

# The Troubadours Tour





# Walk the Wall

## Cloud Nine – The Troubadours Tour

As the renga poets made a stately progress from east to west, The Troubadours were tramping sturdily from west to east. Flying colourful flags from their rucksacks, they were the only participants in the project who literally walked every inch of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail.

They brought a play written by Peter Mortimer and performed by his theatre company Cloud Nine, directed by Jackie Fielding. The theme of *Off the Wall* may seem bizarre, that the Wall could be bought by an aggressive businessman and turned into a profitable theme park, but Mortimer's comic satire steers alarmingly close to the truth at times. He raises important issues about how we should preserve, care for and engage with our historical and landscape treasures.

Although the eleven performances in village halls, pubs and forts along the Wall were at the heart of the tour, they formed the culmination of a creative programme at every venue. This involved schools, the WI, youth and community groups. Each venue designed and painted its own backdrop for the play, and the arrival of the actors on foot, as they would have done years ago, found an enthusiastic response from people who had been working on the project.

Peter Mortimer was very positive about bringing his play to the Wall, and felt that 'Hadrian's Wall had previously seemed the property of academics, historians, archaeologists and some actors walking about sporting Roman helmets and shields. *Off the Wall* was, we hope, an antidote to all that, and a bit of fun into the bargain. Let's face it, previously the Roman Wall has hardly ever been funny!'

*Photos: Susie Burton (SB) Steve Chettle (SC) Stuart Firth (SF) Sara Lurati (SL)*

← Troubadours at Cuddy's Crags

Photo: Sara Lurati/ARTS UK





*Bowness-on-Solway (sc)*



*Low Crosby (sl)*



*Carlisle District (sl)*







*Bowness-on-Solway performance (sc)*





*Walltown Crag (SC)*



*Hotbank Crag (SL)*



*Sycamore Gap (SL)*





*Newtown performance (sc)*



*Steel Rigg (sc)*

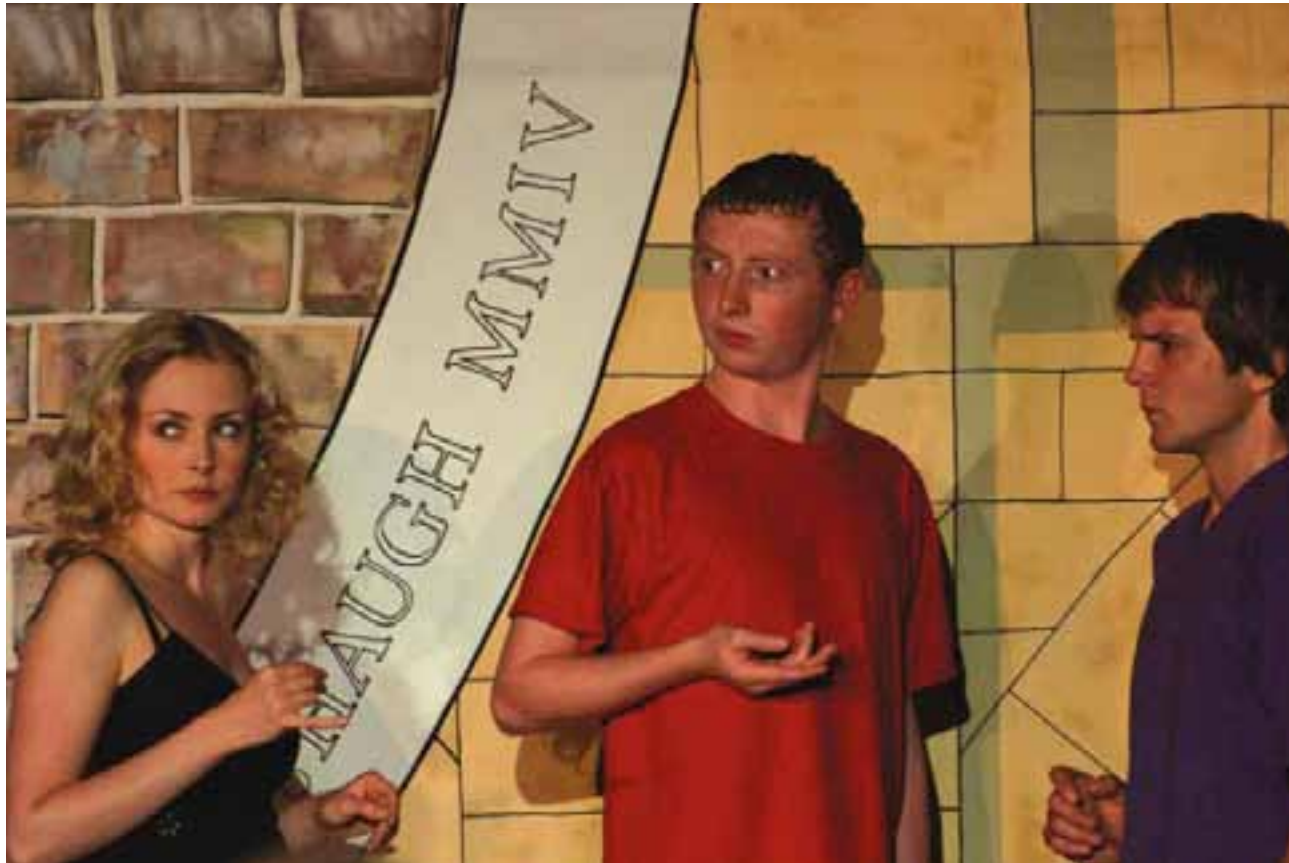
*Marquee at Robin Hood Inn (sc)*





@ HUMS HAUGH MMIV

ROMANS  
GO HOME!



*Humshaugh performance (sc)*





*Heddon-on-the-Wall (SC)*



*Newcastle Quayside (SB)*



*Segedunum, Wallsend*



Photo: Stan Gamester

## Peter Mortimer

Peter Mortimer is a poet, playwright, editor and travel writer. His books include *Broke Through Britain*, about a 500 mile penniless trudge from Plymouth to Edinburgh; *100 Days on Holy Island*, recording a full winter spent on the remote North-East outpost; and his latest, *Cool for Qat: a Yemeni Journey*, which is linked to his play *Riot* about the 1930 Yemeni seamen's riots in South Shields. His book about the Roman Wall venture, *Off the Wall: The Journey of a Play*, will be published in 2006.

## Off the Wall

*Three extracts from his play*

The play was performed and walked along Hadrian's Wall between 19–29 August 2004 at Bowness-on-Solway, Kirkandrews-on-Eden, Newtown, Gilsland, Twice Brewed, Humshaugh, East Wallhouses, Throckley and Wallsend, with two extra performances in North and South Shields on 30 & 31 August.

### Characters (in order of appearance)

#### Modern Day

Drysdale	(A small businessman)	Dylan Mortimer
Loot	(A large businessman)	Dave Hollingworth
Cogno	(Loot's adviser)	Bill E. Meeks
Dolores	(Loot's wife)	Janine Birkett
Minister	(Govt. Minister for the North)	Alex Kinsey
Starlet	(A hedonistic young female)	Susie Burton

#### Roman Britain

Guard/Jailer	(Roman Guard)	Bill E. Meeks
Briginus	(Caledonian rebel leader)	Dave Hollingworth
Prisoner	(A Caledonian prisoner)	Dylan Mortimer
Ulpus Marcellus	(Roman Governor of Britain)	Alex Kinsey
Cingetissa	(Briginus' wife)	Janine Birkett

Several small parts played by members of the cast

Location: The play is set both in modern and Roman Britain  
 Time: 21st and 2nd centuries AD

**The millionaire entrepreneur Lionel Loot first explains to his unimpressed wife Dolores his plan to buy the Roman Wall.**

*Loot* All I ask is some respect!

*Dolores* Respect?

*Loot* I give you everything. You spit in my face.

*Dolores* Where is the man I married? The real man?

*Loot* The little man. The man of no consequence.

*Cogno* Let me clean you up a bit sir. (STARTS)

*Loot* Clean her up! Make her see sense!

*Dolores* Was there anything else?

*Loot* There was something else Dolores, yes. Who owns the Roman Wall, now?

*Dolores* What is all this about the Roman Wall?

*Loot* I repeat, who owns the Wall now?

*Dolores* Very well. Various farmers and landowners. It is under the protection of English Heritage and is managed on behalf of the people.

*Loot* Ah, the people. Does it make money?

*Dolores* Thousands flock to see it every year of course, but –

*Loot* (TO AUDIENCE) Is that what I asked her, whether thousands flocked to see it every year? Well? Course not. I asked her what – yes, that's right. Does it make money? Maybe Cogno knows the answer to this simple question.

*Cogno* Income generation is not the Roman Wall's forte, as far as I know sir.

*Loot* So. By most definitions, the Wall is a failure. I want to buy it.

*Cogno* Buy it sir?

*Dolores* Did you say – buy it?

*Loot* No, I said there's a walrus eating the inside of my bottom. Yes, buy it, damn you!

*Cogno* You want to buy the Roman Wall?

*Loot* I'm in the nation of the deaf, the land of the failed hearing aid. I am among people whose ears contain more wax than a 20ft long candle. Yes – buy it!!

*Cogno* But why would you want to buy the Roman Wall?

*Loot* Why?

*Dolores* You hate old things. You hate anything that has a history.

*Loot* History is irrelevant.

*Dolores* So why buy the Wall?

*Loot* Why? Why? Why? Because – because... (PAUSE) I'll tell you why because. Then you'll see. Imagine this. An 80 mile long –

*Dolores* That's Roman miles by the way. By our measurements it is only 73 miles.

*Loot* I repeat, an 80 Roman miles long theme park. Customers get to travel the entire original length of the Roman Wall via mono-rail which is sealed in a transparent, weather-proof plastic tunnel.

*Cogno* Inspired thinking sir.

*Loot* There are video screens, holograms, actors dressed as Roman soldiers and barbarians.

*Cogno* I see it even as you speak!

*Loot* There are mock battles – an entire full day's travel and adventure without the need to leave your seat.

*Cogno* Perfection almost.

*Loot* I picture it now! Lionel Loot's Roman Wall Experience. Well?

*Dolores* It stinks.



**Lionel Loot welcomes his prestigious guests and declares his newly acquired Roman Wall Experience open.**

*Loot* I give them what they want Cogno, even before they know they want it. That is why I am me, and they are they. Let the construction of the Roman Wall Experience begin! Build the perspex weather-proof tunnel!

(ALL THE FOLLOWING ARE ANIMATED)

*Loot* Assemble and secure the 80 mile long mono-rail system. Install the one dozen giant touch button information screens! Activate the Roman centurion holograms! Complete conversion of 12 milecastles to pizza and burger bars! Choreograph and synchronize the warring Picts and Scots armies! The small details Cogno, I leave to you. Have I missed anything?

*Cogno* I believe the Lionel Loot Roman Wall Experience awaits the official opening.

*Loot* The guest list?

*Cogno* All in order. The PM will be there, Elton John, Charlie Boy, Posh and Becks, Jonathan Ross. The latest Big Brother winner.

*Loot* Is the hospitality tent stocked with the finest smoked salmon and strawberries?

*Cogno* It is.

*Loot* The champagne?

*Cogno* The Moët is ready to pop.

*Loot* Hot air balloons?

*Cogno* 122 of them, to mark the year that construction of the Wall began, will rise at the given signal along the length of the Wall.

*Loot* The Red Arrows?

*Cogno* Flying in a direct line from Segedunum to Bowness, leaving a vapour trail of purple. The colour of Imperial Rome.

*Loot* The Italian ambassador?

*Cogno* Already in the hospitality tent and slightly drunk.

## Lionel Loot meets the Minister.

*Minister* The government is exceedingly pleased with The Lionel Loot Roman Wall Experience.

*Loot* I'm sure. Especially as the theme park passes through two marginal constituencies.

*Minister* All factors are relevant. At the end of the day, given a level playing field, we have rebuffed critics claiming we neglect the rural Northern economy. The Wall's success enables us to ringfence certain priorities, and assures a customer satisfaction level commensurate with expectations.

*Loot* Customer?

*Minister* Yes, customer.

*Loot* You mean, the voters?

*Minister* The party has found the use of consumerist terminology is in tune with market trends. You requested an audience Mr Loot?

*Loot* In non-consumerist terminology, I would now like this government to remove all the restrictions as to how I make use of the Wall and surrounding land.

*Minister* Lift all restrictions?

*Loot* At least your hearing is – what? – commensurate with expectations.

*Minister* But I don't understand.

*Loot* Life is so complex, I agree. But listen, it's simple enough. The Wall is now mine. I should be allowed to do what I like with it.

*Minister* We are talking here about an important historic monument.

*Loot* And I have made this historic monument highly lucrative.

*Minister* Agreed.

*Loot* And can make it even more so.

*Minister* More so? Perhaps you could elucidate.

*Loot* Perhaps I could. Lift the restrictions and I guarantee the financial benefit to the government will be many many times what it is now. Your customers will be delighted. You could even cut taxes.

*Minister* Cut taxes?

*Loot* Quite a shock isn't it? Tax cuts for the better-off, of course.

*Minister* I see.

*Loot* Imagine. The PM need never again face the nightmare prospect of taxing the rich more than the poor.

*Minister* Give me the main bullet points of your proposal.

*Loot* Bullet points?

*Minister* Points one, two, three etc.

*Loot* Tax cuts, tax cuts, and tax cuts.

*Minister* The Wall has always had special protection. What you are asking is highly unusual.

*Loot* Imagine the beneficial headlines in the *Daily Mail*. The praise from *The Sun*. I am talking the greatest tax cuts in living memory.

*Minister* But to lift all restrictions on the Roman Wall.

*Loot* What do restrictions do – except restrict?

*Minister* Yes. I see.

*Loot* Restricted use of old stones, or £20 a month more in take-home pay.

*Minister* £20 a month?

*Loot* Like I say, tax cuts, tax cuts, and tax cuts.

*Minister* Why not simply tell me these – expansion plans?

*Loot* I am a businessman. Businessmen reveal their full plans only at the most opportune moment.

*Minister* I can assure you of this government's full confidentiality.

*Loot* I've seen their full confidentiality on the front of the tabloids. Well? I'm a busy man.

*Minister* I shall see what I can do.

A total of 23 community based workshops were held in July and August. These involved a wide variety of groups and individuals including primary and secondary schools, WI, Special Needs, Craft and Youth Groups, Children of Asylum Seekers, Elderly Day Care Users, Out of School Club.

The workshop leaders were:

- Visual Arts – Stuart Firth, Richard Jardine, Karen MacDougall, Gilly Walton
- Writing – Jim Eldridge, Janni Howker, Valerie Laws, Peter Mortimer
- Drama – Janine Birkett, Jackie Fielding

Each performance started with music from locally based musicians. These were Sue Dunn, Ruth Lambert, Roger Oram, Henry Robson, The Solway Band and Derry Yelding.