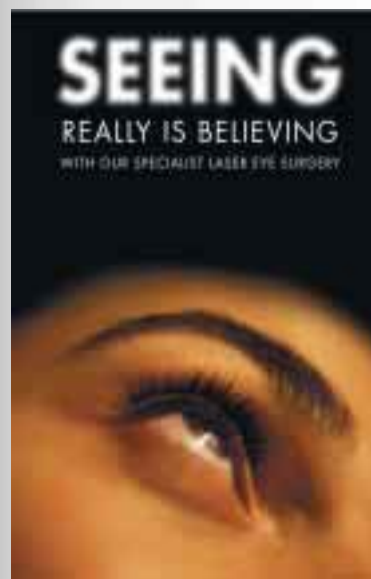
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