North pays penalty for London's suits

A VERY straightforward road sign reassured us that we were on the right motorway. It says "The North". We followed the signs to The North one day a fortnight ago as the sky darkened, wind panted, rain eventually fell and I froze as I refilled the car at a services station somewhere west of Hull.

The coffee being putrid and the boxed sandwich soggy on one side and stale on the other the purchase that sparked us up was the two for £3 CD pack of heavy metal music. For the next hour we listened to 35-year-old lyrics angry at the hopelessness of industrialised life in a region that invented industrialisation in the first place.

It is said that when Queen Victoria steamed north to her Borderland estate in Scotland for her holiday she ordered the blinds in her royal carriage to be lowered through The North to avoid looking at its smoky mills, slag heaps and drab workers' terraces.

You can see what Queen Vic didn't want to see by visiting the Lowry Centre at Salford, stuck among you could be anywhere hotels and factory outlets just down the canal from Manchester. L.S. Lowry was probably the most famous painter of life in The North in its industrial heyday.

On the gallery wall among Lowry's exultant images of workers on the riverside is a portrait of Queen Victoria, holding a Bible. The caption reads "A Queen for the North" and below it stands in the gallery: "I stood in the gallery," said John Rothenstein, "marvelling at the accuracy of the mirror that this to me unknown painter had held up to the bleakness, the absolute shabbiness, the grimy fogboundness, the grimness of industrial England."

It's not the stuff of a tourist pamphlet, is it?

But as any visitor to The North will tell you - though they'd probably make grime, pubs and footy.

Last Saturday we walked for kilometres across the Northumbria moors, near Newcastle. We climbed out of a yellow and orange autumn forest, and ambled across heath and ridgelands and jumped perched streams on the stillest, bluest, clearest day imaginable.

Then we feasted in a village pub on casks of pleasanter and hare warmed by an open fire and good ale with Guy Fawkes fireworks all around.

The weekend over, we drove along the A696 across the northern Pennines as early-spring snow frosted its peaks and we felt privileged to have enjoyed The North at its best.

And now, over there, Newcastle is to be lowered as she passed its smoky mills, slag heaps and fogboundness, the grimness of industrial England.

They talked with local development officials about their ambitions. They spoke excitedly about their city's embrace of renewable energy.

They predict the old Swan Hunter shipyards will fill with 10,000 new jobs over the next decade. Old hands will turn to the assembly of wind turbines with blades exceeding, perhaps, 100 metre radius.

Tyneside is confident it will host the ships and crews that will install the turbines in electricity towers across the North Sea and cable them landward to supply British homes and industry with clean sustainable energy.

Over there, Newcastle is too.

Today's fact

Ostriches can reach speeds of 70km/h.

Today's word

Fatalism: the belief that all events are predetermined and therefore inevitable.

It happened today

From our files - 1941: Work on the floating dock now being assembled at Newcastle was nearing completion and it should be ready for use early next month.

Today's opinion

1942: Christopher Columbus noted in his journal of his voyage to America: "The Jurd" is celebrating its 25th year. "The Jurd" is by far the smallest, most remote, least-known bar in Europe. It is located in a tiny village in the north of Spain, surrounded by mountains.

In 1941, "The Jurd" was opened by a group of friends who wanted to create a place where they could relax and enjoy each other's company. The bar was named after the local legend of a Jurd, a mythical creature that was said to live in the mountains nearby. The Jurd was also known for its excellent food and drinks, which were made with fresh ingredients from the local area.

Over the years, "The Jurd" has become a popular destination for travelers and locals alike. Its rustic charm and warm atmosphere make it a favorite spot for those looking for a quiet, relaxing place to unwind.

Education disadvantages is a celebration

Learning is about a full life, writes Brian Brown.

THE tradition of providing education for disadvantaged young people, both within and beyond the Christian church, is one that deserves to be celebrated.

Although it may not have been the motivation for her beatification, Mother Mary MacKillop, now St Mary of the Cross, has gained the gratitude and admiration of the wider community for her untiring work with her Sisters in bringing education to disadvantaged young people.

Her challenge to others was to never see suffering without doing something about it. Here is an inspiring story of compassion and perseverance in the face of official opposition.

Rev Dr Brian Brown is Minister of the Hamilton Brookmeadow Uniting Church. This article is submitted by the Church Media Association. www.cmahunter.com.au

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OPINION & ANALYSIS

Psih Philip O'Neill is director of the Urban Research Centre, University of Western Sydney.