

www.lancmag.com

April 2016

Lancashire

& North West magazine

Blackpool • Burnley • Todmorden



120 years of fun at Blackpool Pleasure Beach

Lancaster may be small but has big news

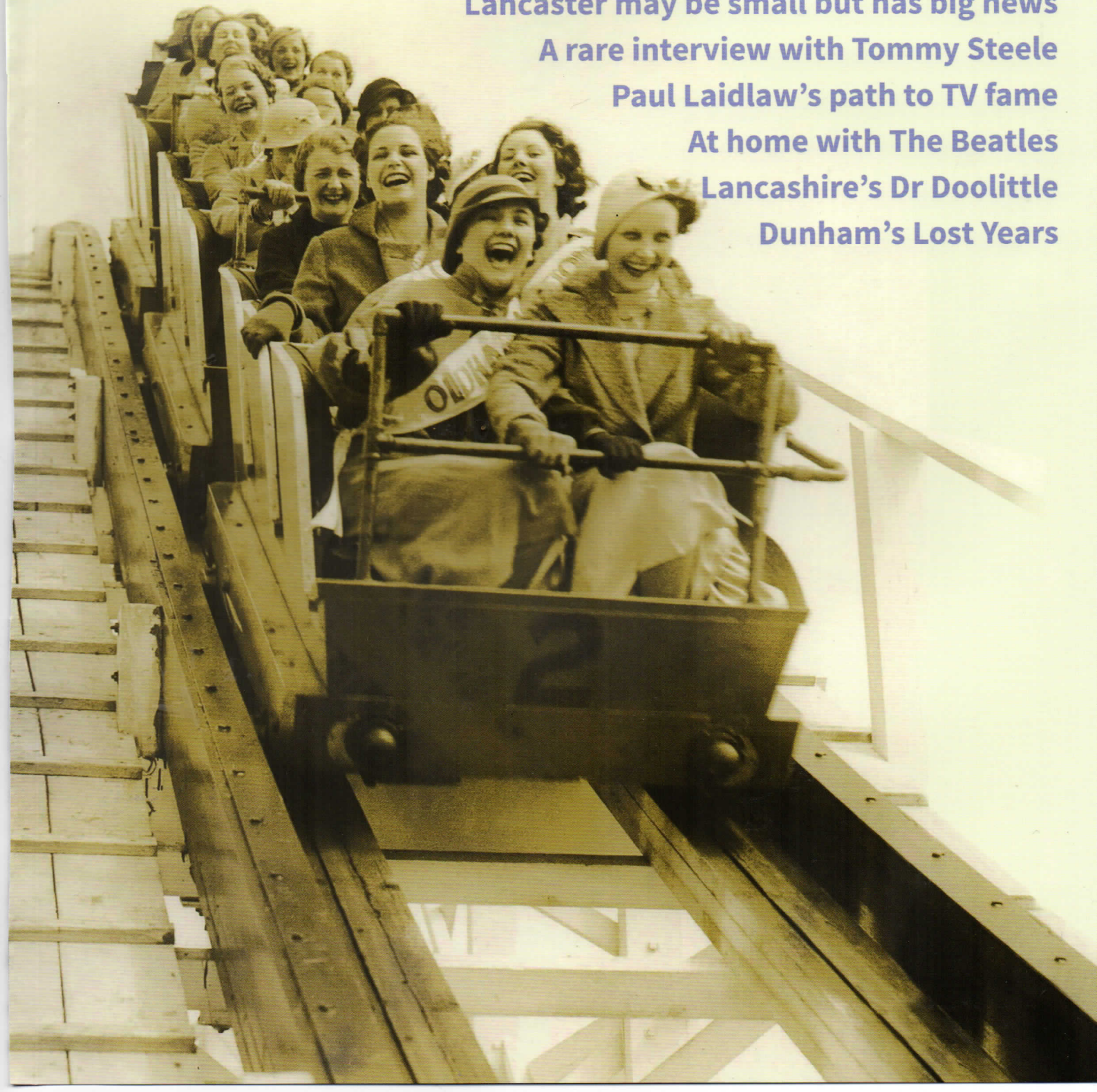
A rare interview with Tommy Steele

Paul Laidlaw's path to TV fame

At home with The Beatles

Lancashire's Dr Doolittle

Dunham's Lost Years



Brockholes Nature Reserve



Brockholes from the air by David Gaskell

A North West Success Story



Andrew Harris celebrates a 5th birthday

Question: What is the size of 120 football pitches, located next to the M6, potentially the north west's biggest single tourist attraction outside of Blackpool and about to have its 5th birthday yet could be better known? Answer: Brockholes Nature Reserve at Junction 31 of the M6 near Preston.

Brockholes Nature Reserve is thought to be unique as it combines more than 250 acres of lakes, wildlife habitats and play areas with a cluster of spectacular floating buildings accommodating an Activity Centre, conference facilities for 50-130 delegates, restaurant, gift shop, art gallery and a welcome centre to help visitors make the most of what is available. It is education, business and fun all rolled in together!

The history of Brockholes is as intriguing as the present. Interest in the site by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust originated in 1992 when it contested quarrying. By 2006 the Trust had the opportunity to purchase the land and protect it from development if it could rapidly raise the challenging sum of £50,000. Within 2 months it became the owner helped by a grant

of £800,000 from the Northwest Regional Development Agency with support from the Tubney Charitable Trust. During 2007 Ian Selby was appointed as Project Manager and the Royal Institute of British Architects launched a design competition for the proposed Visitor Village. By the year-end 5 designs had been shortlisted from 61 submissions.

The winning bid was announced in early 2008. It was from Adam Khan Architects and envisaged 'A Floating World' to provide a cluster of buildings of largely wooden construction resembling an ancient marshland village. The concept of floating buildings was radical then and remains spectacular now. 2008 saw the restoration of the wetlands, creation of ponds, seeding of meadows plus new hedgerows, trees, footpaths and bird watching hides. Development continued made possible by a grant of £8million from a joint programme of the Northwest Regional Development Agency and the Forestry Commission. The Visitor Village was floated in March 2011 and the Brockholes Nature Reserve opened to the public at Easter the following month.





MAIN: Child's play at Brockholes by Tony West.
LEFT: The Brockholes management team: catering manager Andras Koczogh, general manager Donalda Williams and events & communications manager Sarah Leach.
MIDDLE: The Brockholes children's playground.
BOTTOM: The Brockholes Visitor Village by Bentham Imaging.



Brockholes – not to be confused with the Lake District Visitor Centre – is an amazing resource and attraction. Its main appeal is probably to children and families. It is constantly adding to the diversity of wildlife at the reserve and can already boast more than 100 species living freely as none are captive. With about 150,000 visitors a year and a huge role in educating the young, it is one of the major and best legacies of the Northwest Regional Development Agency which was abolished in March 2012 following a change of government in 2010.

Brockholes is owned by the Lancashire Wildlife Trust but run by an operating company which is effectively – but not technically – a subsidiary of the charity. This enables the Nature Reserve to meet running costs of £700,000 a year by earning money from many facilities and activities but still be a not-for-profit organisation. Visits to the Nature Reserve are free but charges are made for car parking, groups and events whilst the gift shop, wedding, conference and informal restaurant venues are trading ventures which help to meet the running costs of Brockholes.

Over the last five years Brockholes has much improved as a wildlife habitat. It is one of the few places in Lancashire where the bittern regularly visits – for four years in a row. The most recent sighting was in January whilst last year the Reserve had five types of heron – bittern, grey heron, great white egret, little egret and the rare night heron.

There was much excitement last year when three otters were spotted – having come over from the River Ribble where they have been recorded in the last few years.

Brockholes' 5th birthday comes in the spring when the Reserve will be carpeted with tall white ox-eye daisies which provide shelter for nesting waders on the islands. They are replaced later in the year with fields of orchids which spread from remote areas of the Reserve to the busy car parks.

On early mornings the car parks can be busy with brown hares darting to and fro before they rest around the site and are hidden by hedgerows. A tiny leveret was found in a wood pile last spring and this has now grown into one of the many 'youth' hares running around Brockholes. Roe deer, weasel and stoat can be seen at dawn and dusk with an occasional fox hunting for a feed.

The Reserve includes sand martins and swifts swooping around the lakes. They are joined by the hobby searching for dragonflies. Along with damselflies, bees and butterflies they all add splashes of colour on warmer days. Noise levels increase in the spring with reed warblers singing in the reed beds.

Lancashire Wildlife Trust has prepared habitats for many creatures that already treat Brockholes as home or just visit. The Reserve is preparing to make occasional visitors like





PHOTO: Geoff Kennedy.

ospreys and red kites more welcome over the next five years in the hope that they will linger at Brockholes for the summer.

Brockholes is a great place for school groups to visit as a dedicated and experienced education team is available. With a purpose-built classroom and the entire nature reserve to explore this is very popular. There is also a new bird hide classroom on the edge of the lake. These sessions are in great demand so bookings should be made well in advance.

Younger children are catered for by pre-school sessions that let little ones get in touch with nature by exploring Brockholes and enjoying fun outdoors activities such as nature art, story time, bug hunts, games and crafts. 'Nature Tots' sessions for children from 15 months to 5 years are provided every Friday during Lancashire's schools term times at a cost of just £4.50 per child. There are also 'Xplorer Challenge' drop-in sessions and Magic Shows during some half-terms.

The wide range of attractions for nature lovers of all ages provide huge opportunities for volunteers who can find great satisfaction by helping visitors and running enjoyable and worthwhile events. There are many ways to become involved and support the Lancashire Wildlife Trust. Individual, Joint and Family Membership is available from £7 to £15 a year. For more details visit www.lancswt.org.uk

Companies can opt for Bronze, Gold or Platinum

Membership with annual subscriptions from £500 to £3,000 to cater for a range of company sizes, levels of commitment and resulting benefits. Depending on the level of corporate membership such benefits include an official certificate, links to the company website, the opportunity to use the Trust's logo, discounted team days, concessionary rates for room hire and publicity opportunities to ensure the Trust showcase company support to customers. To learn more contact Debbie Edwards on dedwards@lancswt.org.uk

Brockholes has achieved huge progress by its 5th birthday and has exciting plans for the next 5 years – but many will depend upon corporate membership and sponsorship. There are many great ideas worth supporting so your columnist urges companies to contact Debbie Edwards as much can be achieved with a level of funding which is modest compared to other causes and opportunities. Brockholes is a flagship attraction for the north west so it is hoped that the north west will support it.

Andrew Harris FRICS FCIM (mailto:andreweharris.co.uk) has chaired environmental charities in the UK and Africa. He is pleased to acknowledge the help provided by Sarah Leach and Alan Wright.

