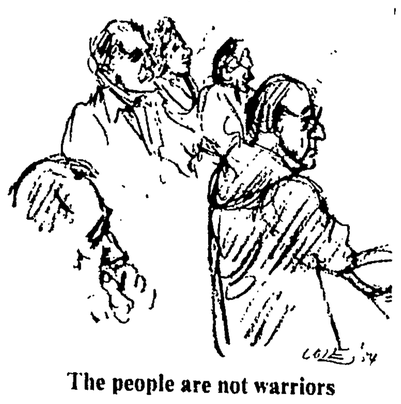
SPECTRUM

Punch-drunk fighter running out of time

The Times Profile: City of Liverpool

When you arrive in Liverpool and walk those evacuated streets, moving from one blotch of urban destitution into another, or drive from barren housing estates about to be abandoned, pathetically clustered around extinguished factories, to docks which stretch aimlessly and empty for miles, you cannot believe that this is a city with the energy to hurt Mrs Thatcher. You feel it may well haunt her, but it is unlikely to hurt her.

It is more likely to hurt itself. It is a city without resources – about to become the front line in the battle against the Government's spending cuts. In almost every way you can think of, it is defenceless. Liverpool today has no industrial base, nor has it raw materials; it has little skilled labour – the craftsmen have moved out; its docks have been undermined by the container trade. Partly because it is on the wrong side of England, neither bribes, nor cajoling, nor Indian trading by successive governments could persuade national or international companies to save it from their rationalization plans. Unlike



The people are not warriors

Manchester, which has outwitted it on almost every level – the skilled builders on Liverpool's housing projects often come from Manchester – it never managed to set up a nucleus of small businesses to feed off the larger ones, or partly to replace them when recession came.

Its posture, fatally, has been too often that of being in service, as well-heeled retainer or casual and dependent helper. It was in service to the slave trade; assisted the passage of peasant and gent to the New World, facilitated the expansion of the Lancashire cotton trade. Then it stood by to service the car industry; biscuits, Meccano toys, all under pressure from modern industrial strategies and all have slid or are sliding from its grasp. Nothing would cling permanently, not even Tate and Lyle golden syrup.

Once a great mercantile city, Liverpool appears to have lost its entrepreneurial skills. So oppressive is the sense of terminal decay that you cannot believe that the great, handsome buildings of the old days, like the Royal Liver building adjoining desolation, are part of the legacy of the people of Liverpool today. They are more like luggage left temporarily behind by opulent giants of another race and no doubt bound to be collected and taken away.

Liverpudlians may have been fatally undermined by generations of casual employment. Fathers and grandfathers were well accustomed to a three or four day week, so psychologically their sons were more able than a southerner to cope with even more shrinkage. They are not rancorous, not restless people; they might be rowdy in pubs at closing time, but perhaps to their own disadvantage they are not really warriors.

Alan Bleasdale, author of *Boys from the Blackstuff*, described the Liverpool character: "When you come into a room there is that initial aggression to get your opinion across. You have to be aggressive to make yourself heard, everyone talks so much. There is a definite strut until you make your point: then you say, well, that's OK then, I've been noticed. You give up, let the argument all dribble away, and spend the rest of the night having a drink and enjoying yourself." For this there are plenty of handsome pubs; and triple-decker drinking clubs open until 2 am. Disco for kids, cabaret with Scouse comedians, or in some places dancing for the elderly – "grab a granny joints".

Like many people who live from day to day, Liverpudlians have the knack of easy human contact, but little taste for the disciplines and rigours which forge the impersonal skills which achieve material comfort.

Indeed, what is eerie about this city in its death throes is the absence – in its streets and its people – of a sense of threat; the absence even of a tangible sense of tension. You would detect more menace in the glance of a New York subway cop than you would in the faces of these candid and amiable people if you strolled through Liverpool for an entire night. Alcoholic squabbing seems to be an entirely private affair.

Such social serenity is bizarre. It can only be the result of lethargy or a kind of incurable innocence which cannot tell the difference between profound urban decay and seasonal crisis. While the official unemployment figure for "travel to work in the Liverpool area" is around 22 per cent, in 1981 the Merseyside Census Digest, breaking down the figures by electoral ward, gave a clearer picture of the reality. For areas like Abercromby, Everton, Vauxhall, the figure, three years ago, was between 47 per cent and 51 per cent. There have been closures since, and there are closures to come. In contrast, the figure for the professional, middle-class area of Grassendale was 14.3 per cent.

Another of Liverpool's problems is that unlike the great days of Boss politicians – Seaton, Braddock (who were indeed a mixed blessing) – Liverpool has now no outstanding political personalities capable of keeping the city's needs in the limelight. When there are marches against factory closures, they appear to be led by the Cloth, represented by Archbishop Derek Worlock and Bishop David Sheppard. Although these men are known to be committed and genuine in their concern, there is a

Derek Hatton in full cry: "Liverpool will be a more powerful force than Margaret Thatcher and all her Government"

suggestion of reliance on old paternalistic institutions.

The present crisis might have thrown up a whirling dervish in the person of deputy council leader, Derek Hatton. Although he has easily eclipsed his leader, John Hamilton, on closer observation he does not display many of the attributes of a canny politician. He appears to have little patience for long-term, coherent strategies. He told me that when he was an amateur boxer going into the first round, he never saw the necessity for having a strategy for round two.

A trim man with a driving restless manner, he spoke of certain victory in a hoarse voice. ("My voice is destroyed with shouting at Jenkin", he said. But he didn't threaten, he claimed.) He declared: "When Liverpool as a city starts to move, quite honestly it will be a more powerful force than Margaret Thatcher and all her Government."

In a phantom city of essentially gentle people, this seemed a highly unlikely development. Hatton has almost certainly misread the willingness of the working class of Liverpool to take to the streets on a byzantine manoeuvre involving long-term high finance. A warning that submission to the Tory Government could mean a 70 per cent increase in rates has little meaning for them, since few of them pay rates; many have to be assisted to pay rent.

Derek Hatton is untypical of Liverpudlians in his taste for the theoretical, the obstinate rigidity of his thinking and the harshness of some of his attitudes. Liverpudlians, whose first principle is to be loyal to mates, did not at all appreciate his warning that those who did not support the strategy would become "lepers".

In addition, contrary to popular belief trade union solidarity is not that tight. Having no work place means little exposure to indoctrination.

There is also almost total incomprehension on every level – among university and polytechnic students I spoke to, professional people, men in pubs – as to just what bankruptcy would mean. Those who were willing to wrestle with its complexities (the majority treated it as none of their affair) were sceptical that politicians, Conservative or Labour, who have been unable to stop Liverpool rotting for decades would be galvanized into remedial action by a *technical* bankruptcy which opens a Pandora's box of untested possibilities.

Who would run the city? Commissioners – accountants, in other words. Would they have the necessary expertise or win essential cooperation? It was one thing for a commissioner to take over a single department, like housing in Clay Cross, administering relatively simple plans already worked out. But no commissioner has ever run a city. Would Barclay's continue to provide massive short-term loans? Would banks throughout the country

Union solidarity is not that tight

begin to back off from assisting other left-wing councils? Is this left-wing council about to provoke the financial destruction of left-wing councils?

But there is another Pandora's box which must inevitably flip its lid. The huge and still growing concentration of unemployed, disaffected youth who see no future for themselves. Some believe that the danger is not so much a growth of radical politics. It has been said that the demands revolutionary movements make of their members – simply reading or discussing political theory – is probably too high for Liverpool's "passively alienated" youth. Nor would many of them be inclined to devote time to political organization. The street violence of extremism might be more appealing. What can be expected from them is persistent and pointless destruction.

A survey of the Vauxhall area, an area of multiple deprivation, revealed that, unlike the children of the "established" working class who are encouraged by their parents to see career prospects in education and to believe that school has some relevance, the Vauxhall children had no such illusions. These children recognize that school was marginal to their lives.

One consequence is that juvenile crime is high. A quarter of all prosecutions by the Merseyside police involved children under 16, and another quarter youths between 16 and 21. But this does not correspond fully to the reality, since a great number of offenders are never caught. Vandalism in Liverpool is not just a question of smashing windows. It has been described as "the systematic destruction of housing and social facilities" by youngsters who do not see it as a crime, but simply a way of passing the time.

On another level, the city is pinning its hopes on items such as Liverpool being named a free port, on the construction of a maritime museum, but above all on the International Garden Festival, which will run from May to October. The supposition here is that if you plant exotic flowers in superabundance in the graveyard docks, horticulturalists lusting after blossoms will converge on the city from all over the world and be so irresistibly taken by the wan charm of disabled Merseyside that they will create a permanent tourist boom.

The locals are not impressed by such herbaceous remedies. A citizen gave me his reaction: "One of those horticulturalists was here the other night; I'll never forget what he said for the rest of my life; he said: 'For me, the daisy is the Action Man of the flowering world.' The daisy!"

A look of consternation came over his face at the realization of the kind of person the city was attempting to attract. "If the festival was in my own back garden," he added "I'd draw the curtains."

Richard Kemp, the Liberal spokesman on economic development, also attempted to indicate for me where Liverpool's salvation might lie. In the Garden Festival certainly, but also in some great yearning he was convinced exists in the hearts of people out there for craft work from Liverpool. His admiration for these plucky craftsmen was too powerful for him to identify just what they might be producing, but eventually he said he did know a man who was producing three-piece suites at £1,000 a time.

Finally he had to admit that Liverpool's great contribution might

Sacrifice may be its contribution

be sacrificial; being at the front end of the devastation that the new microchip world will wreak on the old industrial cities. People could learn from Liverpool's fate. But then again they might not.

Professor Fred Ridley, head of the Department of Political Theory and Institutions at the University of Liverpool, had this to say: "The problem with Liverpool is that any kind of political analysis upsets people, it is seen as doing a disservice to the city, frightening away investors. There is a lot of emphasis on developments such as the reclamation of the docks for the Maritime Museum, the Garden Festival. This and aid to small businesses could not hope to mop up unemployment. Even if the whole economy of Britain was to revive, it would not help Liverpool. There would have to be a boom. The only way we would get a spin-off is if there

Council leader John Hamilton

was an excess productive growth somewhere else which could not be contained within London or Birmingham and had to come here. This is highly unlikely.

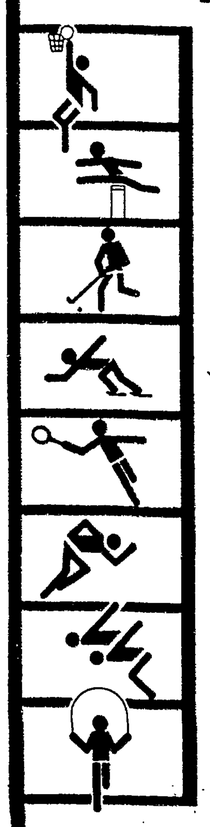
"The trouble is nobody can think of anything which it would be *natural* for Liverpool to provide. It seems to me to be extremely silly to insist on being optimistic. What the city should be doing is screaming for help."

Peter Lennon

Townsend Thoresen present

A Major New Award Scheme for young people

The Young Superstars



Townsend Thoresen are proud to announce the start of their exciting new Award Scheme for young people.

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The Young Superstars Badge Award Scheme is supported by many of Britain's top sports personalities. They recognise the tremendous benefit that such a scheme can bring to so many. Participation in a stimulating variety of physical activities and achievement of a hard won personal best. They also see the Young Superstars as a springboard for the national stars of the future.

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moreover . . . **Miles Kington**

Ireland, behind closed doors

Last Sunday morning I was standing at the end of the Giant's Causeway, on the topmost tip of Northern Ireland, watching the waves foam and crash over the blackened rocks, which was curious because the sea itself was dead calm. There was a little old man bent over the rocks, putting something into a white carrier bag, like a character in a nineteenth century print.

"Seaweed," he said, in response to my curiosity. "Brown seaweed, very good for cooking. It only grows two months of the year, in winter, so you have to know where and when to look for it."

He told me how to cook it. He told me how to recognize it. He told me that he had been born actually on the Causeway, in a house that was no longer there, and about the other six houses that were no longer there because they had been swept away, not by a storm, but by the National Trust, which had replaced them in safety on top of the cliff, and he would still be talking to this day if we hadn't had to move on to lunch near Ballycastle.

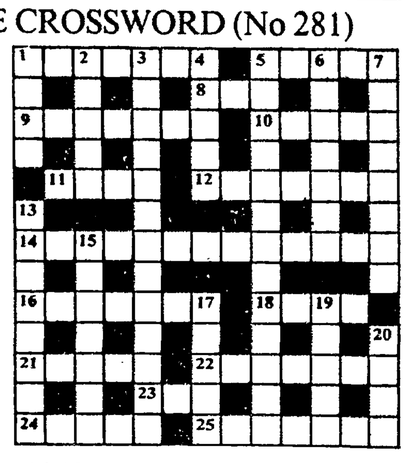
The people we were having lunch with were a pair we had met and taken to at a Belfast party last November. And a terrific lunch it was too, though the roast lamb seemed gamier than usual. "That's because it's not lamb", said Patrick. "It's young goat, only we don't tell people that until after they've had a first helping, just in case they're prejudiced."

Well, everyone's prejudiced about Northern Ireland, and one of the things you have to put up with if you live there is English people coming over and expecting the place to be like Beirut. It's nothing of the sort. Perhaps I'm just lucky, but when I think back to Northern Ireland, it's things like the old man on the Causeway, or roast goat at Ballycastle, that float into the mind. When we arrived at the Harbour Bar, five o'clock on Saturday, it was jam-packed, but by 6.30 it was nearly empty. "It's the pattern," said the barman. "It fills up during the afternoon, then ebbs away. They'll all be back in an hour or so, ready for the evening. The place is open from 11.30 in the morning till 11 at night, when the doors close. All that closing and opening you get in England – it's an awful waste of time."

That's the kind of fey logic which is at the heart of real Irish jokes, not the crude ersatz Irish jokes we've been fed in recent years. The Harbour Bar itself is nothing much to look at – it's the cosy ambiance which makes the place, the roar of talking and crackling laughter from the little rooms down the passage.

Northern Ireland is maybe like the Harbour Bar on a big scale – not very much to look at, but well worth getting inside. It's different there. For instance, did you notice that the barman said " . . . till eleven at night, when the doors close"? In England he would have said: " . . . till eleven at night, when everybody goes home". I think I'll pour myself another pint of stout and tell you more about the place on Monday.

CONCISE CROSSWORD (No 281)



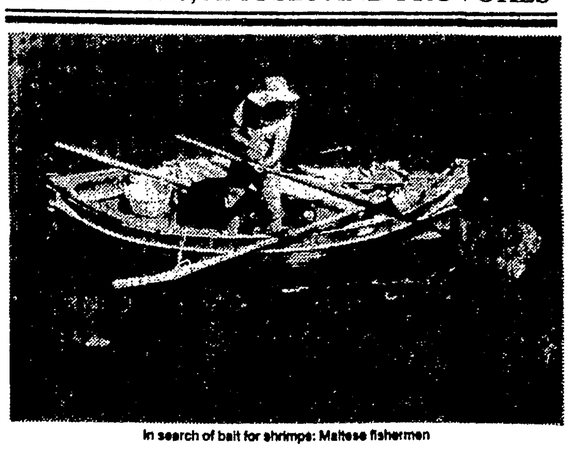
ACROSS
1 Round of applause (7)
5 Zest (5)
8 Whatever (3)
9 Climber's cutters (3,4)
10 Approaches (5)
11 Valley (4)
12 Particular (7)
14 Body twister (13)
16 Removes camouflage (7)
18 Sworn promise (4)
21 Gangway (5)
22 Copy (7)
23 Drink delicately (3)
24 Facilitates (5)
25 Farthest degree (7)

DOWN
1 Affectedly proper (4)
2 Scene of interest (5)
3 Manual skill (13)
4 Duties (5)
5 Women's doctor (13)
6 E African language (7)
7 Out of use (8)
13 Meticulous (8)
15 Goddess of vengeance (7)
17 Hit hard (5)
19 Vestige (5)
20 In this place (4)

SOLUTION TO No 280
ACROSS: 1 Remark 5 Advice 8 End 9 Summit 10 Letter 11 Stud 12 Hibernia 14 Apple pie order 17 Arboreta 19 Each 21 Pester 23 I Ching 24 Too 25 Stench 26 Newton
DOWN: 2 Erupt 3 Armadillo 4 Ketchup 5 Ad lib 6 Vet 7 Crevice 13 Raree show 15 Pervert 16 Evasion 18 Earth 20 Canto 22 Ton

Tomorrow

START THE WEEKEND WITH THE PAPER THAT INFORMS, STIMULATES, AMUSES AND PROVOKES



In search of bait for shrimps: Maltese fishermen

- **Travel:** Islands in the Med – Sardinia, Corsica and Malta and the fare deals
- **The low rollers:** State of play in the betting shops and bingo halls
- **Sir Anthony Parsons:** Reflections on the Iranian revolution
- **Rugby preview:** Can Scotland capture the Triple Crown?

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