

🎩 The Convertible Bus 13 – ooh, scary! 🎩



🎩 “I can smell chocolate.” 🎩

Despite the rumours, I am not, and have never been, a goth. I may have worn predominantly black since 1990, and even have seen The Sisters of Mercy when Wayne Hussey was still with them, but that’s as far as it goes (well, I might concede an interest in some of the clothes bought from the Oasis market in Birmingham back when Novacon was in the centre of the city, enough at least to have gone on a couple of the traditional shopping expeditions). Until last year I’d never even heard of Whitby Gothic Weekend; I first discovered it through the LiveJournals¹ of people I knew who did have connections to the gothic scene. At this point I would never in a million years have thought that I’d attend it.

That was before I started going out with Kate. Kate describes herself as a ‘part-time’ goth. Since we got together she’s taken me to a number of goth clubs, in most of which I have had a good time, and met people I like. So when Kate asked if I wanted to go to the April WGW, I said yes (I didn’t realize at the time that this was the first she’d been to as well).

So, one dull, rainy day in April, Kate, myself, and Kate’s best friend Fiona, a Whitby veteran, piled into Kate’s trusty Toyota and headed north to a place that’s a real pig to get to unless you have a car. (Once well-supplied with rail connections in four main directions, Beeching would have cut Whitby off altogether – in the end a rail link down the Esk Valley to Middlesbrough was kept, but the line along the coast to Scarborough, which would now be a godsend

to goths and tourists, discarded, presumably on the logic that people could drive down to Scarborough and get the train there; as ever, they drove and kept on driving.) Along the way we listened to Philip Pullman expressing his militant atheism on *Desert Island Discs* (I think he’s probably right, but dogmatic atheism is as unpalatable to me as any other religious dogmatism); Beethoven’s *Fifth*, one of his selections, began just as the Duxford Imperial War Museum appeared over the horizon. We stopped off at a Little Chef where the waitresses were called ‘Team Members’, but where they did serve a fine veggie breakfast.

We approached Whitby across the North Yorkshire Moors National Park. The first sight of the town, with the ruined Abbey, and behind it the sea, was really quite impressive.



🎩 “I only started packing yesterday afternoon.” “By alphabetizing your t-shirts.” 🎩

Whitby has two distinct sections. The old town, with narrow winding streets, grew up originally on the west of the harbour, opposite the Abbey. At some point after the dissolution of the monasteries, the town encroached on the east side of the harbour, climbing up the cliffs towards the Abbey, and eventually shifting the communal centre of gravity across. Here the streets are even narrower, and often wholly unsuitable for vehicular traffic (drivers in Whitby must learn to be very polite). The harbour is now crossed by the swing bridge, the operations of which regularly interrupt traffic in the town.

Two factors combined to bring the civic heart of Whitby back across to the west. First, there was the arrival of the railway, which of necessity arrived west of the harbour (when the line from Scarborough arrived, even though it came from the south-east, it had to find its terminus in the West Cliffe area). Then there was the construction of the West Cliffe Estate, the second distinct area of the town. This is an area of broad boulevards leading to the sea, a typical Victorian resort town.



🎩 “Stormtroopers of the lifestyle of tomorrow.” 🎩

Goth is, frankly, not what it was. And I can’t say this is a bad thing.

When I first became aware of goths, hovering suspiciously around the street corners of Manchester, the thin and emaciated look was in. That’s all very well when youth and student grants are on your side, but by the time you are my age life is a constant battle to fight off the pounds. You can’t really be a pencil-thin 35-year old goth. Well, not without dying pretty fast. Well, okay, that’s bollocks, and there are some, but it’s a lot harder to achieve at 35 than at 17.

Furthermore, goth as I recall it was (and I concede I may be talking out of arse here) very much about looking different, beyond being about anything else. It wasn’t about looking sexy (there might have been an element of blokes looking pretty, but if so that was probably more about defying convention than anything else). Picking up on the punk message of ‘sex is boring’, the goth look was

¹ Yes, he’s going on about LiveJournal again.

at the very least asexual, if not anti-sex.

21st-century goth is a different look, one that's not just about looking different, but also about looking *good*. I think this is because it has absorbed much of the aesthetic of New Romantic and (especially) glam rock – some goths have tastes in music that are positively Stiltonesque!²



☘ “Can you rearrange your balls so I can see the expression on your face?” ☘

Thursday night we were down the Elsinore, along with every other goth in Whitby. That's a lot of goths. A whole lot of goths. Still, it took a while before it became unbearable, and along the way Kate told me off for being rude to my old Edinburgh compadre Graham, who was very pissed, and marvelled at the concept of a pint for £1.86.

Friday and Saturday nights were the band nights. I hadn't gone for the bands, and I have to admit none of them left a great impression. What I chiefly recall is that too many of them used a drum machine, and were plainly in need of the extra shot of energy that a real drummer brings (okay, so I'm biased ...). I disagreed with Kate on the merits of Ghost of Lemora.

Sunday was the '80s disco at Laughton's, which made me feel somewhat on the elderly side (“yes, this Blondie record is an '80s hit, I remember when it was released”). I held onto people's drinks and saved my one dance for The Clash.



☘ “Oh you did your hair! And your eyes! Were you drunk?” ☘

In amongst all of this, Kate and I de-gothed and went to Robin Hood's Bay, only to flee when full-time goths arrived; I read Claire Brialey's Aussie trip report in *No Sin But Ignorance*;³ I had strange dreams concerning trailers for the new *Thunderbirds* movie, and Phil Archer outing Kenton because of a dildo; Fiona was disgustingly bright and breezy on Friday morning (I ran away); I thought of something to write in my notes, but promptly forgot it, but added the words 'Mike Abbott' for reasons that are now entirely beyond me; we laughed at (and took photos of) the seagulls perched on top of Captain Cook's head. And we visited Whitby Abbey.

Whitby Abbey is a very romantic location, with its isolated ruins on top of a windswept hill. It's pretty impressive now, and enough survives for you to be able to reconstruct the rest in your mind's eye. From the cottage we were staying in, you could see it across the bay, and it becomes obvious when viewed from this perspective how much the complete building must have dominated the town below. It would have left no question about the relationship between God and man.

² Still, if this means I get to spend my Fridays watching gorgeous women in fantastic outfits go by all night, I for one am not complaining.

³ This is presented in the order in which she remembers the trip, but numbered so that it can be read in chronological order. I found that this was the only way to be able to make sense of it and keep up with what was going on. Plus I was trying to catch her out and find a number she'd missed. I didn't, of course, though for a long time I thought I had got her with 37.



☘ “Chips!” ☘

Like many seaside towns, especially one with a strong fishing tradition, Whitby makes a great thing about its fish and chips. As a vegetarian, I obviously can't eat the fish, but I like chips, and was looking forward to experiencing as much chips as possible. I wasn't disappointed. The first place we ate, Garragher's, had lovely well-done brown chips, crisp, and tremendously tasty. After that I was insatiable, and demanded 'chips' at every turn. To the point that Kate was getting really quite fed up with me demanding chips at every turn. But the chips were always very nice. I had a variety of different ways of preparation, and put on more weight than I should have.

Next year, pizza.



See?? *Not* a goth.



The Convertible Bus, No. 13. Send your Wayne Hussey toilet roll covers to **Tony Keen, 48 Priory Street, Tonbridge, Kent, TN9 2AN**. “Obviously not quite as obscure as we in Croydon thought.” Thanks to Fiona Pollard for the picture above. ✉ keentony@hotmail.com. Website: <http://www.geocities.com/keentonyuk>; LiveJournal: <http://www.livejournal.com/~swisstone>. July/August 2003.