

# The Diary



**Martin Dawes meets the Urban Explorer**

[martin.dawes@sheffieldnewspapers.co.uk](mailto:martin.dawes@sheffieldnewspapers.co.uk)

# Don't mention the war!

## Travel guide author's tale of two cities

URBAN Explorer Duncan J D Smith sips a cappuccino and gazes out of the window of the Caffetteria coffee bar on Leopold Street and sees, not Sheffield, but Berlin.

He's not bonkers. He spent a month pounding the pavements of the German capital ten hours a day for his new guidebook, *Only in Berlin*.

"Berlin feels exactly like Sheffield. The landscape is a mix of 19th century buildings, empty spaces, war damaged pockets and whopping great office blocks like that."

He gestures at the City Plaza opposite.

"Then there's the people. I was met by a friendly couple who were renting me a tiny little room in what was East Germany. In Vienna (he wrote a guide book on that city, too) the people are aloof."

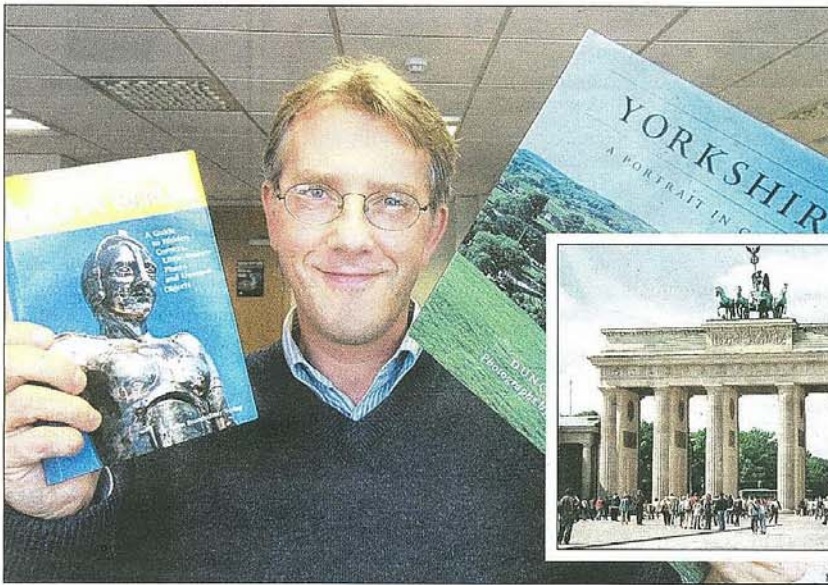
Duncan, who uses his initials so when he's Googled people don't come up with a failed Tory leader, stirs his coffee.

"I felt a sense of liberation in the air, liberation from Communism. In Sheffield I still feel the buzz that we are losing that old grim Victorianism."

We can take it that former Sheffielder Duncan, aged 47, who now lives in Vienna but visits his parents in Brincliffe Edge every summer, has not written the usual kind of guidebook.

"I try to find the hidden places. There is no point in my writing another *Lonely Planet* or *Rough Guide* because the shelves are already groaning with them."

Duncan, who uses the Urban Explorer tag because that's what he does, had the problem of how to cope with Hitler and The Wall without going over old ground.



**Curtain lifted:** Author Duncan JD Smith whose new guidebook *Only in Berlin* has just been published. Below the Brandenburg Gate  
Picture: Barry Richardson



Luckily, he was just around the Corner from Checkpoint Charlie, until the fall of Communism the main way into East Berlin and the German Democratic Republic.

It's a tourist attraction but on his street there was just a line on the road.

Not far away was the site of an old Nazi building, now partly used as a children's playground and a Chinese takeaway. It was also the site of Hitler's bunker.

"That's how I dealt with the Nazis. Hitler would have been appalled.

All that talk about the Asiatic hordes and there's a Chinese takeaway."

Ererily, one night he found the site of the bunker outlined in candles. He never solved the mystery.

Duncan, who has just seen the reissue of his book *Yorkshire - A Portrait in Colour* reprinted for the eighth time since 1995, unearthed little curiosities.

At a natural history museum the curator showed

him the Madagascan Purple Swamp Hen, purchased in 1819 from a former Sheffield goldsmith, William Bullock.

He found there were five, not two, Brothers Grimm collecting fairy tales, poked his nose down sewers and discovered an abandoned pneumatic postal system.

He also put himself in hospital. Not for him schmoozing around a city, he does it on a shoestring.

"All I know is that by the time I finish I get very thin. On the last but one day I got a kidney stone, staggered into a chemist and they put me in hospital."

Berlin follows books on Vienna, Prague and Budapest. Munich is next. Whatever else, he won't be pounding the tourist trail.

■ *For Only in Berlin* (€19.90) visit

[www.duncanjdsmith.com](http://www.duncanjdsmith.com) or [www.ONLYINGUIDES.COM](http://www.ONLYINGUIDES.COM)

■ *Yorkshire - A Portrait in Colour* is published by Dovecote Press at £14.95

## Pakistan cricket legend Imran helps cancer fund

FORMER Pakistan cricket captain, politician and heart-throb Imran Khan turns up in Rotherham tomorrow night as guest of honour at the Apna Indian restaurant.

Boss Nasir Mir has organised a £100 a head charity bash in aid of the Shaikut Khanum Memorial Cancer Hospital in Lahore which he founded in honour of his mother.

"It's the biggest cancer hospital in the whole of Asia," says Nasir, who has a keen interest in the hospital.

His own mother and auntie are cancer sufferers.

The hospital needs funds because 70 per cent of patients are treated free.



**Imran Khan: Guest**

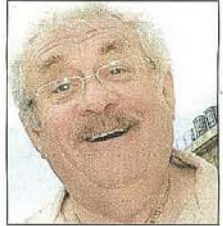
"I invited him through a friend and have met him a couple of times," adds Nasir, who opened the buffet restaurant, on Psalters Lane, seven months ago.

## ASIDELINES

### Place reserved for comic Bobby

COMIC Bobby Knutt went down a storm when he did a surprise turn at the Dave Berry concert for the Abbeydale Picture House restorers to buy the next door car park.

"He called me a week before the show to say he would love to support the project. He came to do a 20



**Bobby Knutt: Surprise gig**

minute spot which turned into the best part of 45 minutes and the audience loved him," says Abbeydale's Barry Northall.

He didn't want paying - just a car park space reserved! And he's agreed to join the cinema's patrons.

### Extra pepperami

ED Vaizey, the Tories' shadow minister for culture, can give Prime Minister Gordon Brown a few tips on eating at official occasions.

In Sheffield to give the keynote speech at the Showcomotion children's film fest, he eschewed the posh dinner to join the delegates at Pizza Hut.

Showcomotion Director Kathy Loizou reports that Vaizey happily had his supper with the Showco crowd, thus proving without doubt his 'man of the people' credentials.

### Yule not believe it

YOU might still be thinking of your summer holidays but some people are already planning Christmas.

With only 167 days to go the Diary has received a press release about Yuletide sales. Sadly it isn't a record.