

Wanted: Dead or Alive?

We toured the streets of Soho to ask 100 members of the public whether the 12 renowned figures listed below are still numbering among the living.

Name	Living?	or Dead?
Dick Van Dyke (Actor)	71	29
Dale Winton (tv Presenter)	88	12
Pelé (Sports Star)	61	39
Ronnie Wood (Musician)	93	7
Angela Lansbury (Actor)	40	60
Roy Hattersley (Politician)	22	78
Glenda Jackson (Actor)	31	69
DMX (Musician)	52	48
Charlie Sheen (Actor)	76	24
Virginia Wade (Sports Star)	37	63
Tim Curry (Actor)	42	58
Princess Margaret (Royal)	84	16

Around About the Trent

Josh McLoughlin issues a call to arms

Last autumn I moved to Nottingham, illuminating my personal terra incognita. I'd lived up north, down south, even out in East Anglia. But the Midlands were the missing link, the dark shadow across my mind's map of England.

Six months on, I've had the chance to reflect on our blessed plot: once proud, now an embarrassment to Europe. To restore some harmony and dignity to this breeding ground of horrendous vibes, I've decided that the north and the Midlands should unite to crush the south, once and for all.

You see, I've come to realise that the north and the Midlands are the same, beneath it all. There's far more that unites than divides us: a shared history of struggle, a common culture and disposition, deep-rooted sensibilities of politics, place and society, and the superfluity of wearing a coat on a night out – something our feeble neighbours down there wouldn't understand. Together the north and the Midlands make up two-thirds of this country – and it's time we had our say.

First of all, though, we need to look in the mirror: the Midlands is lacking a bit of confidence. The 'professional northerner' might be an instantly recognisable type, but Midlanders are still soul-searching. Bang in the middle but out in the cold, the heart of England has been pushed to the margins and routinely overlooked in the political squabbling between north and south. And I think I know why.

The discord begins at home: every few years, a new map emerges purporting to show the exact fault line of the north-south divide, invariably eliding the existence of the Midlands altogether, stoking division by fracturing the integrity and identity of the region.

The perpetuation of a strictly binary understanding of English geography, history and politics serves to disenfranchise the Midlands by stripping the region of

any unique identity. Ignored, shouted over and stuck in the middle of this interminable bickering, the Midlands are England's wallflower, the middle child quietly traumatised by a messy divorce.

But this country's great divide can't be accounted for in econometrics and demography. It's not something you can measure, but a gut feeling, a sympathetic, mutual understanding of graft and wit and soul; a division of culture and values as much as capital and class. Above all, it's about whether you call the evening meal 'tea' or 'dinner' and believe devoutly in the veneration of gravy. The annals of English history record no decent roast ever served on a southern table. And that's why the north and the Midlands are natural allies.

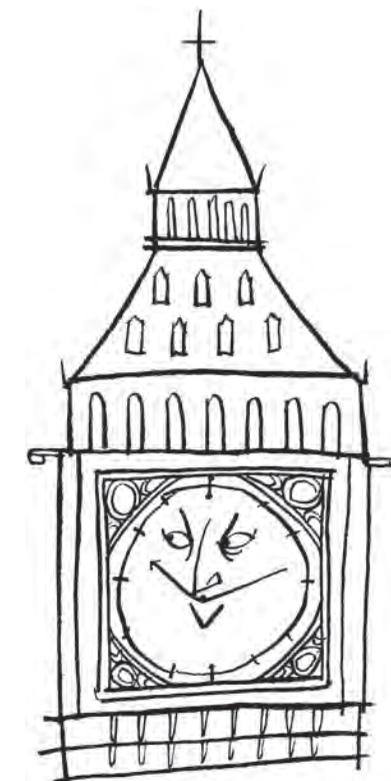


The north could help put some long-overdue respect on the Midlands' name. After all, the north is England's regional brand management expert, convincing scousers and Mancunians, Geordies and Mackems, and the warring roses of Yorkshire and Lancashire to buy into a common identity: The North. The south is entirely bereft of spirit, shared or otherwise. It is simply a loose fudge of greed, arrogance and individualism so enervated by selfishness that it can barely muster regional variation let alone diversity or local pride. There is precisely no discernible difference between Sussex or

Surrey or Hampshire or Kent. While Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Berkshire and Hertfordshire are identically boring, staging posts on a drab and hellish continuum of middle-class ennui. Up north, there is unity in diversity: healthy rivalries ground fierce passions of place but a greater solidarity prevails to bind us together.

The Midlands could be a part of that. A federal union on equal terms with the north would restore pride in the Midlands. Together we can cultivate a powerful regional consciousness that celebrates diversity while maintaining purpose in the face of our common enemy. We'll forgive the scabs in Notts who broke the strike of 1984-85 and we can even quietly forget that Grantham nurtured the Witch herself.

After all, if Thatcher taught us anything, it's the importance of solidarity. London is a monster, a distended beast that dwarfs other regions. Westminster is a venal nest of nepotism: a shelter for paedophiles, carpetbaggers and blood money. But together the north and the Midlands can humble the capital. The south has no other cities – proper cities, I mean – to boast of. Down there, they might have London but together the north and the midlands boast the might of Birmingham, Manchester, Leeds, Sheffield, Newcastle, Liverpool and Nottingham – I could go on – all proudly independent yet alike in humour, verve and fighting spirit.



What reply to the urban effervescence of a united north and Midlands? Brighton is but a puny, sandy appendage of London. Bristol's population of stoned trustafarians won't put up much resistance. Southampton and Portsmouth are no match for our mighty ports astride the Mersey and the Tyne. Outside London, what does the south actually have? Norwich? Cute but powerless. Oxford and Cambridge, filthy epicentres of toxic privilege and the wetnurses of southern tyranny, will fall with ease. York Minster would batter Canterbury Cathedral any day of the week. And a stiff gust would see off Bournemouth.

The north and the Midlands possess immense political power that, if united, could easily overawe the south. The trouble is the rest of the country dances to Westminster's tune. It was England's three northern regions, along with the West Midlands, that tipped the balance of power for the Leave campaign. Imagine what the north and the Midlands could achieve if we worked together *against* the south.



Change is in our DNA: a common urge for activism, progressive social movements and radical thinking. Birmingham and the Black Country, Derbyshire, Lancashire and Yorkshire birthed the industrial revolution. Manchester incubated the Communism of Marx and Engels, as well as the suffragette movement led by the Pankhurst sisters. William Booth, founder of the Salvation Army, was born in Nottingham. The abolitionist William Wilberforce was born in Hull; Isaac Newton in humble Grantham. The southerner, blood-stained inventor of Empire, is naturally at ease with inequality and suffering. But the north and the Midlands – whether it's the rocky terrain and steely weather or the history of hard work together in jobs that mattered – breeds innovation, resilience and a natural aversion to ignorance and injustice.

And we've both got previous in beating our southern overlords where it matters most: football.

The south can boast all of two Champions League medals, bought in 2012 and 2021 by the execrable Putin-backed sportswashing disgrace and England's leading producer of racist hooligans, Chelsea 'football club'. Together – and without the financial doping of stolen petrobillions – the greatest teams of the north and Midlands have conquered Europe 12 times.

When I moved down to the capital seven years ago, I was very nearly seduced by southern fundamentalism. I began to affect the smug sociopathy of the adopted Londoner: the mindless exceptionalism, the nasty, ignorant scorn of the 'provinces' and, above all, an indifference to the deprivations imposed on England at large to satisfy the greed of London and the south. But I escaped from behind enemy lines and made a happy discovery of the Midlands. There, I saw the best of the north reflected everywhere: the kindness and the courage, the swagger and the solidarity, the wit and the grit. The time for estrangement is over: all that's left for the north and the Midlands is to unite.

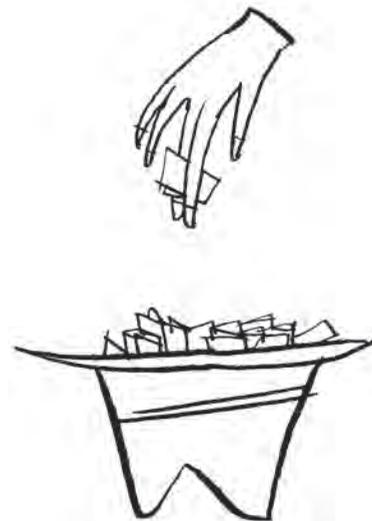
We're going to need a name for our republic, of course (it goes without saying those lizards at Buckingham Palace will be the first thing to go). It should represent the new alliance of the north and the Midlands as friends and equals, co-partners in casting off the Westminster yoke and re-conquering Albion – and it should strike fear into the southern hearts. How about a portmanteau of our respective Anglo-Saxon kingdoms: Northumbria and Mercia, combining to create 'No Mercy'? That will double up as a handy war-cry when we storm the Palace of Westminster!



Money Man or Quiet Man?

You will agree with William Clarke that many novelists struggle with character names. Did these valiant efforts come from the works of celebrated author Martin Amis, or from former Conservative leader Iain Duncan Smith's forgotten 2003 thriller The Devil's Tune?

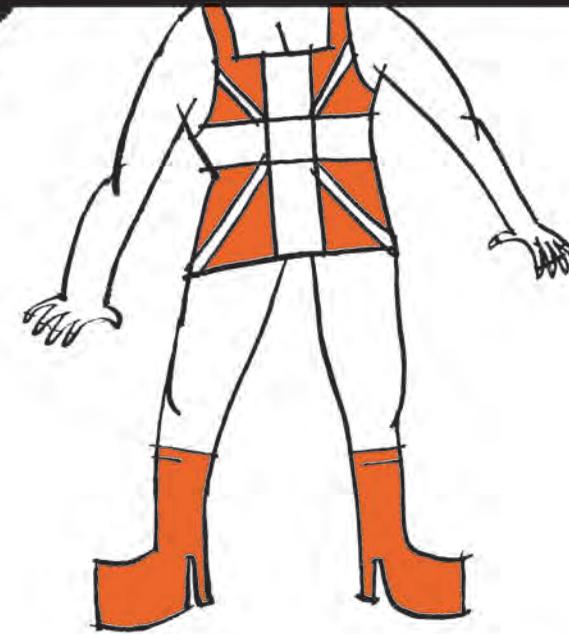
- 1 Fielding Goodney
- 2 Spunk Davis
- 3 Jason F. Peach
- 4 Hannah Doll
- 5 Desmond Pepperdine
- 6 Frank Parry
- 7 Charles Highway
- 8 Tod T. Friendly
- 9 Ewan Kelp
- 10 Selina Street
- 11 John Grande
- 12 Evan Marriot
- 13 Guy Clinch
- 14 Benjamin Clay
- 15 Violet Nearing
- 16 Victor R. Acquilan
- 17 Clint Smoker
- 18 Nicola Six
- 19 Terry Service
- 20 Dick Mason



Amis: 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 15, 17, 18, 19
Duncan Smith: 3, 6, 9, 11, 12, 14, 16, 20

Illustrations by Tristran Howell-Crocker

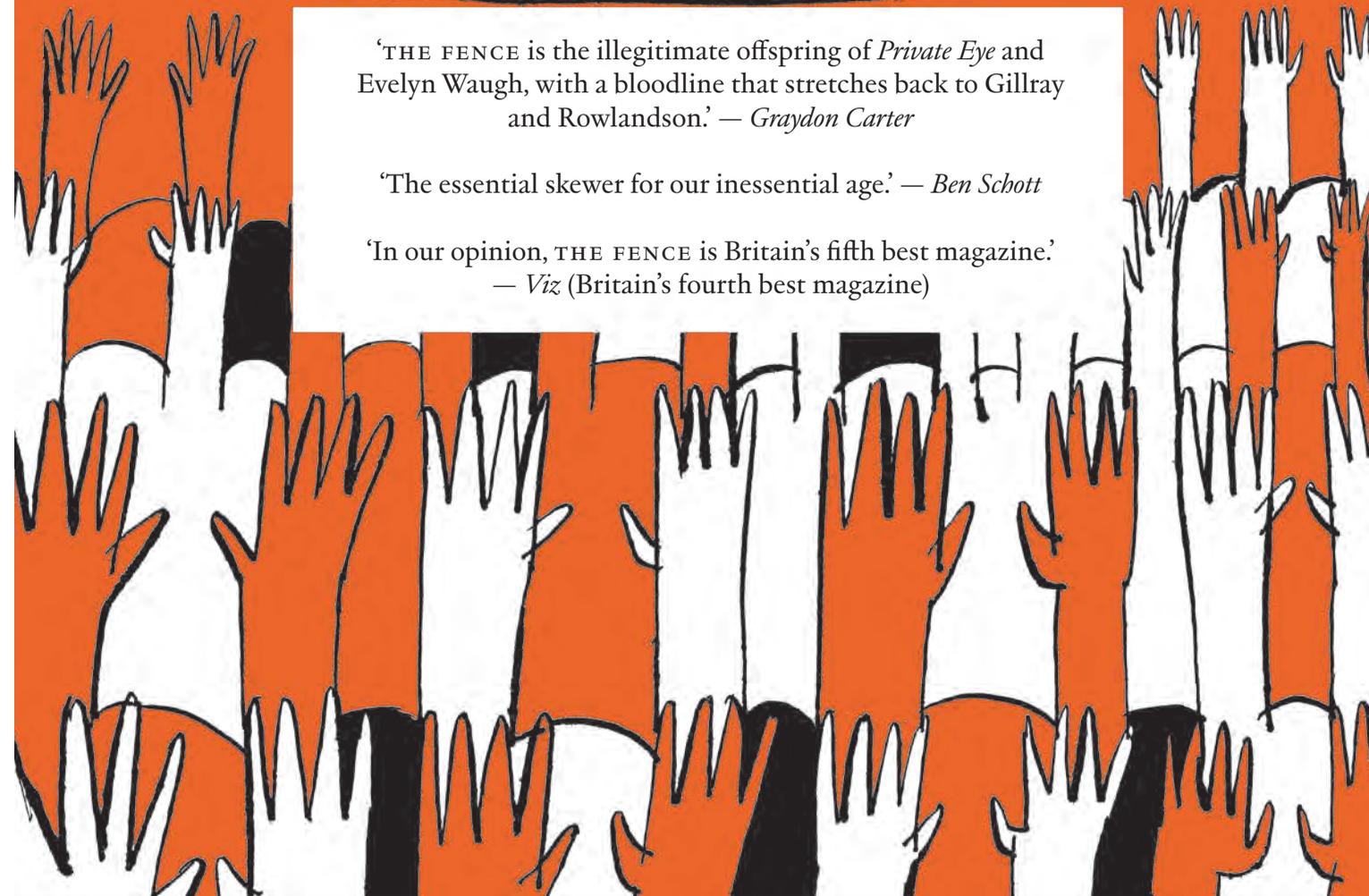
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