

amble.

TAKE ME
I'M YOURS

YOUR GUIDE TO INDEPENDENT CHESTER

ISSUE 1 • SUMMER 18



UNICORNS • MERMAIDS • HAPPINESS

#DISCOVERCHESTER

WELCOME



The first time I saw Chester, I drove into it in a moving van and picked up the keys to a flat on Commonhall Street. What started as seeking a new adventure after London, ended in an instant love affair. I couldn't stop walking the walls, and the meadows and feeding ducks on the canal. Weekends were all about chilled brunches on Watergate Street, Delamere Forest and discovering the hidden shops of the Rows.

As a homemaker, I was soon seeking out friends to explore with and started a lunchtime Coffee Club. The awkward small talk (which thankfully improved) centred on one thing - how tough it was to discover Chester without some serious time and hard work. Most of us had moved from bigger cities, where you're inundated with what's on and where to find it. The appetite was there, along with the sleepy surfacing of great things, but we lacked a roadmap.

Within fifteen minutes of meeting, Dave and I decided to have a go at illuminating the city's wonders and the artists behind them. Cue a good six months of head-on-table despair, cider, lightbulb moments, dramatic u-turns, hysteria, and more cider. amble was finally born inside The Chi on Garden Lane and we were elated - www.amble.to.

It's now two years later. Welcome to the first amble magazine. We are hugely thankful to our stupendous team; the twenty-one inspiring, inventive individuals who have run themselves ragged making this a reality. Thank you to the creative entrepreneurs and independent businesses who've fed this issue. And to you, for picking us up and giving us a read. We hope you find something new and exciting to support and be part of.

We want to continue to evolve and develop into something which truly reflects Chester; its imperfections and nooks and crannies, alongside all the good stuff - and we need your help to do that. Don't be shy - say hello@amble.to anytime.

Cheers,

Gem

Editor-in-Chief

THE TEAM

Gemma Glover
Editor in Chief

Dave Livesey
Creative Director

Writers

Gemma Glover
Clare Dudman
Marie-Claire Ashcroft
Ann Cooke
Graham Catlin
Helen Rutherford-Gregory
Emma Parry
Lucy Howarth
Erin Gallagher
Rachel O'Donnell
Debz Butler
Undercover Baker
Huw Williams

Proofing

Emma Rees

Designers

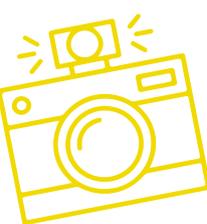
Dave Livesey
Lucy Howarth
Rachel O'Donnell
Ellena McGuinness

Published by Amble Media Limited
Registered office: 8 Chichester Street,
Chester CH1 4AD. Registered in England
and Wales (11387759).

IT'S TIME TO PLAY

GEMMA GLOVER

Kids' parties for adults with a side of gin? I never thought you'd ask. Sign me up...



Stumbling upon the world of self-proclaimed Professional Rebel, Marie-Claire Ashcroft has brought me great joy. 'You either love me or hate me,' she says, in relation to her website being a natural filter, 'It's loud and full of swear words, which appeals or puts people off.' For me, the appeal is strong – an eclectic creative who throws children's parties for adults and wants us all to take life a little less seriously. Yes, please.



Pinning down what occupies Marie-Claire's time is a challenge, and a patchwork of artsy, wellbeing and glitter-filled endeavours. So let's take this one intriguing patch at a time. Don't worry, we'll start with the parties for grown-ups seeking a break from adulting. This is the ad-hoc, Chester based event which really ignited my interest, in the way that only jousting with 6-foot balloons on giant space hoppers can. 'It's just a big escape. Kids describe adults as stressed, always in a rush, moaning. You don't tend to see depressed kids; your average young child is happy, excited and full of imagination.' And that's exactly what she tries to inspire in the wrung out and beaten down, naturally with a pic 'n' mix array of colouring in, Plasticine, googly eyes, face paints, and special guests such as magicians.

'As soon as you arrive, you write down whatever is



“
**AS SOON AS YOU ARRIVE,
YOU WRITE DOWN
WHATEVER IS BUGGING
YOU AND CHUCK IT IN THE
FU*K-IT-BUCKET.**
”

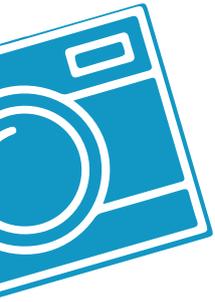
Marie-Claire regularly battles with and writes about in her blog: 'Growing the lady balls to put myself out there and talk about the depression and anxiety was hard – I was getting vulnerability hangovers – but anytime I do a share like that, I get emails from strangers saying thank you or saying it was a refreshing way to look at it. We're all different, but we all have the same types of issues.'

Perhaps due to her eclectic fight to discover what she wanted to do in life, and the magical power of numerous creative outlets, Marie-Claire also runs confidence workshops. The first trial run was back in

bugging you and chuck it in the f**k-it-bucket. We've had people spend half an hour working through all their problems – they don't want to play until it's all out.' Marie-Claire sums up the experience beautifully, 'It's just a chance to be a k*ob for a few hours and make friends. Puts a bit of sparkle into your step.' She's witnessed people transform during the event and tells me there's always at least one person who completely goes for it. Sounds super fun, even as a spectator sport. It even helps coax out the more reserved, benefiting those who struggle with social anxiety.

Which brings us swiftly to patch number two – her focus on inspiring positive mental health in others, and drawing from her own life experiences. Anxiety and depression are something

#*!



February at Telford's Warehouse. 'You use so much energy fighting your feelings and putting a good face on it. This workshop is not just about creativity – it doubles up as self-care and a chance to reinforce a positive self-identity.' The premise is wonderfully relaxed and straight-forward, 'You work on a book, *The Big Book of I'm Awesome*. You can do whatever. I love getting messy with paint, but you can collage, scrapbook, stick photos in. Part of the human condition is to look for what's wrong – which is useful – it helps us grow and learn to fix things, but not the best for our mental health. The book is good for those tough days – to remind yourself of all the great things you've done and achieved – to remember how to get through it. We too easily forget what we're capable of.'



**GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION
NOT TO BE BUSY. I DON'T
BEAT MYSELF UP FOR
THINGS I'M TOLD I SHOULD
DO, BUT DON'T WANT TO.**



Further full-day workshops are in the pipeline, alongside an online version. 'I received some lovely feedback, people letting me know it helped them feel happier. So I also want to have more casual meet-ups where people can get together and work on the book. It had a real community vibe. People were vulnerable at first but soon realised they were all similar, battling similar issues, then everyone got into it.'

Let's slide on over to patch number three, her photography business, a very happy accident. 'I took a point and shoot camera to Canada – photos are a good way for me to remember stuff as I have a really bad short-term memory due to developmental trauma. Friends started complimenting me on the shots.' The cleaning lady (at her previous 9-5 job exporting chemicals around the world), asked Marie-Claire to photograph her son's wedding, 'I'd not even been to a wedding at this point in my life!' she laughs, 'but sometimes you just have to make it up and do your best.'

Having qualified in modern languages, her family were keen for her to aim for a job at the UN. But she ultimately found translation boring and feared her poor memory would result in messing it up and triggering a

war. A much different path was called for. 'Something was nagging at me, that there was more to life than this.' The wedding shoot and occasional trade of photographs for beer became something more serious after breaking up with a partner just before going travelling. 'I just didn't feel like going anymore, so I used the money to do a foundation degree in photography. It helped me storytell with images and find my style.'

Starting her own business, however, wasn't without its challenges. 'It amplified my insecurities and self-doubt at first. I was still riding the 'should' train. It was a lot of pressure to get enough money initially so I was saying yes to any type of work, also networking and attending every seminar. I kept hearing, *you need to, have to, do this*. Suddenly I was wearing a million hats, PR, marketing, sales etc. It looked like everything had to be done a certain way and zapped all the fun.'

'At first, putting my creative self out there was exciting, but I started feeling vulnerable. I hadn't been taught how to run a business and didn't have the confidence. I found myself getting really unhappy and didn't know why this kept happening.'

Feeling that things were spiralling out of control, Marie-Claire took a break and had a word with herself. She tried to return to her priorities: creativity, spontaneity and adventure. 'I made new rules; to turn up to jobs I'd been paid for and pay my taxes. Other than that, relax. Now I've created a life for myself where if I'm knackered I work from home that day and blog or work on the happiness stuff. And I hold workshops when I'm feeling energized.'

Marie-Claire shoots events, parties, and weddings, more often than not for the non-cookie-cutter couples – people who are going for something a bit different. She's found her niche and she loves it, but she'll never let it take over, 'I've stepped out of the mentality that busy is good, we tend to wear it as a badge of honour these days. People always ask me, how are you, are you busy? And I always go, 'no!' Give yourself permission to not be busy. I don't beat myself up for things I'm told I should do, but don't want to. If I'm struggling I up my self-care, which might be a duvet day. Step off the hamster wheel – that's when some of the best ideas arrive.'

She keeps a close eye on her mental health, alongside helping others to spot the signs which call for a much-needed break, 'Get to know yourself and what you need and prioritise it. You hear about old people on their death-beds who say they wish they hadn't worked so much and spent more time with friends instead. Daring to step out and make life my own has had its challenges but it's important. I wouldn't change what I've done, I had to go through it.'

She's also a firm believer in keeping the faith, 'The person who always complains tends to have the





worst experiences. You've got to persevere. Everyone slips. Then, usually at the last minute, something comes in to save the day.'

A big believer in the power of community and support groups to help carry us through, Marie-Claire set up the, 'I Dare You Project' – let's call it the fourth and final (though no less significant) patch worn by this multifarious lady. 'It came to me one night when I couldn't sleep after coming home from a trip to Thailand. It's an online group designed to help myself and others grab life by the balls. By working together at your own pace whilst holding one another accountable, we take steps towards doing something we've always dreamt of doing. Life gets in the way and sometimes we wonder how we got to where we are, so if you don't take at least some baby steps towards something that matters to you, there's a chance you'll end up somewhere you never planned on going. In addition to your 'big dare', you also get the occasional positive dare – a reminder to get out into the world, challenge yourself and put out good vibes. It's also about connecting; everyone picks each other up. One of the starter challenges was a five-day sparkle challenge, about being more present. You got an email every day – encouraging you to have a go at meditating or little ideas for wellbeing. We've also had things like writing letters, telling someone you're proud of them – that did lead to someone getting laid!'

Despite such a dazzling array of commitments Marie-Claire is seeking more patches, 'I feel sorry for

young girls; there's so much pressure – what with photoshopped models – kids need to realise it's all boll**ks. Filters for Snapchat are dangerous too; being able to 'fix' your skin or distort yourself – feeling like the real you isn't good enough. That worries me. I'd like to do something with schools, get my message out – without the swearing!'

When she's not scheming away on her next creative project, Marie-Claire often finds herself in Chester, 'I've always been drawn back here. It's beautiful. I often go to other cities and miss it. And I love that lots of things are popping up. I remember being sixteen, and there was no culture – I think I was the first person to dye my hair a crazy colour. It felt very conservative and boring. But it's changed so much for the better with places like Telford's and Flower Cup – lots of little independents – Chester has finally caught up.'

During my research, I came across this gem of a quote from Marie-Claire, 'We're all mad, but there's only a few of us who admit it.' She laughs at the reminder, 'I did say that, and it's true. Take anyone, if you could listen into their head, it doesn't matter what background, what age, if you could hear it – we'd all get locked up.'

Find out more about Marie-Claire

www.professionalrebel.co.uk

 @ProfeshRebel





**FIT & DON'T YOU
KNOW IT.**

EMMA PARRY

The benefits of regular exercise are well-documented - especially the one where it means you get to eat cake. The evidence of so many unused gym memberships suggests even cake can't persuade many of us to exercise regularly, let alone the long list of physical and mental health benefits and even a recent TED talk on the positive changes it can make to your brain. In the hope of more guilt-free cake, I've wondered - what's the secret to convincing yourself to do exercise regularly?

Turns out it's finding something you enjoy. True, exercise will give you endorphins that make you feel invincible (briefly), and we're not suggesting you will love it when your instructor can't quite seem to count properly when you're holding plank or on what feels like your millionth burpee, but in general, finding exercise you enjoy and want to do is - spoiler alert - more likely to make you do it! Variety can be a driver too - mixing it up keeps it fresh, interesting, tests different muscles, and can suit your mood - sometimes you want a pure beast and other times a more mindful stretch is just the thing.

In selfless pursuit of doing all the hard work so you don't have to, we've looked at some of the fitness activities you can do in Chester that might finally float your exercise boat. A little bit different than a plan at the gym that's half-heartedly followed, these independents are changing the game with focused, fun, ways to get fit and stay fit. Oh, and it's in a handy week plan so you can just pin it to your fridge and off you go!

WHAT: HIP - High Intensity Pilates. This is a strong, flowing total body work out class where you'll definitely get sweaty and out of breath. Think stretches, roll downs, squats into planks, sequences with short breaks, increasing in difficulty through each set with dynamic movement, arms and legs working out together. There are optional hand weights for the hardcore.

WHO: It's best to have tried one or two of the other classes (like Pilates for beginners) or have a good level of fitness to get the most out of this class, but every level is catered for.

WHEN: 7:15 pm - booking advised as places limited to keep technique on point.

WHERE: Melody Dean Pilates, The Old Chapel, Houseteads Drive, Hoole, CH2 3DL

THE STORY: Melody's passion for Pilates began when she found it was the only thing that could help get her husband back to health after a spinal injury. She loves to share the positive impact Pilates can have on fitness, posture, injuries and mental health. Classes are social, smiley, fun, supportive and really work.

WHAT ELSE: Tai Chi, beginner and intermediate Pilates also offered, plus look out for taster sessions for inversion (headstands etc.) and aerial Pilates.

WALLET: £7 per class. Class passes available.

WEB: melodydean.com or book via Facebook facebook.com/melodydeanPilates

MONDAY

TUESDAY

WHAT: Open water swimming. In a beautiful rural setting in a small mere, a measured, buoy-marked 750m course with 300m and 450m options. Wetsuits essential (can be hired) plus swim hat. Swimming without the chlorine or the stop-start of turning at pool walls, just continuous lake to swim through at your own pace in the open air. Bliss!

WHO: For all levels, but best for confident/competent swimmers, able to swim at least 300m. You can book coaching sessions or team up with a regular or a buddy for your first time.

WHEN: May–Oct, Tuesday 6-8pm, Saturdays 9-10.30am.

WHERE: Just a few miles outside Chester at Manley Mere, Manley Lane, WA6 0PE

THE STORY: Open water swimming is increasing in popularity with tens of thousands of

swimmers and hundreds of events and venues - some of this is thanks to sports like triathlon driving awareness, but also the benefits of swimming as a stress-busting, lower impact way of increasing heart rate and flexibility. Plus it sounds cool (and really can be in the heat). Manley Mere is a National Open Water Coaching Association (nowca.org) swim venue (you'll need to sign up for £12 or bag one of the guest passes on the day).

WHAT ELSE: There's changing rooms, loos, a great cafe, a lovely social vibe, a run/walk trail around the lake, oh, and an inflatable water park and adventure trail.

WALLET: £6.50 NOWCA members (£60 for 10 swim pass), £8 non-NOWCA. Wetsuit hire from £5

WEB: manleymere.co.uk

WEDNESDAY

WHAT: One-to-one personal training in a gorgeous private studio. A great way to get kick start your fitness journey or target specific goals, especially for those put off by large gyms.

WHO: Anyone and everyone can benefit as programmes are specifically tailored to goals and abilities.

WHEN: Anytime - book an hour session when it suits you - Mon–Sat.

WHERE: Elysium Health & Fitness, The Old Smithy, Chester Road, CH3 6HJ.

THE STORY: Frustrated by working with clients in busy gyms - where some clients weren't comfortable or the right equipment was busy, Elysium was born to give more personal attention to clients wanting PT but in a way that really works for them.

Less is definitely more here - there's only ever one or two sessions going on and the gym is fully equipped - no waiting for the right equipment means your workout hour is full-on and on-programme every time. That does mean no slacking though! It got me back into the gym after an injury - when the big busy gyms felt a bit daunting.

WHAT ELSE: Quiet, peaceful area, private individual showers, professional coaches, protein shakes on offer and very tailored programmes and flexibility. Nutrition plans and remote tracking (no cheating!). Look out for offers on their Facebook page and occasional circuit group classes.

WALLET: No contract. Price depends on the time of day/week, number of sessions etc. Buddy sessions can be offered, and they will work with you to find a solution between your budget and your goals. I've found it to be very good value versus other PT.

WEB: elysiumhealthandfitness.co.uk

THURSDAY

WHAT: Density - TRX® class. Small-group, intense classes in a specialist gym space built around TRX® using your own body weight for a total body workout, supported by an eagle-eyed coach to ensure correct technique - and maximum effort!

WHO: Suitable for every level - from professional athletes to pensioners - the owner's parents are regulars, as is a World's Toughest Mudder contender

and ultra marathoner, plus the man behind the UK startup pioneering jet-suit powered human flight. Seriously, we are living in a Marvel comic.

WHEN: 17:30 - book a 'getting started' session via the website before booking on to specific classes

WHERE: S3 Fitness, Unit 64 Evans Business Centre. Minerva Avenue, CH1 4QL



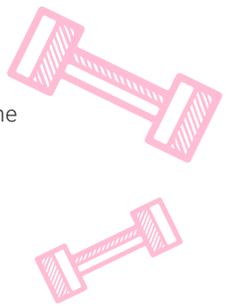
THE STORY: Ben (owner) is a TRX® Master Trainer and has been using this kit for years to help people achieve their goals, whether that's been to lose weight, tone up, summit a mountain (it helped get me up Kilimanjaro!), or injury rehab. If you've not seen it, go on the website and see what it's all about - the TRX (R symbol) straps assist in doing a huge variety of exercises and moves that engage the whole body...and the best bit - you control how easy or hard to make it. You can get all the benefits of push-ups by doing a standing chest press without having to take your whole body weight or, at the other end of the scale, challenge yourself to

do push-ups using the straps - tougher than using the floor.

WHAT ELSE: A whole host of kit mixed into classes including sandbags, peg boards, RIP (R symbol) trainers, boxing moves - variety is guaranteed.

WALLET: £8 per session (45 minutes), memberships available.

WEB: s3fitness.co.uk



FRIDAY

WHAT: Hot Yin Yoga... by candlelight. The most lovely end to a frazzled week - this session works your body with poses held for a little longer than normal, to deeply stretch and give you time and space to make peace with the week and relax your body and your mind. Not a 'just lie on the mat' session, this is work, but in an 'ahhh' way, not a 'grrr' way.

WHO: Suitable for all - alternative poses will be given for different levels, but I'd suggest trying a standard yoga class or a shorter hot class first to really get the benefits of this one.

WHEN: 18.30

WHERE: We Love Yoga, Hoole Road, Flookersbrook, CH2 3AF

THE STORY: Hot Yoga can benefit flexibility, balance, lung capacity, and mental health through focus and relaxation - a warm room (105-110 degrees Fahrenheit) can help achieve deeper stretches and can also work you harder but weirdly feel more relaxing. The quiet space and candlelight on a Friday night with Dionne's thoughtful and in-touch style is a real haven and you leave feeling refreshed and fantastic.

WHAT ELSE: Hot, warm and ambient yoga and Pilates classes regularly throughout the week.

WALLET: £10 per session or buy class passes (book via Mindbody app). Bring your own towel (can be hired, mats provided).

WEB: weloveyogachester.co.uk

SATURDAY

WHAT: Park Run. Timed, measured 5k - run or walk or a bit of both. Great community feel (it's run by volunteers) in a picturesque setting with huge encouragement and support. Not too hilly - a few little bumps, two laps of a mainly tarmac path. A great way to start the weekend - with a sense of achievement and brunch earned (see www.amble.to for our brunch recommendations).

WHO: Everyone - and their dog, and their baby, and their friends!

WHEN: 9am (get there with a little time to spare).

WHERE: Countess of Chester Country Park, Valley Drive, CH2 1UK. Park in the pub - or walk/run there as limited parking.

THE STORY: Park Run organises weekly, free-timed runs in parks to help get people into fitness

- there are now over 500 locations and Park Run tourism is a thing. Chester has run nearly 100 runs and has had over 5000 runners.

Sign up in advance on their website so you have your barcode for timing and can get your results on the website.

WHAT ELSE: Join the runners for coffee afterwards at The Little Owl pub for 9.30am. Volunteers are always needed - give back and give them a Saturday morning. Or be a Park Run tourist - Delamere and Ewloe are nearby. Support the organisation with T-shirt purchases and engage with sponsors who help make it happen. Set a goal to aim for your milestone 50 park run T-shirt!

WALLET: Free!

WEB: parkrun.org.uk

SUNDAY

Day off! Hot-foot it to some of those beer gardens we've listed on pages 24 & 25!