

A Magical Mystery Tour

Darren Calpin and his Beatles-loving Mum tour the Liverpool haunts the Fab Four called home

"I CAN'T BELIEVE I'M actually going to see him!" My mum is as giddy as a schoolgirl as we approach the outskirts of Liverpool following a three-hour drive. "I can't believe I'm really going to see Paul McCartney."

It's lovely to see Mum so animated and happy. Although she was a young woman in the Swinging Sixties, living in rural Hertfordshire meant her chances of seeing her idols, the Beatles, were few and far between. I tried for years to get hold of tickets to see Paul – her fave moptop of all – in concert, all to no avail.

However, the rock gods smiled upon me and here we are, half an hour away from the Fab Four's hometown and with an afternoon of Beatles-inspired sightseeing to enjoy before dreams become reality at the dockside Echo Arena.

MACCA'S OLD DIGS

We arrive before lunchtime and our first stop is Mossley Hill train station. Here we pick up my old pal Ryan, who's travelled across from

nearby Warrington to act as our photographer/cultural attaché for the day. I know this area well, having lived around here while studying at Liverpool John Moores University 20 years ago.

In fact, there are quite a few places steeped in Beatles folklore within easy reach of Mossley Hill so I ask Mum where she'd like to go first. Her answer? "Paul McCartney's house."

Less than 10 minutes later and we're parked up in Forthlin Road, an anonymous residential city street in nearby Allerton that's distinct only by how unremarkable it is. I was expecting to encounter parking problems and hordes of selfie-taking fans but, aside from two Eastern European tourists packing away their cameras, we're the only ones here.

Number 20, a small terraced abode with a modest front garden, is Macca's old childhood home.

It's amazing to think that he and John composed early hits like 'She Loves You' and played them for Paul's dad in this very house. Or that he was still living here when Beatlemania kicked-off proper.

Like John Lennon's old childhood home, this is now a National Trust property, and as such it's possible to go inside and have a good old nose around if you book a tour beforehand. We haven't so we do the next

best thing: stand by the plaque next to the front gate while Ryan snaps away. He gets some great shots and Mum is as pleased as punch.

LENNON'S HOME TURF

A quick jaunt around the corner is John Lennon's childhood home, Mendips. Ryan, always one for swift property evaluations, observes that this neat suburban semi with a large front garden and driveway is quite a step up from Macca's old digs in Forthlin Road.

"I think the Lennons may have been a bit better off than the McCartneys," he offers. I can see what he means: it looks more like a filming location for Terry & June than a crucible of avant-garde rock lyrics and burgeoning socialist idealism. Mum is equally utilitarian: "I bet it's worth a packet now."

Obligatory snaps taken, we head back to the car and resume listening to The Blue Album as we head a mile or so west into the city.

As if by divine intervention, the immortal line 'Penny Lane is in my ears and in my eyes' echoes around the car as we reach the bustling thoroughfare that inspired Paul to write the eponymous song back in 1967 (which, funnily enough, was released as a double A-side single with Strawberry Fields Forever).

STOP AND SAY 'HELLO'

The northern end of Penny Lane is a



Darren's mum, Diane, is reunited with the Fab Four on the waterfront



Penny Lane's famous barber shop

busy area with lots of people, shops and local businesses. Parking isn't easy to come by, so I drop Mum and her chaperone off, then find a space down a nearby side street.

I rejoin the two outside a barber shop, which we take to be the one mentioned in the song. We go in, as instructed by the lyrics, to 'stop and say hello'. Happily, the lovely lady hairdresser is as laid-back as can be.

Mum goes a bit giddy when she sees pictures of Macca on the wall, and happily puts a few quid in the

donations box before posing outside for Ryan who, it has to be said, is fulfilling his multifaceted role with aplomb.

The roundabout with the bus shelter, another key landmark featured in the song, is somewhat underwhelming, so I head back to the car, extract the dynamic duo in one swift pick-up (well, as swift as pick-ups get with 72-year-old passengers) and head to the quieter southern end of the lane.

To Mum's evident delight, we find

not just the famed Penny Lane street signs but also the painted road sign that McCartney signed when he drove around Liverpool with James Corden earlier in the year for the chat show host's popular 'Carpool Karaoke' segment. Unsurprisingly, the sign now has a protective perspex covering!



No prizes for guessing what tune they went away humming!



John Lennon's childhood pad



The McCartneys' former Forthlin Road residence

THE LEGENDARY CAVERN

With the afternoon light fading, we head into Liverpool's buzzing city centre, grab a bite to eat then make for ever-lively Matthews Street, home of the legendary Cavern Club. Though it isn't the same building the Beatles played at in the early days (that's a few doors down), there's still loads of character and heritage packed into the subterranean brick arches of this intimate and highly evocative venue. Mum isn't so keen on the slightly claustrophobic nature of the cramped, busy environs but she's clearly made up to finally be in

a place she's dreamed of visiting for so long.

MACCA IN CONCERT

After a full afternoon of exploring we decide to kick back in the relatively peaceful surroundings of The Cavern Pub just across the street. A beer beneath a copy of an original score of 'Yesterday', signed by Paul McCartney and George Martin, being the perfect way to recharge the batteries ahead of the show.

Needless to say, the gig is absolutely sensational. Macca, so completely natural and at ease on stage, has the audience in the palm of his hand the whole time, regaling us with wonderful old stories and dipping into a back catalogue that no other

artist in the world can match. Helter Skelter and Eleanor Rigby are highlights for me, although it is the sing-a-long chorus of Hey Jude which sticks most firmly in my mind. Holding Mum's hand, belting out 'na-nana, nana-na-naa' with 11,000 swaying Scousers and an acapella McCartney is a life-affirming experience. I can't remember the last time I saw my my mum smile so much. Truly magical. **GTW**



Strawberry Field can now be forever explored