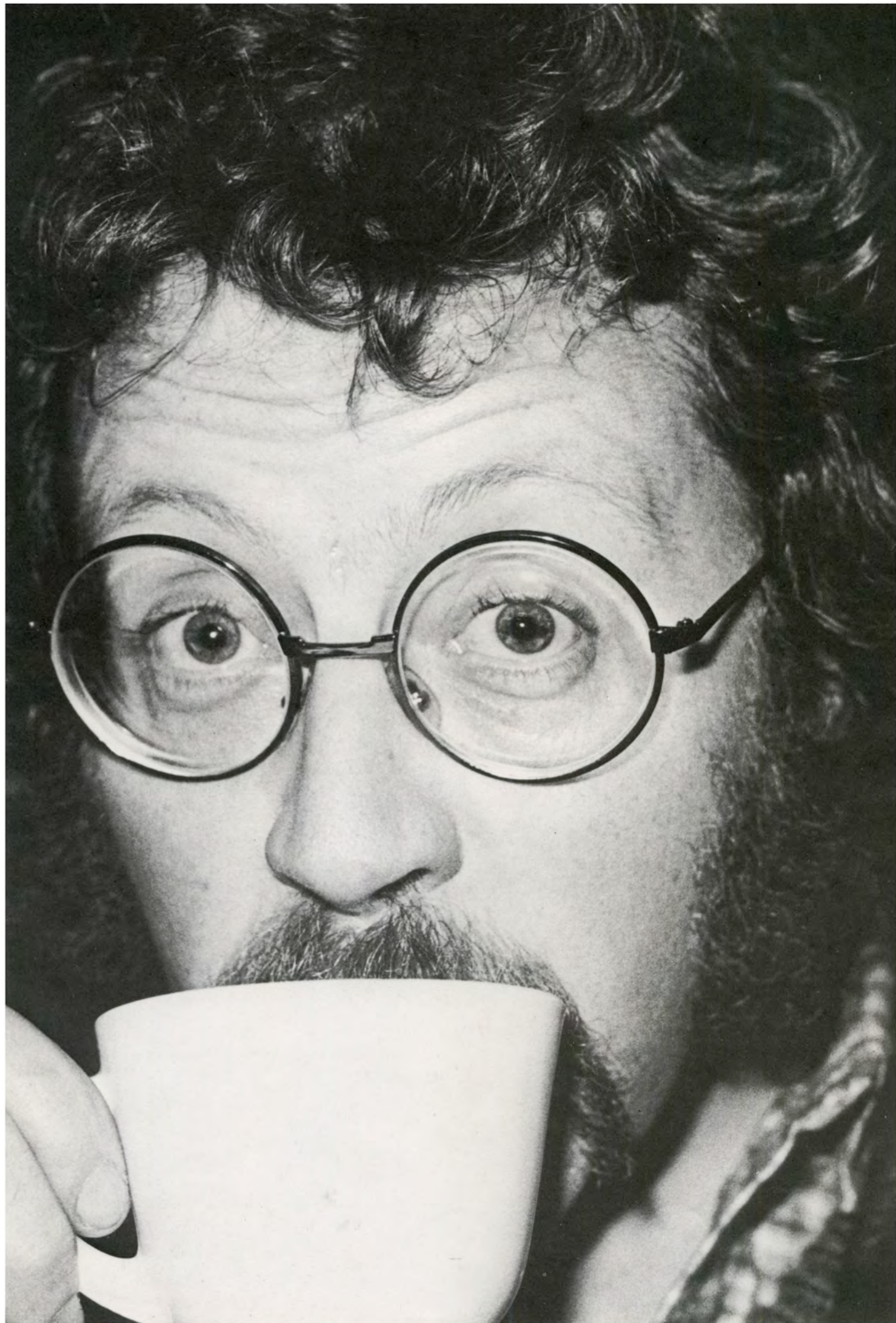


Mike HARDING



THE TOUR OF THE COSMOS



Mike Harding

I was born on the 23rd October 1944, a date previously only made famous by the fact that a Bishop in Victorian times, called Usher, had predicted by calculations, involving the length and breadth of the pyramid, the summer solstice over Stonehenge and the dates, names and inside leg measurements of Moses, Jacob, Asherfat, Arafat and Marafat in the Bible, that the world was created on the 23rd October 4,004BC at 10 o'clock in the morning. Doctor John Whiteford, Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, reached the same calculation almost but was an hour out. He said it was created at 9 o'clock in the morning. Ever since I found this out I have insisted that at birthday parties in our house, everybody sings not just happy birthday to me but happy birthday to the world as well. After all it is only fair. I was born at 2 o'clock in the morning, and I know for certain it was 2 o'clock in the morning because my mother told me and she was present at the time. She said she was there because she felt it was a family affair and she didn't want me coming into the world naked in front of a lot of strangers on my own.

For the first 18 years of my life I lived in a place called Crumpsall, which is in Manchester, and is famous for having a dye works and a Cream Cracker and Biscuit factory at the bottom of the hill. A lot of people don't believe that Crumpsall exists but that it's like Naria in the C. S. Lewis books; a far away place that you can only get to by walking through the back of wardrobes. But, in fact, Crumpsall bestraddles a muddy little creek called the River Irk. And it was there that I used to play happily with the dead dogs, and old prams and milk crates in the dye polluted pools overhung with orange privet trees near the ICI Dye Factory and the Brake-Lining Works. I ran away from home once or twice in my younger years. The first time was when they took my rubber duck that I used to float in the bath and used it as a replacement ball-cock in the lavatory system. Fortified with a sugar butty, a bottle of liquorice water and an old gas mask mag, I struck away from home only to get as far as Heaton Park before it got dark and I got frightened and gave myself up to the police.

A lot of my earliest years were spent with my great-grandmother who came from Dublin, although she had originally been a country girl from down County Wexford. She filled my head with stories of lake monsters, banshees, fairies, little

people and the Devil, who she believed looked over your shoulder if you looked in the mirror and was waiting on you everywhere to trip you up. Added to this was the fact that a lot of the kids in Crumpsall had their own particular mythological monsters that they created like Hicky the Bare-Bum Fire Bobby, Jinny Green-Teeth and the Humpty-Backed Monster. So I was so frightened when I was a kid that I wouldn't go in the coal shed without a string of garlic round my neck, a Crucifix in my hand and a bottle of Holy water.

I went to school at St. Annes Roman Catholic Primary Mixed Infants, Crumpsall, where I learnt that babies come from your belly-button and if you kiss a girl you have got to get married. I also learnt if you tread on a knick you have got to marry a brick and a beetle will come to your wedding. Three facts which stayed with me during my adult life and that I only shook off at the age of 32. When I was 11 I passed a scholarship through either a brainstorm of my own, or an inability of the examiner to spot a rogue when he saw one and I was sent to St. Bedes College for young Catholic gentlemen, a school which I believe is now a minor public school, although I think that miners would probably have a hard job getting in there. The school was run by a gang of Mafioso type clergy, that were drummed out of the SAS for cruelty, and had the mistaken but popular belief that education can only go in per-recta, that is through the seat of one's trousers. A primitive and erroneous course in anatomy had lead them to believe that the cerebrum, or brains of young boys, inhabited the regions of the lower intestinal tract and that by sufficient knocking about and shaking it could be better induced to memorize Latin conjugations and the Haber Bosch process for the manufacture of ammonia. It was while I was at this school that I started playing in a skiffle group called the Irk Valley Stompers. There was about 12 of us in the band, 10 of us playing guitars. Almost everybody at that time wanted to play guitar because it was romantic, Lonnie Donegan did it all the good skiffle bands had loads of guitarists and also you got more chance of standing at the front of the stage of the Youth Club and looking down, sullenly, beneath your Tony Curtis hair-lick at the school-girls on the front row. So the only lads who would volunteer to play the wash board and the tea-chest bass were two of the local dummies. The tea-chest bass player was picked because he was the only one tall enough to be able to stand up and put his leg on the tea-chest and pluck the string. He was tone deaf but what matter, he looked good. The wash board player had St. Vitus Dance, which meant that his sense of rhythm didn't always

agree with ours and also usually meant that he went on playing the wash board 3 minutes after the song had finished. Luckily nobody ever tried to dance while we were playing, otherwise the RSPCA would have had to come round and disentangle a spider's web of legs, suspenders, arms, elbows, spectacles and pet cockroaches.

When I was 15½ I started playing in Rock 'n' Roll Bands. The first band I ever played in was called the Stylos and we were together for about 2 years and we played all round the dance halls, and the pubs and clubs in the North and the Midlands. I spent 18 months in the resident band at Bernard Manning's Club – you don't get that for murder nowadays. I left the Stylos and, for a brief period, played in a band called The Renegades and the most memorable thing about that band was the rhythm guitarist's socks, which he used to take off every six months and beat soft again with a piece of lead piping. He had worn them so long they looked shiny and had the consistency of chrome leather. In fact walking round the dressing room one night he looked for all the world as though he had got a pair of steel toe-capped boots on.

When I was 18 I started work. Various jobs; boiler scaling, dustbin-man, steel-erecting, labouring, digging holes in the road, working down sewers, humping bags of chemicals in a chemical warehouse, working on the buses as a bus conductor, working in a book shop as a book seller, knocking on doors trying to sell encyclopaedias in the middle of winter and finally as a male model for garden gnomes. It was at this period that I decided that life must have more to it than sitting on a giant plastic toadstool with a red hat and a pipe in me mouth, and so I applied for a degree course in education and spent 4 years learning very hard. I passed and my mother was so pleased she bought me a new fountain pen and a satchel



and school cap. On leaving, with my degree clutched in my hot hand, I went straight on to becoming a full time Folk singer 'cos I had worked my way through college playing in Folk Clubs and bars and pubs and anywhere else I could get in – chip shop queues, barmitzvahs, Irish fights – you name it I worked it. So on the day I left college I went straight on the road as a full time dipsomaniac. I worked for 5 years playing every gig it was possible to play, the Isle of Man, Jersey, Scotland, the Outer Hebrides, the Inner Hebrides, Cyprus, Malta, Gibraltar and Gan Island in the Indian Ocean, Newfoundland, Belize and several trips to the British bases in Germany, that left me an incurable brätwurst addict.

In 1975, for a bit of a giggle, I made a record called the Rochdale Cowboy. It was released as a single and I promptly forgot all about it and went away to do a 3 week tour of RAF bases in the Persian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. When I got back and flew back into Brize Norton Airport in Oxfordshire, I got off very hung over at 4am after a 10 hour flight and was greeted with the news that the Rochdale Cowboy had gone into the charts at number 30. The next month seemed to be one of the craziest months of my life. It was spent meeting Cyril Smith in the House of Commons dressed as a cowboy with a pair of cap pistols, appearing on Top of the Pops on a stuffed alsatian dog, giving away 3 tons of Uncle Joe's Mint Balls to Mongolian

nose flute makers and any other publicity gimmick that the record company could think up. From then on as they say, the rest is history. It has been a succession of one night stands all round the country, trips abroad to Australia, America, Canada, Hong Kong, Bermuda, and Bahrain where you get paid in cans of GTX oil. If I was asked to describe my life I would say that on the whole I always feel I have been incredibly lucky because I never regard what I do as anything other than a job, but a job that I enjoy very much, and after having worked for so long at jobs that I actually hated it is great to wake up in the morning and really feel happy about going to work.■



The Stylos at the Methodist Mission 1961.



Luxor Club, Hulme 1961.



The Renegades 1963.

Mike Harding

TOUR '82

FEBRUARY

Sunday 14	Leeds	Grand Theatre
Monday 15	Leeds	Grand Theatre
Tuesday 16	Wolverhampton	Civic Hall
Thursday 18	Whitehaven	Civic Hall
Friday 19	Morecambe	Palace Theatre
Saturday 20	Doncaster	Gaumont
Sunday 21	Stockport	Davenport Theatre
Monday 22	Stockport	Davenport Theatre
Tuesday 23	Coventry	Apollo Theatre
Wednesday 24	Birmingham	Odeon
Thursday 25	Birmingham	Odeon
Friday 26	Leicester	De Montfort Hall
Saturday 27	Ipswich	Gaumont
Sunday 28	Ipswich	Gaumont

MARCH

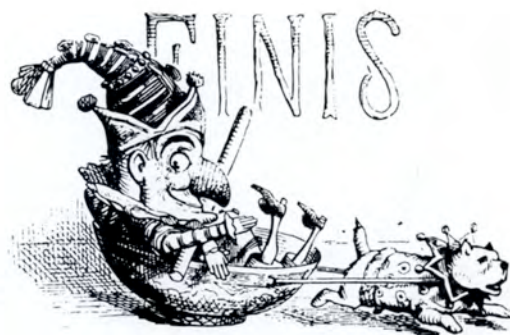
Tuesday 2	Sheffield	City Hall
Wednesday 3	Sheffield	City Hall
Thursday 4	Sheffield	City Hall
Friday 5	Croydon	Fairfield Hall
Saturday 6	London	Dominion Theatre
Sunday 7	Oxford	Apollo Theatre
Monday 8	Harrogate	Royal Hall
Tuesday 9	Harrogate	Royal Hall
Thursday 11	Preston	Guild Hall
Friday 12	Preston	Guild Hall
Saturday 13	Southport	Southport Theatre
Sunday 14	Nottingham	Theatre Royal
Monday 15	Chatham	Central Hall
Tuesday 16	Folkestone	Leas Cliff Hall
Wednesday 17	Brighton	The Dome
Thursday 18	Portsmouth	Guildhall
Friday 19	Poole	Wessex Hall
Saturday 20	St Austell	Cornwall Coliseum
Sunday 21	Bristol	Hippodrome
Monday 22	Swansea	Brangwyn Hall
Tuesday 23	Southampton	Gaumont
Thursday 25	Hull	New Theatre
Friday 26	Hull	New Theatre
Saturday 27	Liverpool	Empire Theatre
Sunday 28	Newcastle	New Tyne Theatre
Monday 29	Newcastle	New Tyne Theatre
Tuesday 30	Middlesborough	Town Hall
Wednesday 31	Bridlington	Royal Hall

APRIL

Thursday 1	Skegness	Festival Pavilion
Friday 2	Oldham	Queen Elizabeth Hall
Monday 5	Ashton-under-Lyne	Tameside Theatre
Thursday 15	Bradford	Alhambra Theatre
Friday 16	Bradford	Alhambra Theatre
Saturday 17	Bradford	Alhambra Theatre
Sunday 18	York	Theatre Royal
Tuesday 20	Stirling	MacRobert Arts Centre
Wednesday 21	Aberdeen	Capitol Theatre
Thursday 22	Dundee	Caird Hall
Friday 23	Glasgow	Theatre Royal
Saturday 24	Edinburgh	Playhouse
Monday 26	Derby	Assembly Rooms
Tuesday 27	Derby	Assembly Rooms
Wednesday 28	Halifax	Civic Theatre
Friday 30	Colne	Municipal Hall

MAY

Saturday 1	Malvern	Winter Gardens
Monday 3	Hatfield	Forum Theatre
Tuesday 4	Reading	Hexagon
Wednesday 5	Reading	Hexagon
Thursday 6	Blackpool	Opera House
Friday 7	Manchester	Apollo Theatre
Saturday 8	Manchester	Apollo Theatre



*If this is Hong Kong 0700 hours,
then they're still drinking in Wigan.*

DOWN UNDER WITH THE ROCHDALE COWBOY



After completing the recordings of his present
series on BBC-2,

Mike Harding has set off for Australia.

This is the first of a number of dispatches
written from his staging post at Hong Kong.

TALK about jet lag, well, you don't know what jet lag is until you've been on the Isle of Man ferry. Mind you, that's not to say that the journey from Gatwick to Hong Kong was not without incident. To begin with, Gatwick has got to be about as well signposted as an SAS reunion dinner. It took one and three-quarter hours of maniacal driving to get from my sister-in-law's in Twickenham to the launching pad. Signs to Gatwick disappeared just after Kingston. I think we went through Surbiton twice, Crawley three times, and I'm certain that at some time we stopped to ask the way outside Marks and Spencers, Hastings.

It seemed to take less time to get from Gatwick to Bahrain, where they let us off for half an hour and where two pints of beer set us back £2.30. Dave the roadie sang Wee Willie Winkie every time an Arab went past in a jalaba, which I did not think wise; and surely retribution was visited upon him when he knocked over a pint of Double Diamon that had just cost £1.15. He must have the most expensive elbow in Christendom. In the United Kingdom, CAMRA members would have applauded the spillage; but in Bahrain transit lounge Brits stood in two minutes' silence as more than a pound's worth of English chemicals was mopped up by a deeply sympathetic Pakistani.

We got back on the plane, fastened our seat belts, put our faces in an upright position, and extinguished all our hopes. The in-flight movies were Star Trek - The Movie, and The Final Countdown, starring Kirk Douglas and half a million Japanese soldiers. I got the earphones mixed up and heard Dr Spock come out with the immortal lines "One of you sonofabitches move - I'm gonna fill you so full of lead you'll look like a slant-eyed pencil."

At 0800 hours Hong Kong time while we were somewhere over Red China, Dave looked at this amazing watch he's got that tells you the time all over the world and said that, according to his watch, they would be just playing the last game of 501 in his local in Wigan by now. After I had beaten him senseless with an airline bread roll, I thought about what he had said and worked out that if it was true, then the airline had just taken eight hours of our lives. As well as having us in airborne captivity for 14 hours, they had taken another eight out somewhere. In an announcement the captain had told me to put my watch forward to Hong Kong time, making me a third of a day older in one sentence. Where does the time go? Who gets the missing hours? Einstein would probably know but he's dead, probably because he flew a lot.



As we took our approach position, dawn rose over Red China. I'm sure that if the people of Surbiton and Kingston-on-Thames knew that the Communists of Red China get better sunrises than they do without paying rates or mortgages or watching Songs of Praise, they would be running down the library for Das Kapital and The Ragged Trousered Philanthropist in their thousands.

At 08.30 hours a Chinaman sitting behind us obviously spurned on by Dave's announcement that it was only 12.35 in Wigan ordered a glass of red wine with breakfast.

As we taxied to the reception area at 09.05 the Muzak machine on the plane played Strangers In The Night, which was all right because it was still only 10 past 1 in Wigan.

The airport baggage handlers made us feel another few years older by losing Dave's suitcase. The prospect of a week in Hong Kong and four in Australia with Dave in the same pair of socks and underwear was so fearful that I broke out in a cold sweat. The case turned up two hours later hidden under some Chinese nuns and we left the airport to see signs saying Happy New Year! spread all over the town. Not only had the airline taken eight hours off us but now the Chinese had pinched a year.

It's the Year of the Cock, the taxi driver told us. What did that mean? Was it like The Year of the Child or The Year of the Disabled? Did that mean that we had to be kind to cockerels? Did we have to push money into tins while middle-aged ladies stuck pins in our chests fixed to flags with cockerels on them? Will Tom Jones, Frank Sinatra, The Bee Gees and Bette Midler all appear to raise money for orphaned cockerels or disabled cockerels or homeless cockerels or maybe just cockerels that are having a bad time?

Such questions furrowed my brow as we sped through Hong Kong towards the apartments we were staying at. I had expected pagodas, rickshaws, and pig-tailed inscrutable gentlemen full of wise sayings such as "A wise man never mocks the hunchback with the machine gun": instead a very quiet man with a

£300 Rolex watch drove us through concrete canyons that looked like a cross between a grey Legoland and Act One of Aladdin.

Towering modern blocks loomed over a nest of bright red, gold and yellow signs advertising everything from topless massage to herbal dentists, or was it herbal massage and topless dentists? We drove past very fast and Dave told the taxi driver they would be just chucking them out now in Wigan, and the taxi driver told Dave they never chuck them out in Hong Kong, and he knew a bar where pretty girls would give you the time for \$600 Hong Kong. Dave said he

already knew the time and that in Wigan they played dominoes for a penny a spot which seemed to so confuse the driver that he stayed quiet for the rest of the journey.

The apartment we are staying in belongs to Stephanie and Chris, who run the club I'm working in. I had a shower and Dave wound his watch up before we got ready to go on our first tour of Hong Kong.

The television was showing an American soap opera called *The Young and The Restless*, full of long head shots showing people suffering nobly, and shots of sets that looked as though they

had been painted on after. It's on five nights a week and is so bad it makes Crossroads look like Deep Throat. The half an hour that is was on felt like a year – more time going.

As we sat down later in the Hermitage Bar looking out over Hong Kong harbour, Dave with a foaming glass before him told me that according to his watch it was now 10 am in Wigan. "No one'll be supping now," he said, knocking the top off his Chinese lager, "not even the bobbies; mind you, if they served this stuff in Wigan, no one'd want to drink no matter what the time was."



Roadies having a light meal in Scunthorpe.



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Illustrated by Bill Tidy

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**DAILY
ANARCHIST**
EASY TO ENTER
BOMB THROWING
COMPETITION
PAGE 11



THE DAY THAT THE FLOTSAM TURNED INTO JETSAM

THE ROCHDALE
COWBOY DOWN UNDER

But not yet. Mike Harding is still in Hong Kong, and he describes and photographs an encounter with refugees picked up by a police boat on routine patrol.

IT LOOKED like it was going to be a funny day. Ted Aikin Davis, an expatriate Northerner from Todmorden, had invited us out on a routine patrol on police motor vessel no. 60 of the Royal Hong Kong Police. "We'll take a trip out to Cheung Chau Island," he said, "have a look round and a bite to eat, then we'll show you some more of the islands."

He's a good guy, Ted, ex-Navy, good sense of humour, warm sort of bloke, still very much down to earth even though he is a chief inspector with 300 men under him. "Thursday morning about ten o'clock lad," he said. "Right," we said, Dave the roadie and I: and it looked like it was going to be a funny day.

Thursday in Hong Kong got off to a greyish start, a sea haze smoothed the outlines of the furthest islands, and a pearly sky stretched over the hundreds of fishing junks and sampans in Aberdeen harbour. Suited businessmen on their way to work stood precariously on the open decks of wobbly little sampans that plied between towering ocean going boats, looking as cool as though they were on the 8.15 from Surbiton.

Murray, the young inspector in command of no. 60, welcomed us on board and pointed out some of the harbour sights, shrimp fishing junks with whole families living on board, a pretty Chinese girl in skirt and blouse rowing herself to the office, the jumbo floating restaurant that can seat over 3,000 people. It was going to be a good day.

Cheung Chau Island was fascinating; twisting alley ways led from the harbour to dark courtyards with smoky temples where stone dragons guarded the door. On the street where most Hong Kong

life is lived, baskets of dried fish and squid lay alongside boxes of fruit and sleeping dogs as a Chinese funeral procession wound its way slowly past with gongs, a coffin, and a brass band.

On the way back to the boat, Ted told us that instead of returning to Aberdeen harbour as we'd intended, we'd have to sail out towards Red China territorial waters because the police radio had just picked up a tip that a boat load of IIs (illegal immigrants) had been spotted leaving Macao in an open boat. It seemed at first just another strange event in a funny day.

We lay in wait in open seas off Flat

Rock, a dangerous block smooth as a billiard table jutting ever so slightly out of the water. Nothing happened. A sampan fishing along the coast moved in and out of sight. The Macao ferry crossed the horizon and melted into the grey of the afternoon. A freighter, rusty and battered, hauled round the headland off our starboard bow and steamed slowly towards Kowloon.

Then what seemed a far piece of driftwood came into view beyond the ferry lanes, but it was moving too fast for driftwood. The police launch headed to intercept it at full belt. As we neared the low flat shape, we saw it was studded with the silhouettes of people and in a few minutes we were able to see their faces and their eyes. Huddled in an ancient open boat were 25 people in thin clothes, looking up at us with a mixture of fear and hope and pain.



The Chinese engineer spoke enough Vietnamese to address them through the loud hailer. We drew them alongside and found that one of the young men on board spoke fair English.

Murray squatted down to talk to him. "Tell the women with babies to come off first. Then the small boys, then last of all the men."

And they did. The women were searched by a WPC and taken into a warm cabin with their babies and the other small children. Then the men came on board, and were searched too, and then squatted down by the liferaft. We gave them water and cigarettes. The boat, leaky and hardly bigger than the rowing boats you find on boating lakes in English parks, was tied behind and we set course for Hong Kong.

There were two brothers amongst them, Ho Xuan Thien and Ho Xuan Duc. Ho Xuan Thien stayed in the refugee boat to steer her back to Hong Kong. I asked Ho Xuan Duc how long they had been at sea.

"Ten days," he said.

"Ten days in an open boat?"

"Yes, ten days and ten nights."

For ten days in an open boat, they had braved the wild seas and the Thai pirates that have raped and killed so many who have tried to escape this way.

"How did you eat? Did you have food?"

"We stopped at Hainan Island and changed all our rings and gold for food and water."

"Who sold you the boat?"

"It is his, he is a fisherman." He pointed at a thin man who smiled shyly.

"How did you find your way?"

"He had a compass." The thin man showed me a cheap compass such as you might get in an Army and Navy store for a few English pounds. It was US Army issue, dirty and old.

"Where have you come from?"

"Da Nang."

"Why did you leave?"

"Because if we did not leave we would be forced into the army and sent to fight in Laos or Cambodia."

In the cabin I gave a woman a cup of water as she lay ill and hungry on a bench with a baby to her breast. The other mother looked at me. "You too?" I asked pointing at the water. She nodded. The children took some too and smiled.

"You are happy now?" I asked.

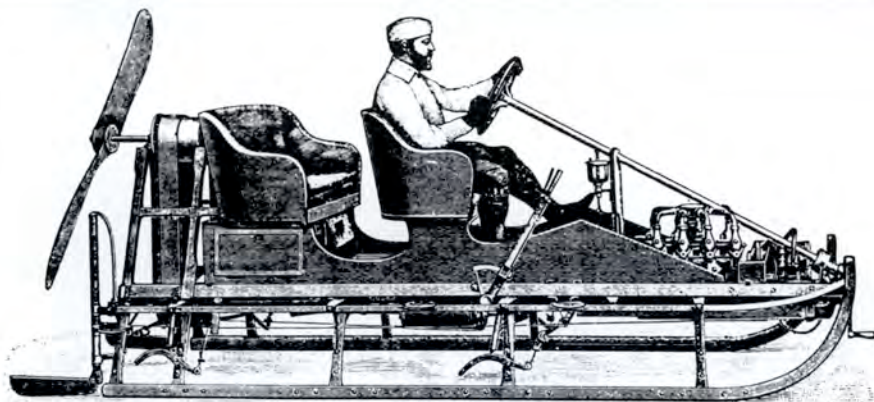
She smiled weakly.

"You are happy?" I asked Ho Xuan Thien.

"I am happy," he said, "now we are free."

The police on the launch treated them with the compassion you see at road accidents. Murray smiled, Ted smiled, Julian smiled, the Chinese cook gave them cigarettes.

We sailed into Hong Kong as lights came on and the tall ships' riggings stood out against a westering sun. A small boy made a thumbs up sign at me. I waved back. Somehow, all the newsreels of My Lai, Saigon, the gunships in the paddy fields, the napalm, weren't just newsreel any more. It wasn't a funny day at all.



M. Harding's personalised tour limousine

News cuttings West Australian—

MINING

FOR Sale or Auction 7 groups of Gold Mining Leases with Mineral Leases or Mineral Claims in Leonora Merondale Laverton Region. Geologist report on some leases. Owned by well known prospectors. All enquiries to PO Box 177 Kalamunda 6076 or by Telex 95704.

PROSPECTOR needs pegging finance for tantalum. Replies to AO22, this office, Perth.

WESTERN AUSTRALIA
Mining Act, 1904
NOTICE OF APPLICATION FOR A MINING TENEMENT OTHER THAN A LEASE

Reg. 153
Mineral Claim No. 45/10274
NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN that We, Mt Newman Mining Co Pty Ltd of P.O. Box 231, Port Hedland, WA 6721 the undersigned have this day made application

MY own minor telephone troubles, which involve people calling me in the belief that I am their doctor, lawyer or friendly local mining magnate, are as nothing compared with those of Mrs Sheila Cocking, of "Jindabyne," Mogumber.

"After erecting our phone line 20 years ago and maintaining it at our own cost, I thought you might like to know some of the fun we have with it," she writes.

"After the ducks fly off the dams I can usually untangle the wires by standing on a banana crate and waving a broom handle about."

"When the cows walk through I can chase them away, but it's a full time job when it's between them and the water trough."

"When the cockies chew the wires I can shoot them, but after 20 years there seem to be just as many."

"Now, after two days of crackle-free phone (a record) it is impossible to hear a thing. A chap digging a dam 5km away has buried it, but at least he left a bit sticking out so we could find it again."



Roadies waiting to be paid.

GOLD DIGGERS OF '81

THE ROCHDALE COWBOY DOWN UNDER

Mike Harding, touring under the
auspices of the West Australian Arts Council
(heaven help them)

discovers a motel that has phased out the cow
and photographs
a gold miner called Jenny.

WE LAND at Perth from Hong Kong at 1 am Ozzie time, tea time in Wigan. Two Australians fall on their knees and kiss the tarmac, shouting "Australia we love yer." Dave the roadie says he thinks they're potty. I tell him not to tell them that because they're both 8 ft tall and built like kangaroos.

At the first press interviews I am asked almost immediately how I like Australia. Since I've only seen it in the dark, driving from the airport or from my bedroom window where the view is largely dominated by the Sally Army Citadel, I say that my first impressions are that it is big, dark, and religious. The next question is really intriguing – how do I think I will like Australia? That's like asking Lincoln how he's going to react to the assassination. ("I'll probably die," he says.)

Dave and I go for a walk by the Swan River famous for its black swans. We do not see any. It is a beautiful summer's day in Perth. Dave undoes the top button of his overcoat, saying "It's a bit warm for February." We try some Australian beer. Dave proclaims that he'll never get used to it, and if that's all the beer you can get over here, it's no wonder the Salvation Army Citadel is so big.

Next day at Jandikot Airport, the first leg of the Australian tour starts, and with it the first disasters. Let me just say here that the organisation and timing of the Perth Festival people and the West Australian Artists Council are perfect. The things that go wrong are acts of God. We turned up early at Jandikot Airport with enough sound, lights and musical equipment to fill a double-deck bus and find a plane that looks like a milk churn with wings.

"SNAFU" (situation normal all fouled up), I say.

Cal, the pilot, is deeply sympathetic. "Jeez I'd like to get it all in, mates, but there's no way. You'd need bloody Concorde for that lot."

I think he is very calm about it, particularly since he got married only two days before and has left his wife to spend his honeymoon with Dave, the roadie, and me looning round the deserts of Western Australia.

We tried to get as much of the equipment in as we can but the plane tips up. So we transhipped the bulk of the gear to a van. The van's engine blows up. A car that comes out to help reverses down a driveway with the door open and tears it off. We fly off leaving chaos and turmoil behind us. Peter, from the Arts Council, apologises. I tell him not to, and that every tour we go on reaps a rich crop of disasters.

"We're like a walking Bermuda Triangle," I say.

He dismisses it with a lighthearted wave of the hand. Three days later he is to be led away a gibbering wreck.

We set off for Bunbury, a small town famous for being a small town.

"We're off like a bride's nightie," says Cal as we gain height after take off – a strange expression, given his circumstances. Cal points to a flock of sheep drinking at a soak in a dry paddock "Lot of them sheep fall off their perches," he says.

For hours I wonder what sheep are doing on perches. Later I find "to fall off the perch = to die."

Cal hands me a sandwich. "Scuse fingers but it's better than me feet."

Cal sees me writing something down. "Diary?" he asks.

I tell him it's a bit of journalism.

"Ah!" he says, "tampering with the truth."

I ask him why we are flying below the cloud. He tells me there are rocks in it. I

believe him.

After the concert at Bunbury, I meet a lady who lived next door to a girl I went out with in Manchester, when I was sweet sixteen.

"Yes, I remember you," she says, "you used to have spots and a school cap."

"Ah, plus ca change, plus ca difference," I say.

"Bloody pom," she says.

Next day we fly to Albany, a small town on the coast, famous for being on the coast. Above us the clouds.

"Rocks?" I ask as we hit a turbulence.

"She'll be right, mate," says Cal. "No worries." An Australian expression that means we are not in any imminent danger of falling off our perches.

Peter, from the Arts Council, has gone by road with the bus. It is the third bus we have had. The engine of the first blew up, and the second had to be changed because there was something wrong with it. "It just sort of fell apart," says Peter.

We fly over hundreds of miles of bush, scrubby gum trees, dry paddocks, and salt flats. "That's it, mate," says Cal. "GABA – Great Australian Bugger All."

We are being followed by vultures with knives and forks. "Are you blokes really that unlucky?" asks Cal. Little do any of us know that this is to be the last time he is to fly us anywhere.

I'm appearing at the Centennial Oval Hall, Albany. An oblong hut where they normally hold sheep shearing contests and Drambuie tasting competitions at the same time. The town is small and friendly. In fact everyone we've met in Western Australia so far has been very warm and friendly. We have a meal in Kookas, one of the best wholefood restaurants I've eaten in. It used to be Albany's only brothel until the police station opened up next door and ruined business. So in its time it has catered for a variety of appetites.

Tonight in bed, I start reading The West Australian, the local daily paper of an area of 3,000,000 square miles. You can always find out a great deal about a place by reading its local papers. One item in The West Australian is an advertisement by a local undertaker showing a roughly drawn mourner's face and carrying the text: "Did you know that there are some pretty silly rumours about us round town? Well there are. It has for instance been gossipped that we use cardboard coffins! Well, I ask you! Our principle would never allow it."

Further along is a letter from a lady in the bush about the problems she has with her phones. Mrs Cocking of Mogumber writes: "After the ducks fly off the dams I can usually untangle the wires by standing on a banana crate and waving a broomhandle. When the cockies chew the wires I can shoot them but after 20 years there seem to be just as many."

A few pages on, I find a piece in the small ads: "Prospector needs pegging finance for Tantalum." No worries mate, she'll be right.



I lie in bed staring at the motel ceiling, thinking. One of the things I think about is the motel. Motels are soulless places. If the dead have a staging post before they are ferried across the Styx by Charon, it will be a motel. Featureless, plastic, tasteless, neon-lit boxes on the tarmac arteries of the world, they offer cold comfort to the nomadic comic a long way from home.

Room service is two dry biscuits, a kettle, individual sachets of instant coffee or tea bags, and, worse still, sachets of "Non Dairy Beverage Whitener," i.e. Non Milk. The motel has phased out the cow. The list of ingredients on the sachet read like something from an A level chemistry paper: - "Corn syrup solids, coconut oil, sodium caseinate, dipotassium phosphate, emulsifiers, anticaking agents," Just make this prescription up for Dr Jekyll you?

Rumour has it that Joe Walsh the American guitarist, has a chain saw that he takes with him on tour. When he finds life in motels too much, he saws the room up. Tonight I can understand that.

In the morning, breakfast is pushed through a flap in the wall. I catch a glimpse of a hand. Is there a person attached to it, I wonder, or is it just a hand? Breakfast is more sachets and tiny

tubs of jam and honey, soggy white bread and tiny pats of butter. A toaster is provided in your room for you to toast your own toast with. The tiny tub of honey reminds me of a story. I tell it to Dave.

Chic Murray, the Scots comic, and possibly the funniest man I've ever seen, was staying in a hotel in Scotland on tour. "I'd like some honey with my toast," he said. The waitress brought him a tub the size of a thimble. Chic stared at it for a while, then looked up saying quietly, "I see you keep a bee."

Dave laughs so much he burns the toast.

A hand appears at the flap again and takes the trays. Dave and I start clucking like battery hens. The hand does not think it is funny and makes an insulting sign which cheers us up. At least it was a real hand.

Cal comes in. "Well, mates, there's no way we're flying out of here today, the clouds are as low as a penguin's backside and it's not going to get any better."

So we say goodbye to Cal, who spends another two and a half days of his honeymoon under a blanket of clouds in Albany and start to panic. Dave and Peter have set off on the 800 mile bush road trip to Geraldton and I'm left

with no transport. Don Caine from the Albany end of the organisation races me to Perth. The roads are empty, the bush flies past. "GABA," says Don. "SNAFU," I shout back. We drive a distance roughly equivalent to the trip from London to Carlisle and pass one small town of nine houses.

I fly from Perth to Geraldton just in time to do the show. At Geraldton next day I take a photograph of a windpump, the most interesting thing in Geraldton.

At the airport we meet John, who is to be our new pilot. He has heard of us and is wearing garlic, crucifixes, rabbits' feet and scarabs.

We fly to Telfer, a gold mining town, population 300. It is the middle of a desert near Marble Bar, reputedly the hottest place in the world. As we arrive it starts to rain. One and a half inches of rain falls in five hours. It is the wettest desert I have ever seen. The next day we get a chance to look round the gold mine. Women work here as well as men and drive 85 ton haul packs into the workings and back to the extraction plant. Jenny, a no-nonsense lady, who has been on the mine nearly a year, shows us round. On one of the settling tanks, some wag has put a wooden duck over the moving depth marker. Over a ten year period the mine will yield a truck load of gold, about 38 tonnes. To do this they will have to mine 44 million tonnes of waste rock and treat 4 million tonnes of ore. It seems strange that poor men come all the way to this desert to dig up something that they then give to rich men who make it into bars and then bury it in the ground again. GABA SNAFU.

We leave Telfer where the storeman comes from Manchester and arrive in an iron mining town called Newman, where everybody comes from Manchester or thereabouts.

The area around Newman was first discovered by Giles and Ross who called the surrounding mountains the Ophthalmia Range because Giles was suffering from an eye infection called Sandy Bright when it was first discovered. The mind boggles. Natural features named after ailments could produce a rash of places like Hernia Hill, Scofulus Gulch, Tonsilitis Gap, Twinge In Me Back River, Mount Pre Menstrual Tension, and Just A General Feeling Of Tiredness Valley.

I take lots of pictures of giant earth movers and a mountain of iron ore so pure it can be welded just as it comes straight from the ground. John, the pilot, beams. "Well, mates, she'll be right, no worries. There's nothing gone wrong so far." As we cruise at 10,000 feet above the Red Desert the radio crackles. It is a message for John to go straight from Perth to Albany after dropping us.

"Jeez, mates, that's me day off gone."

"SNAFU, John. SNAFU."





Young wines, with just a hint of gumboot.

Mike Harding ends his tour, care of the Australian Arts Council, by discovering the meaning of sloshing foaming frosties – and their ultimate destination. The answer's a great white telephone

IN ADELAIDE they sent the wine and food man from the local newspaper to review the concert. In all it was a thumbs up sort of notice, although he did call me an "ethnic comedian" and didn't like my gag about the kid sello-taping breadcrumbs to the inside of the window panes so that the pigeons would peck themselves senseless on the glass. Mind you, I probably wouldn't like his food and wine reviews.

With an afternoon off in Adelaide, Dave the roadie and I hired a car and drove to the Barossa Valley, one of the main wine growing areas of South Australia. It was a bizarre experience. We left typical Australia houses behind with their Sydney lace, ironwork, and corrugated roofs and drove into the set of "The Student Prince meets Der Rosen Kavalier."

Bavarian mini schloss rubbed shoulders with stainless steel wine tanks and all the road signs started to appear in German Gothic. Ladies in Bavarian costume waved from Rasthaus doorways. The guide book said the Barossa was

first developed by Lutheran refugees from Germany. They brought with them their culture and traditions, many of which are still carried on. They also established and developed the wine industry. Most of the wineries had tastings in their cellars where you could drink for nothing. Dave kept trying a fizzy red wine that he called Chateau Sarsprella that turned the whites of his eyes bright orange. I only tried a few wines because I was driving. I suppose a connoisseur would have described them as "young and irreverent with just a hint of gumboot."

We flew on to Darwin, which was one of the strangest places I have ever seen. We arrived in the middle of the wet season. It was hot and steamy with a pervading smell of swamp. It was like living for a week in someone's sock. Darwin blew down in a cyclone in 1975 and has since been rebuilt in what I can only describe as a post cataclysmic style of architecture. It looks as though they didn't want to do the job properly because they were expecting another

one. Inter-disaster, art deco, bungalows on stilts.

We were met at Darwin by the most unforgettable character of the whole Australian tour. John Renfrew, a big beefy bearded man who drove us round the Northern Territory in an Aris Council bus, totally ignoring the clutch and shouting the most cheerful obscenities over the noise of a ripping syncromesh, "Tight last night I was fuller than a bull's bum." He also called ladies' bosoms "norks", which sounded more like something from Tolkien.

In Darwin I played to an audience that was almost 90 per cent Australian. At previous concerts, I know I'd pulled a lot of poms out of the woodwork. In Darwin it was different. There was not the same chorus of revel yells that greeted every passing mention of Burnley, Cardiff, Chatham or Inverness. I enjoyed it and for the first time felt that I was working in the real Australia.

We saw more of the real Australia the next day. John took us to the seaside where we couldn't swim because of the sea wasps: "dead in three seconds mate, deader than Ned Kelly's dog." We couldn't paddle in the river because of the salt water crocodiles. "They'd ave yer legs away faster than a Melbourne train," said John. Other things we had to look out for were the King Brown snake, the funnel web spider, and the red backed spider, all of which would kill you or at least make you wish you hadn't come.

But the deadliest species of fauna in Northern Australia was without doubt the Greater Zenophobic Ocker. Ockers are Bazzer McKenzie type Aussies – all beer gut, shorts and singlets, bare feet and grubby skin, sloshing foaming frosties (ice cold lager) down their necks and chundering down the big white tele-

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phone (being sick down the lavatory). We only really met them in Darwin.

John dropped us off at a bar on Sunday afternoon and drove off saying "see you later." I couldn't help but detect a hint of maybe in his voice. The bar was a roughly roofed lean-to with wire mesh walls and an iron gate. It was full of men in shorts and bare feet; most of them had bare chests as well, those that didn't had grubby vests on. The pictorial work of the tattoo parlour was the only decoration in the place. Snakes disappeared down the backs of shorts, eagles flapped on chests, one Ocker had a pair of open garden shears tattooed on his neck. The few women that were there were bigger than the men. One of them was punching a very drunken man in the corner, another was bending chairs with her eyebrows. Everybody was drinking from tins and when they drained them, threw them in the vague direction of a huge bin in the centre of the room.

We looked through the wire mesh. We were hot, we were thirsty, we were stupid, we went in. I had white shorts, a white shirt, white legs and a camera. Dave ditto. We sat down with two beers as the sound of people being hit and throwing up died down and the room filled with a silent expectancy. A forest of eyes turned towards us. England seemed a long way away. At last somebody broke the silence "What d'yer know mates, it's a brace of f—ing tourists".

The room started laughing, drinking, fighting and throwing up again. I told Dave not to look at anyone. We drank up and ran out, discretion being the better part of not getting maimed. John picked us up later. "That was a real Ozzy bar," he said. "Thanks John," we said.

Next day we flew to Sydney and I did the Mike Walsh TV Show with Des O'Connor, which just goes to show that nobody's perfect. The Mike Walsh show

is a sort of lunch time Parkinson cum Pebble Mill At One with all the attendant dangers that involves. I followed Des O'Connor and an asthma specialist talking about ostrich racing.

Next day we flew home. In 3 days we flew from Darwin to Sydney to Melbourne to Hong Kong to Bahrain to Gatwick to Manchester. And the baggage got lost between Gatwick and Manchester. Let me finish with a couple of quotes I picked up along the way.

In Darwin I spoke to the bush painter John Pickup, and talked about how quiet the outback was. He said, "I stood alone in the Simpson Desert at night thousands of miles from anywhere and listened. I heard a low groaning rumbling sound. It was the sound of the earth turning".

And from a toilet wall in the Pink Pig Cafe, Adelaide:

To be is to do - Plato

To do is to be - Socrates

Doo be doo be doo - Sinatra

THE GUARDIAN Friday March 20 1981

Where the only good poet is a dead poet.

How Mike Harding found himself (lost himself?)
at the Perth Arts Festival, doing his bit for culture in the Antipodes.

SERENADE for Australian hotel and guests in three movements. At 7am doors start to bang. The bloke in the room above has a shower, flushes the toilet, shaves, and cleans his teeth, all so loudly that it sounds as though it's going on inside your pillow. The people next door are doing something that is causing their bed to bang against your wall very loudly and rhythmically. They're either cracking walnuts with their bed end or digging their way out.

At 7.15 iron kegs of beer and crates full of bottles arrive on a lorry. For some reason they are rolled about for half an hour across the cobbles under your bedroom window before being taken away probably to some other hotel.

At 7.45 just as you have dropped off again, the dustbinmen arrive. Never have you heard rubbish make so much noise. The cart tips up to rattle the rubbish about a bit more and the men shout encouragement to the driver.

"Woah you old bastard!" "that'll do mate, she's right!" This goes on until people in the cemetery across the road are complaining. They rev up the motor and it snarls out of the yard, lurching like a drunken 'roo.

At 8 a Qantas air crew arrives on a stopover and decide to have a party with their duty free allowance. This goes on until they're all too drunk to stand (about 8.15).

At 8.20 the cleaners arrive, vacuuming outside your door. They open it, say "Oh sorry," and go out again. They switch on radios in other rooms very loudly and sing along with them.

At 8.25 the window cleaners swing past on a trolley and decide to park

outside your window for their tea break. You fill their kettle for them and go back to bed.

At 9 men arrive in the street and start digging the road up with pneumatic drills.

The phone rings, you fumble for it. It's somewhere under your shirt, passport, and airline tickets in your suitcase. You remember now you put it there because it seemed safer after that bottle of champagne last night. You put the receiver to your ear. You can't hear because of the drills.

"Pardon?" you say.

"Smorgle bloop der gall sir," she says.

"Pardon?" The drills chatter like manic iron magpies.

"This is your early morning call," she screams.

You fall back and cancel the day.

At Perth they went one better. They started knocking down the hotel next door at 7am, every day for a week.

We went for a walk round Perth and found a black swan. I pointed out to Dave that there was a lager in Australia called Black Swan Lager. Dave said it was no wonder they were black if they drank that stuff. We'd been in the deserts and up country for so long that it was a change to get back to Perth and be able to walk for more than 10 minutes without hitting the bush or running out of road.

We got back to the hotel and bumped into Roger McGough, an old mate from years back who is also over here to do his bit for culture at the Perth Festival. We sat down in the bar and talked about New York, where both of us had just

been, Roger reading poetry and I singing (and making people cry). I asked him how it had gone and he came out with the immortal line - "Poets in New York; if you're not dead, they're ten a penny." You can tell he's a poet.

Perth is a beautiful city and the people of Perth warm and friendly. All of us at the festival were looked after very well. The Halle Orchestra disgraced us all at a party by offering to



take on everybody, but since there were well over a hundred of them no one bothered. It did look at one time as though the Zagreb Theatre Company were going to join forces with the Polish Chamber Orchestra and call the Halle's bluff, but Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee came in on the Halle's side and persuaded the Oscar Peterson Trio to join in with them.

A rough-house mob composed of Prunella Scales, Richard Rodney Bennett, and Mary O'Hara tried to stir it all up again by saying that the Halle had called the Musica Antiqua Cologne "a bunch of Kraut fiddlers and plonkers," but it was all finally settled when the Halle bought a round of drinks and agreed to stop keeping people awake at night in the hotel by dragging unwilling kangaroos up to their rooms for a drink.

I met my first real Australian that night. He insisted that my parents had personally sent his ancestors to the colonies in chains and locks. I told him if he wanted the key we'd lost it, a statement that served to confuse both of us. He called me a bloody immigrant, so I told him they were all immigrants except the Aborigines, which kept him quiet for four seconds. He asked me, "What about English cricket then?" I told him I'd never had any interest in cricket since I'd been forced as a 13-year-old to wear a batting box upside down. He asked me if I was a poofdah. I said no, was he looking for one? He threatened to give me a fat mouth. I pointed to the Halle and said they were all my mates and if he didn't stuff it, the

lady who played the bongos would come and rattle his billabongs in 6/4 time. He quietened down and walked away muttering about Poms. I later learnt he was a gentleman of the cloth.

The next day I saw the Halle off back to Manchester. My mate, Lawrence Wood, who taught me how to smoke when I was 12, is now a cellist with the Halle, which just goes to show that not everyone at my old school turned out to be priests or croupiers.

One of the best things about festivals is the fact that you get a chance to meet so many old mates like Roger McGough and Ally Anderson, the concertina play-

er, and of course the twelve Henshawes. The Henshawes were the highlight of the Perth Festival and brought the house down on the final night with their rendition of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in a Birmingham accent. Their recital of *Hiawatha* while spinning plates and riding monocycles brought tears to the eyes of at least one person, while their one-act ballet, *The Dance of the Pickled Cucumbers*, had the audience on their feet and running for the exits.

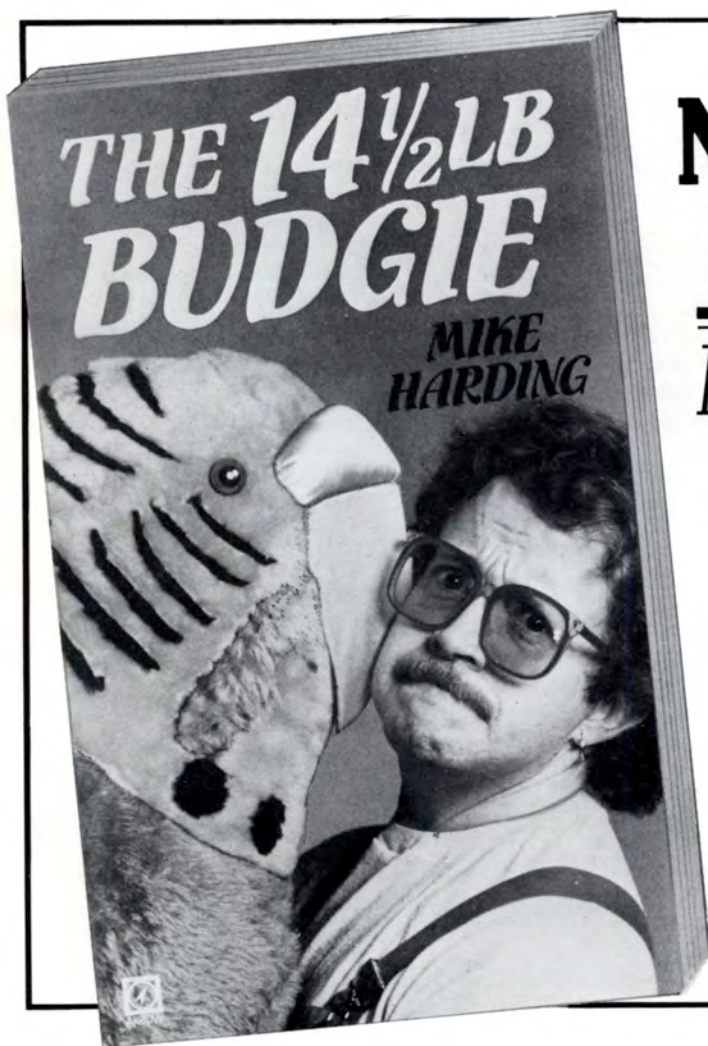
Dave the Roadie said he didn't know much about art, but he knew what he liked, then he hit one of the Henshawes. Rough things, arts festivals.



Wind storm that occurred after roadies had eaten the biggest vindaloo curry in world.



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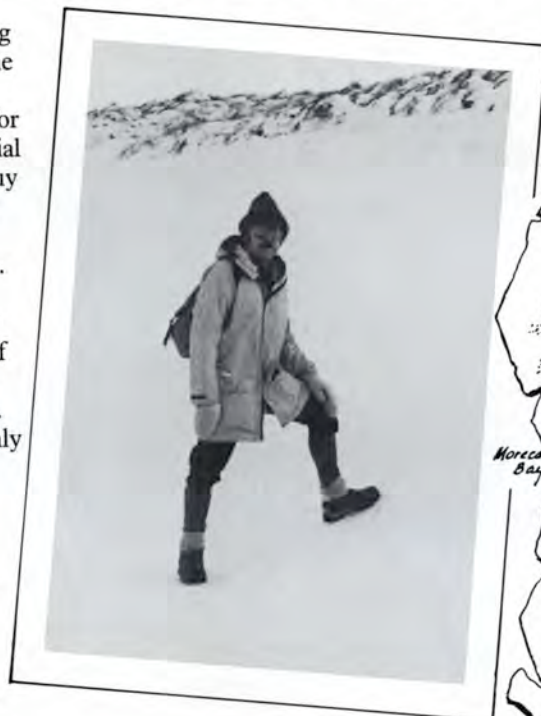
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- Side 1 Australia
 Hail Glorious St Margaret
 Take your Fingers Off It
 Captain Legless Meets Superdrunk
 The Ghost Of Cafe Gungha Din
- Side 2 The Crumpsall Kid
 Quasimodo Meets The Virgin Mary
 The Viking Helmet

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Dear Beloved Brethren
Tonight's reading is from
Barbarians 1981

And it came to pass that there were in those days certain men who had their brains taken out and were named the planners. And they did go forth and meet the high priests of stupidity in their council chambers and they did take the city and they did cock it up.

They did go into the highways and byways with their measures and their chains. They did take the length and breadth thereof and they looked at the city and they did say "Let us knock it down. Let us move the people to the wasteland and the deserts, for forty years let them wander, let them be visited with plagues. Let the first plague be water running down the walls.

Let the second plague be badly fitting doors and windows, let them be cold and damp.

Let the people have sore sicknesses. Let their children peer from windows. Let the wind howl round their dwellings and let them be infested with rats and vermin.

Let the people have no work. And let them also have no hope.

And it came to pass as the planners said for they were strong and the people were weak.

And the God of the planners was Corbusier and they did worship him. In his image and likeness did they build. Many cubitts high were their towers and great was the fear of all who dwelt in them. For he did say to the builders and the scribes take ye a man and measure him (P 67). Now take the lines thereof and make a box and it was done and it was called a module and then the Lord Corbusier said build many modules and into them put many men. And it was done as the Lord said.

And although the planners did build thereof they dwelt not in their towers. For they did dwell in Cheshire, in green pastures they did lie and of milk and honey from Sainsbury's they did eat.

And the planners did say "We shall build a temple to Mammon the God of Greed. No windows shall it have of straight lines shall it be built. And the rents within shall be so high people shall pay more for their goods. Of pots and

"The biggest toilet
in the world"



"East Germany?
no West Collyhurst."

tiles shall thou cover it yea so that it looketh like a mighty urinal.

And thou shalt have necks of solid brass so that thou shalt ignore the peoples' shouts when they cry 'My God what pillock hath designeth this - my kid brother could do better than that with his Lego.' And lo it came to pass as they said and their necks were of solid brass and they did build it. And the people did cry. "Lord we need houses and homes" and lo the planners did build offices. And they did stand empty.

"Lord" cried the people, "we need homes" and lo, the planners did build more offices. And they did stand empty.

And a third time the people cried out and a third time the planners did ignore them and did build offices and they did stand empty.

And lo the people wept but they were not heard for they were as voices crying in the Wilderness.

And lo the cities were as dead places and the wind did howl through them and at night they were empty and without hope.

The planner is my shepherd. He maketh me to walk; through dark tunnels and underpasses he forceth me to go. He maketh concrete canyons tower above me. By the rivers of traffic he maketh me walk. He knocketh down all that is good, he maketh straight the curves. He maketh of the city a wasteland and a carpark.

He giveth over the city to the motor car. He annointeth my head with their stink and their noise assaulteth my ears. Yea, the planner is my shepherd, he maketh me to live in concrete hovels, in the abomination of desolation he maketh me to go. He maketh me to lie down in concrete pastures.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of mismanagement and the depths of stupidity I shall fear no evil save more of the same. By the ribbon development where I lay down, how I shall weep when I remember Ancoats, Hulme, Darn Hill, Hattersley, Netherley, Huyton, Skelmersdale, Easterhouse, Hyde Park, Peterlee, Milton Keynes, etc., etc.

As a point of interest - after the broadcast not one single planner wrote in to defend their actions. The only letters came from people who were furious about me doing it dressed as a priest.

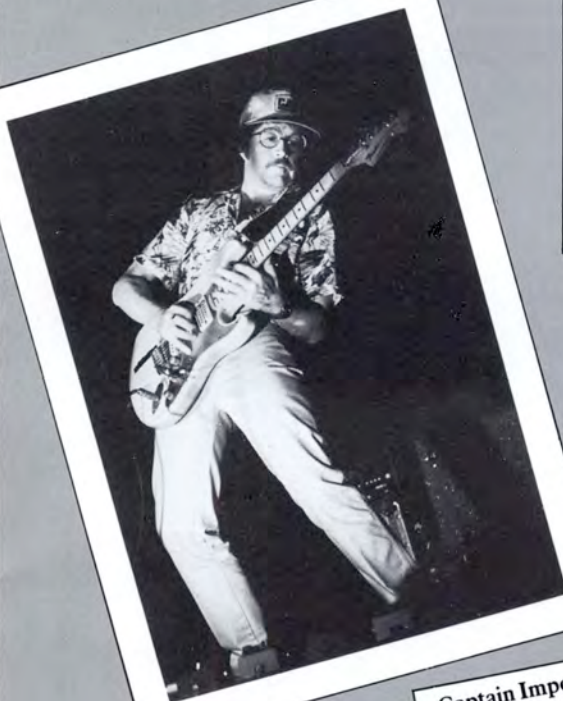




Our glorious leader, spot the monkey.



Roadie happy in his work.



Captain Impossible cutting his nails.

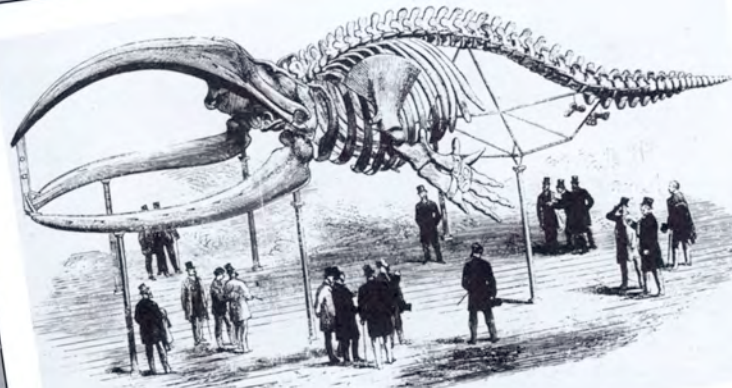


The picture my Mam likes best.



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Roger Morgan	(Illustrations on centre page and P15)
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Andrew Allan	(Back cover)
Mike Harding	(P8 and 11)

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Sam & Me in the Ronnie Corbett
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