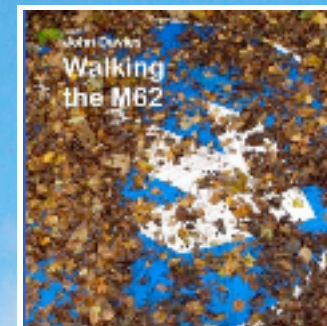


2007 was quite a year of travelling for me, always to exotic places like Dolwyddelan, Snowdonia, pictured here in February, and later in the year on a trip to Iona which brought together our Liverpool folks with Jonathan, Renata, Babette and others from Holloway. In April I had a reading week at Fellfield overlooking Hawkshead at the heart of the Lake District and in July I stood on a grass verge in Kent watching the Tour de France flash by. I did a lot of walking, much of it urban and experimental, like an experiential walk around Liverpool's Chinatown which I led one Sunday evening, a 'Heart of Cheltenham pilgrimage' which I led from Greenbelt (at the racecourse) on August Bank Holiday Monday, days of discovery with Jim in places like Birkenhead (wonderful park, amazing architecture, and the opportunity, if no-one's looking, to investigate the disused old Mersey Tunnel entrance) and the outskirts of Nottingham (with Phil retracing the journey of Charles Hurst who walked England 100 years ago planting acorns). To cap it all I spent part of my sabbatical, September and October, on a coast-to-coast journey across the north of England, Hull back home, which I called *Walking the M62*.

2007 was also the year when I did a lot of work on the theme of 'heaven in ordinary', the idea of the possibility of encountering hints of the divine in the middle of mundane life. I spoke about it on Iona, at Greenbelt and in Leeds in March, co-wrote about it in *Coracle* (describing a good walk with friends here in West Derby on a hot Easter Saturday) and it was that idea which was behind the M62 walk. Following the Transpennine motorway route home on foot might sound a crazy idea but behind it was the serious intention to use the walk as a way of seeing, listening and learning about some of the minutiae of life in the north of England today. And sure enough en-route I met many fascinating people who walked me around their particular area and talked about it as they went, including a farmer at the motorway's Pennine high point, the chaplain to Warrington's new Golden Square shopping centre, and a writer retracing the footsteps of the mythical 'Halifax Slasher'. I spent the last few weeks of my sabbatical reworking my walk diary, adding some reflections to produce a 135-page book: all very fulfilling and enjoyable.

I managed to do all this because the people I work with, and friends and family, have been very supportive and tolerant of my whimsicality, so thanks! 2007 brought sadness - especially losing Lynne, a good friend whose funeral and thanksgiving services I took, but also celebration (The Savoy, no less, for Linda's 40th). *What I Heard About Iraq* was powerful theatre at the Unity in April, *Girl and Dean* were very very funny at the Canal Cafe Theatre in July, James McFadden scored the goal of the season at Goodison v Charlton after Easter and in November the folk revival roadshow *The Imagined Village* was a joy and a stimulus at Liverpool Phil. I hope to spend a lot more time at home in 2008 - not least because it's Capital of Culture year at last and it'll be good to be part of what happens here then. Hope all is well with you and yours, and the best wishes of the season!

John



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