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My next project will be a life cast of singer John Turrell of Smoove and Turrell

Paul Robinson

with are fairly costly."

Paul said he is looking to do a series of busts with the aim of putting a solo exhibition together. Although not full figures, materials to produce them still cost around £600 each.

However, while he would very much appreciate backing, he said he would keep producing work if he can't find sponsorship, financing them himself as and when he can, such is his love for his work. He took inspiration from his tutor in college, artist David Goard who made him look at various artists from George Segal, Sir Antony Gormley, Ron Mueck and Duane Hanson.

"Realistically my ambitions are just to keep enjoying what I'm doing," Paul adds, "and if I can, give other people a bit of enjoyment in what I do."

■ If you'd like to sponsor Paul contact him on: paulrobinsonsculpture.com



It's a simple tale of a boy played by the lively Matthew Chase, who needs to get rid of some sad faces on his school chart to earn a place on the school trip to the biscuit factory.

The school scenes are pleasantly retro, reminding me of being in a classroom in the 1980s and the home scenes are eccentric clichés where grandparents (fossils) bumble around with cakes and hats.

Liz Pichon's illustrations are snazzily brought to life by clever animated sets and video design by Simon Wainwright, so that the actors appear to be literally stepping in and out of the pages of books. Tom's sister Delia (Amy Hargreaves)

Tom's sister Delia (Amy Hargreaves) skulks under an animated thunder cloud, a visual straight out of the books, and creating an entire doodle world on stage is a particular success.

The humour is gentle and jokes are a little on the light side, as Tom (not really a natural mischief maker) is really quite earnest. The laughs come from moments such as best friend Norman jumping very fast on the spot or his enemy Marcus asking if 'I can go for a wee wee.'

In the interval I asked my son how he scored Tom Gates: Live on Stage! It got 9 out of 10. By the end of the show he marked it a whopping 55 out of 56. A little random, yes, but that's how your brain works when you're 10.

Tom Gates: Live on Stage! is at the Theatre Royal Newcastle today, at 11am, 2.30pm and 7pm. For tickets visit www. theatreroyal.co.uk/whats-on or call the box office on 08448 11 21 21 (all calls are charged at 7p a minute plus your phone company's access charge, calls from mobiles may vary).

Britain is on the move – but in the wrong direction

Benneworth



S I write, all my worldly possessions are on an HGV speeding across Belgium to the ferry to the UK. The moving process has been a demonstration of the value of European integration.

We're moving to Whitley Bay and hired a local removal and storage company until we buy a house. They sent two North Eastern porters to collect our stuff, but when they arrived, the differences were immediately clear.

Dutch houses have very steep stairs, so furniture is habitually removed through upstairs windows. Their British truck wasn't equipped for this, so they contact their local agents, who in turn arranged local help. A team of porters came the next day from Rotterdam with a cherry-picker. No more than two hours later than originally planned, the curtain fell on our Dutch family life after ten glorious years.

It's an everyday example of the Single Market making life easy; things differ between countries but it's not a problem

Because we don't own any restricted products, there've been no need to fill in forms; the move's been nerve-shredding, but relatively straightforward.

It's a total contrast with the experience of a friend who emigrated five years to America. He'd built up a rather nice wine collection, but importing that to America was going to be prohibitively expensive. He bowed to the inevitable and gave up his hobby: we had great fun in helping him finish it before he left, but a bureaucratic rule caused him great personal discomfort.

I'd always planned to be abroad for a decade, but I'd imagined I'd be coming back to a North East starting to race back ahead

back ahead.

I left in 2009: Gordon Brown's Labour government was running out of steam, with the Tories were poised to take over. Big cuts were obviously coming, but I assumed that after five years of austerity, Labour would recover its popularity and start the necessary reconstruction.

I was right about the cuts: Cameron's Conservatives immediately tripled student fees, axed the regional development agencies, and bled the North East councils dry. Fairly standard Tory stuff – breaking up Labour's carefully crafted public services.

What I hadn't anticipated was government turning so viciously on UK residents. The hostile environment made a whole section of Britons suspect, and social security reforms demonised unemployed and disabled people.

Together with slashing social services, this shifted the British state's relationship with its citizens. Instead supporting, caring and helping, it moved to punish, discipline and sanction hard-working law-abiding residents.

This unlocked a poisonous public atmosphere that was looking for someone to blame. Politicians stoked fears of immigration as a neat scapegoat masking the problems' true cause: Tory mismanagement and Whitehall's dysfunctional relationship to us all.

It's unsurprising that this led to the Brexit vote. What amazes me today is the total absence of efforts to address those underlying causes.

I was hoping I'd be coming back to help rebuild our fragile region, but the whole country remains frozen in a Brexit paralysis. Britain lost the last decade to this national institutional failure, and seems determined to make the 2020s as hard as possible for itself.

Before we restart building our country, we must bring back a sense of solidarity and shared purpose. Only by government respecting, valuing and supporting all UK residents can we finally start to feel things getting better in the North East.

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