



Fun-filled festival brings community together as one

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PEOPLE in Jesmond get a sneak preview today of its popular annual community festival.

It officially begins next Saturday and over the following three weeks around 100 events will take place, with a wide range of activities inspired by the Newcastle suburb's rich history and varied amenities.

The festival, coordinated by Jesmond Community Forum, is the annual expression of a sense of togetherness in a place where settled residents and a large and transient population of students live side by side.

A press launch today is being held at 97 & Social on Osborne Road, while in the surrounding area a series of events are held.

They include performances outside Oliver Bonas on the junction of Acorn Road and St George's Terrace in Jesmond from 11am to 2pm.

It kicks off with Peruvian band APU, described as 'The Gypsy Kings of the Andes', hailing from The Sacred Valley near Machu Picchu.

A Geordie institution, they are the official Peru Ambassadors to the UK and Ireland and have made numerous TV appearances, as well as performing for the Royal Family.



> Chris Murtagh, centre, with members of APU

They will be followed by the Simon/Tamara Duo and Sax on the Tyne. There will also be stalls and street entertainers.

Outside West Jesmond Metro there'll be a pop-up garden and children's ride.

Chris Murtagh has helped organise the Jesmond Community Festival for many years. He said: "It is self-generating and just keeps growing as more people and organisations want to participate in what we see as being Newcastle's premier community festival.

"The success has been down to the involvement of local people and busi-

nesses. It started over two days with half-a-dozen events. Now it's around 100 events over three weeks."

There is sure to be something for everyone, from toddlers and teenagers to students, families and pensioners, with concerts, jazz, talks, open days, family fun, walking tours, a fair and much more.

Many events are free, although some ask for voluntary donations and a small number charge for tickets.

Chris said: "It's a unifying event for the community. It brings people together."

■ Visit www.jesmondfestival.org.uk

The bigger picture has just vanished over the horizon

Paul Benneworth



FOR the first time in nearly two decades I've not been in the North East for Easter, and it's left me feeling extremely homesick. In the absence of access to the real thing, I've been left to devour books about the region, both new and old.

Now that NUFC are safe for the Premier League for this season, I've mustered up the courage to read about the club.

An Irishman I met in Barcelona this January recommended Paul Ferris' bittersweet autobiography *The Boy on the Roof* to me, and Ferris's clear passion for the city has been a tonic for my jaded soul.

I've got Keegan's autobiography next, and I've just finished Martin Hardy's odes to Newcastle United, *Tunnel of Love* and *Touching Distance*.

But against all the depression of the stories of NUFC's serial mismanagement, it's Harry Pearson's latest volume that has had me rolling about with laughter.

The Beast, the Milkman and the Emperor has on the surface very little to do with the North East, being a history of Flemish cycle races. But his expert eye, to tell the story of something that matters to ordinary people, was honed in the North East.

I read my first book of his on the recommendation of eminent Durham sociologist and one-time Journal columnist Dave Byrne. *The Far Corner* tells the story of North Eastern culture through the lens of local football via a series of visits to non-League grounds.

It's a formula he later perfected in subjects as varied as dog walking to Northern league cricket, using his own observations to tell a bigger story. And it reaches its apotheosis in *Racing Pigs and Giant Marrows*, that provides profound insights into Northumbrian country life as witnessed through visits to county fairs.

He is a master of of "seeing the world in a grain of sand". Pearson looks at a marrow competition in Cambo or a rainy Saturday on the terraces of Hillheads, and shows the essence of what it means to be a north

easterner, the passions, the rivalry, the common-sense and the absurd.

And it's a skill desperately needed these days as people refuse to question their own beliefs. People have lost the art of learning from the anecdote and instead let it reinforce their false world views.

At its most heart-breaking we see babies infected with measles because other parents have left their children unvaccinated. Convinced by anecdotes, they look in the grain of sand and see their own prejudices of vaccination danger reflected back.

Everywhere, this effect leads to people holding beliefs ever more fervently, regardless of the evidence they see. Fake news is taking over and is half way around the world before the truth has got out of bed.

Under the cover of fake news, politicians are weasling out of being held to account. A senior cabinet minister is fired for a leak he denies, and everyone leaps to their own conclusions without the truth ever being called into play.

Today's council elections tell us of a system failing on every front. The two-party system is completely paralysed, disgruntled voters are turning to small parties that have no chance for real power.

The world goes on around us, with jobs being moved overseas at an accelerating rate. But politicians shout that there are more jobs than ever before, and the media circus moves on to the next hot take.

We need to rediscover this lost art of seeing the real bigger picture from our own experiences, and to understand what really makes the North East today.

Only then can we demand a better politics that is really capable of preserving and supporting the place we love to live in all its varied detail.

■ Prof Paul Benneworth is professor of innovation and regional development at HVL University, Norway.