

solitude * * * *

standing

fanzine
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GREENWICH
1884 MERIDIAN - 1984

In 2006 I accidentally spent three months alone in Bognor Regis. This probably needs some explanation. While I was still living in London I came down with a nasty reoccurring bout of shingles, and ended up deciding to quit my stressful teaching job and the shitty flat I was paying £600 for one room in.

Introduction

I needed a break from London, and my mum asked if I wanted to housesit in Bognor Regis. My grandparents had lived there - my nan was already dead and my grandad was very old and frail. The house was sold, he moved to a care home, and my mum moved down to Bognor and used some of the money to buy a smaller flat in the area. As soon as this was done, my grandad died. She didn't want to stay in Bognor, and wanted to move to France (where she lives now).

The fact that water started coming through the light fitting in my housemates' room and the landlord being blissfully unconcerned cemented my decision. I was leaving London for a while (2019 spoiler- I ended up not moving back).

So it seemed ideal - I could live rent-free a short train ride from Brighton, where I used to live and still had friends, and have some time to recover my health and work on some projects of my own. My mum's mind would also be at rest that someone was watching the house while she was away in France organising the move.

That's not how it worked out.

I had already given my notice to my landlord in London when my mum gave me some bad news - the electrician had been to fix something and it turned out that all the wiring in the house was illegal, outdated and dangerous.

Even worse, a lot of the wiring was plastered into the walls rather than the modern method of encasing it in surface trunking. (UK walls tend to be brick with a top coat of plaster rather than made of sheet rock). This meant that all the plaster would have to be removed and redone after the dodgy wiring was ripped out, creating a huge mess.

I asked my landlord about extending my lease a couple of weeks while the work was done. He would only extend it for the full month. It turned out to be cheaper to visit some friends up in Yorkshire and then go to Italy for a week (see issue 29 of this zine). All my stuff went into storage.



20^p
TO PA

TO PA
3^p

When I finally did go down to Bognor the work was still dragging on. I slept on the world's worst sofa bed in the kitchen while the building work went on around me, and felt like the dust was permanently engrained into me. As soon as my mum and the plasterer were gone, I gained an actual bedroom and unpacked my stuff. Time to relax.

NO



As soon as that was sorted, a huge train strike began. The local train company was already notorious for their poor service and lateness, and they pissed off all their staff by announcing new plans to have large sections of rural routes with no train inspectors and no station staff. I guess if there was a problem with the passengers the driver could just park the train up and intervene or something in their minds.

Bognor Regis was one of the stations on extremely restricted service, making it hard to go anywhere without a car (which I didn't have). Or I could go, but not get back easily. So I was stuck there, without the chance to visit friends in Brighton or pick up work in any of the larger towns in the area. So Bognor it was.

bognor regis

Bognor Regis is an unglamorous seaside resort in Southern England of around 24,000 people, many of them old. It's halfway between the bigger regional cities of Brighton and Portsmouth, and the area around it is very rural. In the 19th and early 20th century it **was** a glamorous place, but now it's a byword for dowdy and dull. The last words of King George V were apocryphally "bugger Bognor".



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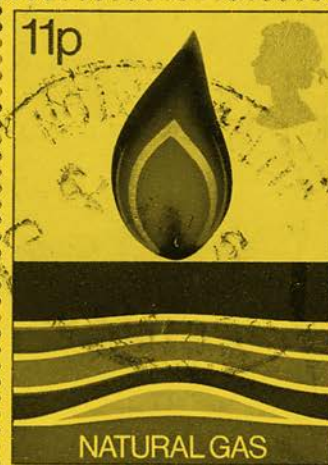


RMS Queen Elizabeth 2

The beach is shingle, the pier is dilapidated (and no longer hosts the Birdman flying machine competition). The high street is all charity shops and mobility scooter dealerships.

There was almost nothing for me to do aside from the one screen cinema that had one new film per week at £3 per ticket.

Bognor Regis is also a Tory stronghold with a majority of over 60s. The few people in my own age group were more the type with children, also likely to be fairly conservative.



So there was nothing for me to do, almost nowhere for me to go, and little chance of meeting many like-minded people. So I was totally thrown on my own devices.

solitude

I like my alone time, but everyone has their limits. Perhaps if I were more extroverted three months almost totally alone would have made me lose the plot. As it stood, I was essentially ok. I guess I accepted that I would have no social life or interesting things to do that I didn't completely initiate myself.

Psychologists talk about extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. According to Wikipedia:



"Intrinsic motivation is the self-desire to seek out new things and new challenges. It is driven by an interest or enjoyment in the task itself, and exists within the individual rather than relying on external pressures or a desire for consideration. Some activities provide their own reward."

"Extrinsic motivation comes from influences outside the individual. Common extrinsic motivations are rewards or the threat of punishment."

So it was clear that the environment was going to provide me with very little in the way of external stimulation or reward, it was up to me to provide it for myself.

There is a lot of media coverage of FOMO being a major component in unhappiness and anxiety. There is something weirdly relaxing about knowing you're in a place where there is nothing you might want to do that you could conceivably be missing out on. I didn't see any people at all who made me think "I wish I knew them".

I joined Meetup to see if there was anything for me to go to. There wasn't. My one attempt at being social was to try to go to a meetup for French speakers to watch a French film at the £3 cinema. They normally met up at a pub in another town that I would only be able to get home from by car.



I went to the film anyway, but couldn't figure out who the Meetup people were, so I ended up watching the film alone. It was enjoyable anyway- *Microbe et Gasoil* a comedy about two teenage boys who make a motorised shed and go on a road trip around France by Michel Gondry of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Science of Sleep*.

I also tried going out canvassing with the local Labour Party. There was no election happening, and no chance of getting elected anyway in Bognor, so the small group were concentrating on campaigning against the train company's shoddy treatment of their staff.

It was a success in terms of getting signatures on the petitions (including those of some train drivers and ticket inspectors) but it was a failure socially. Everyone was a lot older than me, and seemed to get the impression I was someone's teenage daughter doing it for work experience, and spoke to me accordingly. The problem was that I was 32 at the time.

Of course it wasn't like I was devoid of social contact. I became a much heavier user of social media and Skype in particular. So I had a lot of contact with my chosen people. They just weren't physically there, and the logistics of having visitors with the sparse train service and terrible sofa bed weren't great.

I remember a late-night drunken conversation with an old housemate once about being alone and identity. I was surprised to hear him say that he felt more like a person around other people than alone - like he felt he got identity from relation with other people. I feel the total opposite - most myself when alone. Other people can judge and influence you, when you're alone you have total freedom.

I can't say I understand attention-seekers. Attention finds you whether you like it or not, and it can be a burden. There are expectations on you, you are observed and judged but probably not understood. Even positive attention can feel like a trap or a limitation if it's not backed with understanding. And a sign of psychological dysfunction is not seeming to care if you get positive or negative attention, because both feel like validation that you exist.

Anonymity of the sort you get in a big city or being a stranger can be very freeing. No-one notices you or has any real opinion of you. As long as you follow the basic social codes you are free to do as you like. People choose invisibility as a superpower for a reason.

For example, I now live in a small town of 60,000 people. I would never go and eat alone in a restaurant here - it's a small social bubble and I would feel observed and judged. When I was coming down here house hunting I felt completely free to though because I was a stranger who only knew a few people. However, in London or when travelling there's no pleasure like it. I often wonder if moving to a small town was the right decision for me because of this. Panopticons are a prison after all.



I'm not one of nature's joiner-inners. I'm happy to sit back and observe until I choose to join in. Perhaps if you're more extroverted, seeing someone just sitting back and observing makes it seem like they're not having fun. I feel like the sitting-back-and-observing type are more prevalent amongst zine readers and writers at any rate.

I probably see being observed and seen as being a restriction or a burden because I find the role I'm assigned as a woman by society so restrictive and frustrating. When you are constantly told daily that you are an object to be looked at and your only value lies in how closely you match a narrow (and always narrowing) physical ideal, being looked at feels like an imposition.

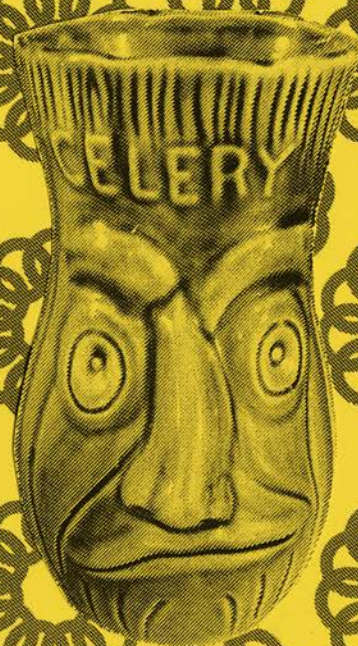
You are also told that your only power comes from gaining men's approval and attention for your appearance or sex appeal, which is of course a load of utter bollocks. There are many more rewarding ways to gain power, and women who do manage to gain that attention are often not treated with much respect in the end anyway.

I guess that also matches preference for observing and being behind the camera- let me get to choose how things are looked at for once rather than being the passive object of the looking.

For what it's worth, I don't feel like men's attention is worth much.

Being unnoticed and free to observe are pleasures many more marginalised people are denied. If you stick out for a quality that is discriminated against, it's harder to be peacefully in the background.

In Bognor I knew no-one and was probably not noticed by anyone. I didn't feel like I'd disappeared however, more like I'd gained the power of invisibility, and freedom from the restrictions of the stressful job I'd just quit. The UK education system is losing teachers at a rapid rate because everything has become focused on monitoring essentially meaningless statistics which are scrutinised and judged and used against the teachers as a weapon.



charity shops

Bognor's biggest strength is its charity shops. There's a lot of vintage stuff at low prices because (more sadly) there are a lot of house clearances of old people who died, and because there also aren't the vintage sellers regularly picking through like there would be in a larger city. I probably did the rounds myself 2-3 times per week.

Best things:

- * Yellow dress that looks like a costume from the Prisoner
- * Bert and Ernie wallet I gave to a friend as a gift
- * Selection of 70s Hornsea Ware kitchen jars I used as cactus planters
- * Leek-themed vase with a face that looked like Sideshow Bob when I put an aloe plant in it
- * Marimekko style translucent curtain in orange
- * Burnt yellow trinket tray with black heron design
- * Seventies dress with dagger collar in blue and white zig zag fabric

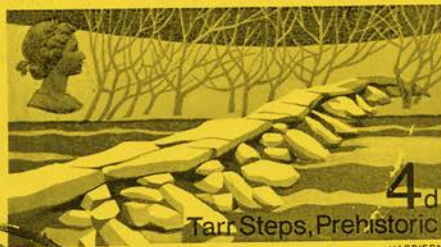
robert smith

Robert Smith of the Cure is the most famous resident of Bognor Regis (or Aldwick to be more precise). The owner of the local hifi shop told me where he lived when selling me some new speaker cable, and I was bored and thought I'd have a look.

It's in a very posh estate called Aldwick Bay - it looks like a 1940s Hollywood studio lot with a similar gateway area. You're free to walk around inside though however, but cars need a pass.



I guess I was expecting Robert Smith to live in a dramatic old house. Something Victorian and imposing. Maybe elaborate gables and stonework and stained glass windows. Instead it was a very bland modern and expensive looking almost McMansion. Disappointment.



However the beach next to the house was much more what you might expect of Robert Smith. A deserted windswept expanse of shingle reminiscent of Dungeness, but with the addition of big surreal cabbages growing on the beach. I never bothered to see Robert Smith's house again, but I returned to the beach many times. I was nearly always the only person there.

aimless wandering

Aimless wandering is one of my pleasures. I had plenty of time to do it in my time in Bognor. I was thinking at some point why no-one had done a phone app that recorded whether you'd walked down every street in a postcode and you'd "win" that town once you'd covered it all.

Which then made me think there was probably a lot of privacy and tracking concerns with that. I tried to do the same with a map and a highlighter, but it was hard to find a suitable online version to print, and equally difficult to get hold of an up to date paper map

With that kind of wandering, (and my level of spare time in Bognor), small details become interesting. I have an activity book called How to Be an Explorer of the World that I often use activities from with students.

A lot of it focuses on going to a "boring" place you know well, and using observation activities to make it interesting. Suddenly that asymmetrical triangular 1960s house on a strange circular street or that cobbled alleyway that's only three meters long becomes a nice surprise.

small pleasures 11th august 2016

New blue HEMA notebook

HEMA is a dutch shop similar to Tiger. Cheap attractive housewares and stationery. This notebook has a satisfyingly chunky blue pulpboard cover with red binding on the spine, and thin ruled pages inside

Jarritos

Mexican soda brand. I rate the mandarin and tamarind ones.

The packed train suddenly emptying out halfway along the journey

Ahh space

Pentel Touch Sign green pen

It's a green felt tip pen with a flexible rubber nib and a sparkly green case. It's not fancy or expensive, but feels very luxurious to write with.

Enjoying a sunny day, not too hot

I'm writing this sat in the garden at 3pm, soaking up the vitamin D, but with a pleasant breeze stopping it from being too hot.

vegan nanaimo bar recipe



Nanaimo bars originated unsurprisingly from the city of Nanaimo on Vancouver Island. I used to have a co-worker from Manitoba, who would make this typical Canadian treat from time to time, and bring it in.

I got a weird craving for them when I was in Bognor, so learnt how to make them for myself.

Most of the online recipes unsurprisingly use North American ingredients, so here's a version with British ones

Equipment:

Glass lasagne dish
Silicone spatula
Small pan (a milk pan is ideal)
Electric mixer

For the base:

100g vegan baking margarine (Stork has dairy in, but a lot of supermarket own brands are vegan)
50g brown sugar
5 tablespoons cocoa powder
100g dark chocolate
150g digestive biscuits (can easily be substituted for gluten free digestives)
70g finely chopped almonds
100g dessicated coconut
5 tablespoons golden syrup

For the filling:

100g vegan baking margarine
2 tablespoons custard powder (gluten free is also available)
300g icing sugar
3 tablespoons soya or almond milk (vanilla soya milk is great for this recipe)

Optional variations:

Add 1 teaspoon of peppermint or coffee flavour along with matching food colouring

For the covering:

150g dark chocolate
2 tablespoons baking margarine

To make the base:

Put the biscuits in a sandwich bag, and hit with a spoon until they are completely crumbled. (They don't have to be perfectly crushed, as long as there are no big lumps)

Mix the biscuit crumbs, almonds and coconut in a bowl

Melt the margarine, sugar, cocoa and chocolate over a low heat in the pan

Pour the liquid ingredients into the dry ingredients, add the golden syrup and mix well

Line the bottom of the lasagne pan with the mix

Chill the base for 30 minutes. If you don't chill the base, it will come apart when you add the filling.

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To make the filling

Mix the icing sugar and custard powder well in a small bowl and set aside

Add the margarine to the mixing bowl, and slowly add the sugar, mixing with an electric mixer as you go along. You will end up with a very thick, dry buttercream.

Slowly add the soya milk while mixing to create a thick, smooth buttercream. Spread the buttercream over the biscuit base. Chill for 10 minutes.

To make the topping

Gently melt the chocolate and margarine in a pan over a low heat. Pour over the custard cream layer. Chill for three hours- you can't cut the squares until the chocolate is perfectly set. Cover with foil or baking paper- cling film will just stick to the chocolate.

Once completely set, cut into small squares. Keep in the fridge.

Welcome

KEEP OUT

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