



It's wall going on

Here's a taste of what's on across
Hadrian's Wall Country this month.

Birdoswald Roman Fort: Autumn Watch – every weekend from September 24 to October 16, www.english-heritage.org.uk/hadrianswall

In amongst the badgers, red squirrels and swallows to be discovered around the fort, English Heritage has created a selection of activities for little ones.

Segedunum Roman Fort and Museum, Wallsend: Cullercoats: An artists' colony by the sea – from October 22, www.twmuseums.org.uk/segedunum

Cullercoats was the centre of a thriving artistic community in the late 19th and early 20th Centuries. Its story is told through a selection of paintings and original prints from the collections of North Tyneside Council and Tyne & Wear Archives & Museums.

Chesters Roman Fort: Roaming Roman Trail & Dress as a Roman soldier for children – October 22-30, 10am-4pm, www.english-heritage.org.uk/hadrianswall

After leaving their posts to shelter from the terrible storm, some mini model soldiers have become lost. Can you find them?

Walby Farm Park, near Carlisle: Horrible Hallowe'en fun for all the family – October 29, 6-9pm, www.walbyfarmpark.co.uk

Arrive in fancy dress for a chance to win the competition for grown-ups and kids, bring a carved pumpkin to be judged 'best in show' and have a go at traditional Hallowe'en games.

Carlisle Castle: Ghost and Ghastly Story Tours – October 24-October 28, 10.45am, 12.30pm and 2.45pm, www.english-heritage.org.uk/carlislecastle

Themed guided tours for all the family. To book please contact the site on 01228 591922.

*Please check each event for costs.

•Hadrian's Wall Country Bus, the AD122, runs until October 30, providing an easy and environmentally friendly way to enjoy the Hadrian's Wall World Heritage Site. It runs from Newcastle Central Station and Carlisle with connecting services to Bowness-on-Solway. See www.hadrians-wall.org for places to go, things to see and bus ticket booking discounts.

Playing before 2,000 fans at Newcastle City Hall is a thrilling prospect for even the most seasoned veterans in the music industry and for some it can be the pinnacle of their career. But for talented Gateshead-based indie-rock band The Soviets, it's where the journey began.

It was Sunday, February 7, 2010, and brothers Micky and Stephen Cochrane, then appearing as The Known World, were chosen by actor Tim Healy and others to receive a grant from the Sammy Johnson Memorial Fund.

Not only that, they were also invited to appear at the famous Sunday for Sammy fundraising alongside Mark Knopfler, Kevin Whately and other esteemed figures on the entertainment scene. Not bad for a band who were still to play their first gig.

"We hit it lucky, especially now, with money being taken from Arts Council," says singer Micky. "We were able to buy some equipment and a PA system from it, so it really set us on our way."

Despite the concert being their first public performance, stage fright was not an option.

"We didn't have time. It all happened so quickly that I couldn't really take it all in," laughs guitarist and primary song writer Stephen. "They said, 'Right, you're on now, go', and we ran on to the stage in the pitch black. I couldn't see a thing; I was too busy trying to find the jack lead to plug into my guitar."

Since then, The Soviets – now including Andy on lead guitar, Russell on bass and Craig behind the drum kit – have capitalised on their opportunity and gone on to play shows all around the country, including a support slot for the Sunshine Underground at Newcastle's Riverside.

Their emotional lyrics and raw guitar hooks are evident on singles including The Waitress and the poignant, politically-driven All the People Want is a Wage and have also garnered them national attention. One of their admiring champions has been BBC Radio 6's Tom Robinson.

Their success also saw them voted on to the main stage at the ill-fated Ignition Festival (due to take place at Newcastle Racecourse in August but cancelled at short notice). "We were gutted about that," says Stephen. "But you move on."

Disappointed, but not ones to dwell, the band are looking forward and preparing to release their debut LP, the eclectic You Are Not the End of the World, via their own label, Reckless General Records.

A fruitful post-Soviet union

No Iron Curtain will keep North East indie band The Soviets from their growing legion of fans, as **Ian McCabe** finds out.

"It's not exactly a concept album but there is a theme running through it," states Stephen. "There's love, relationships and politics, but it's really about what everyone is doing and what they're affected by in everyday life, the themes of life."

"I tried to take the songs that say, these are the kind of things you're going to go through in life and, by the way, you are not the end of the world. I think the title works in that way."

To help bring the album into existence, the band have taken advantage of the fundraising website Pledge Music which calls for donations from fans in return for a copy of the record and exclusive content.

In The Soviets' case, this included the guitar that the album was written on, which sold for £500.

"It was just lying around because I had a new one and thought why not?" beamed Stephen.

"I thought we could sell it but couldn't believe it when we did it so quickly. I wish we put more stuff on there because we had a lot of people saying, 'Oh, I wanted that'."

It's a unique initiative which is befitting of the band's tag: "A revolutionary council of workers; a democratic voice."

It has attracted popular acts such as Cast, The Subways and Fun Loving Criminals, with a percentage of the earnings going to a charity of the artist's choosing.

"A lot of big names are actually using it,"

says Micky. "It takes out the need to rely on a label to give you budget, so you can just go out and make the album."

"I told the lads, 'I think this is a great way of raising money for the album, plus it's good publicity too.' And it's proving true; we just reached our full target. It's a great scheme and they're brilliant too, always keeping in touch and giving us advice."

"We're raising funds for Metro Radio's Cash for Kids from it, too. It's a really positive scheme."

You Are Not the End of the World is expected to be released this November. Until then, The Soviets are trendsetting for other unsigned regional acts and are set to embark on their latest national tour, including a play-back party for the record on September 30 at the Riverside, Newcastle.

Find out more about The Soviets on www.thesoviets.co.uk and also visit www.pledgemusic.com/projects/thesoviets

