

Belfast's Best

THE GEORGE BEST TRAIL

George Best's East Belfast

This trail will bring you up close to east Belfast as it was in George's day. You'll see the everyday places that formed part of his daily life - his local school and playing fields, the chippy where he went for a fish supper, the cinema where he watched the most recent films and the ice cream parlour where he'd get a 'slider' or a cone.

Much has changed since George's day but the warmth and humour of east Belfast folk remains strong, as does the pride they feel for 'the Belfast boy'. You'll find many loyal Manchester United fans among them, only too happy to discuss their team's ups and downs.

So we're off. Start your trail from EastSide Visitor Centre at C.S. Lewis Square. Catch the Glider from the city centre and hop off at either of the Connswater or Holywood Arches stops. There is also a Belfast Bikes docking station at C.S. Lewis Square.

Use the Connswater Community Greenway to walk or cycle to the various points of interest along this self-guided trail. The full route will take approximately 1½ to 2 hours to complete. Wear comfortable footwear and appropriate clothing for the weather. Take care when crossing road junctions. Details of how to visit George Best's grave at Roselawn Cemetery can be found in Section 5.

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Home Turf

PAGE 19



Former
Lishasharragh
Secondary
School

Museum
of Orange
Heritage



6 Metro

1

Glentoran

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Cregagh Rd

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Woodstock

PAGE 09



4 Metro



6 Metro

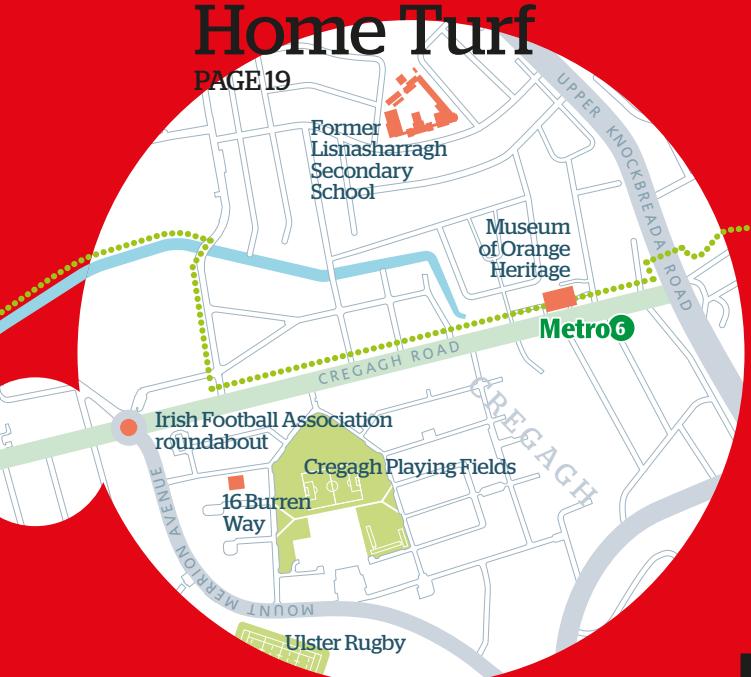
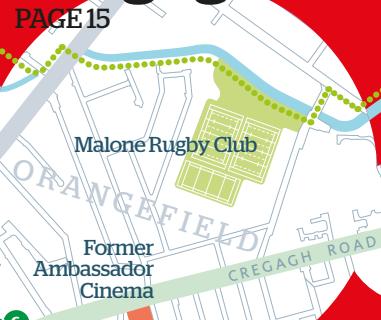
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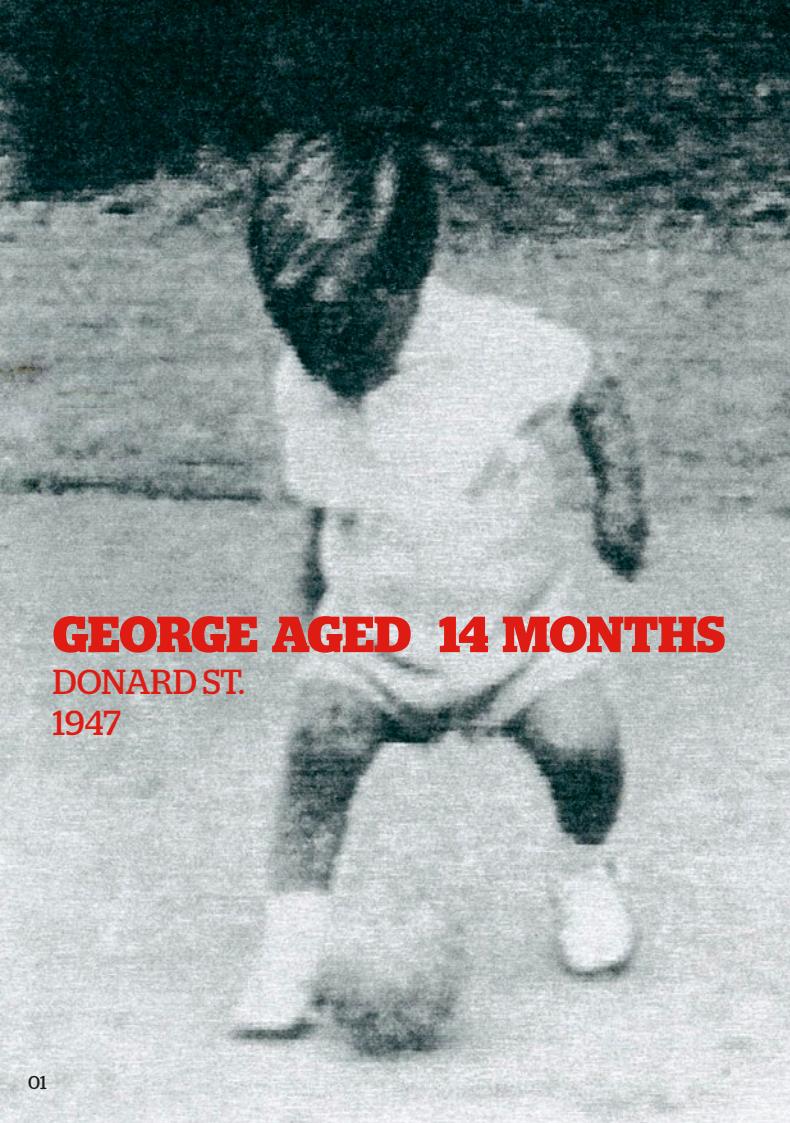
500 metres

5

Final Whistle

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GEORGE AGED 14 MONTHS

DONARD ST.
1947

A Belfast Boy

George Best was a footballing marvel. To this day he stands head and shoulders above most of the rest. On the field, he could dribble, tackle and score goals. Off the field, he was handsome, charming and witty. No wonder he earned the tag, "the Fifth Beatle".

George was born on 22nd May 1946, the first child of a working class family in east Belfast. His father Richard, or 'Dickie', was a skilled lathe operator in the Harland & Wolff shipyard. His mother, Ann, was a warm, softly spoken mother who instilled respect in her children.

A phenomenon almost from the moment he could first kick a football, George's talent was spotted by the Manchester United scout, Bob Bishop. He sent a telegram to the team's manager, Matt Busby, which simply read; "I think I've found you a genius".

So at 15, George left home for Manchester, but desperately homesick, fled back to Belfast after only 24 hours. Fortunately he returned to Manchester United two weeks later and in September 1963, he made his debut against West Bromwich Albion. He went on to make 490 appearances for Manchester United, scoring 179 goals.

In his day, 'the Belfast boy' was a global sports celebrity. Pelé, the legendary Brazilian footballer, famously called him "the world's greatest player ever". This guide will introduce you to the people and places that shaped George in his formative years and give you a flavour of his life in east Belfast, before he hit the big time.

Football is part of the lifeblood of Belfast, particularly in its working class areas. The city supports 31 Association Football Clubs, most of which are, like local club Glentoran, semi professional.

From EastSide Visitor Centre follow the Connswater Community Greenway to Mersey Street where you will find Glentoran's football ground, The Oval.

George's dad, Dickie, played football when he was young and was spotted by a scout for local team Glentoran. He signed for Cliftonville for a while and continued to play in various leagues right up until he was 37 years old.

Interestingly, Glentoran was the first club to notice George's talent, but they dismissed him on the basis that he was too light, too weak and too small to be a footballer. Manchester United's local scout, Bob Bishop, made a very different assessment of his talent and soon the young George was off to Manchester to start his career.

Glentoran





Desano's Ice Cream Parlour

Desano's is a local favourite and George loved the ice cream from this family owned shop. To this day, Desano's traditional Italian ice cream is served either in a cone, with a chocolate flake, in which case it's a '99', or between two wafers, called a 'slider' in Belfast.

George always loved to visit here when he returned home. His sister Barbara even managed to take some Desano's ice cream to the Cromwell Hospital in London when George was ill.

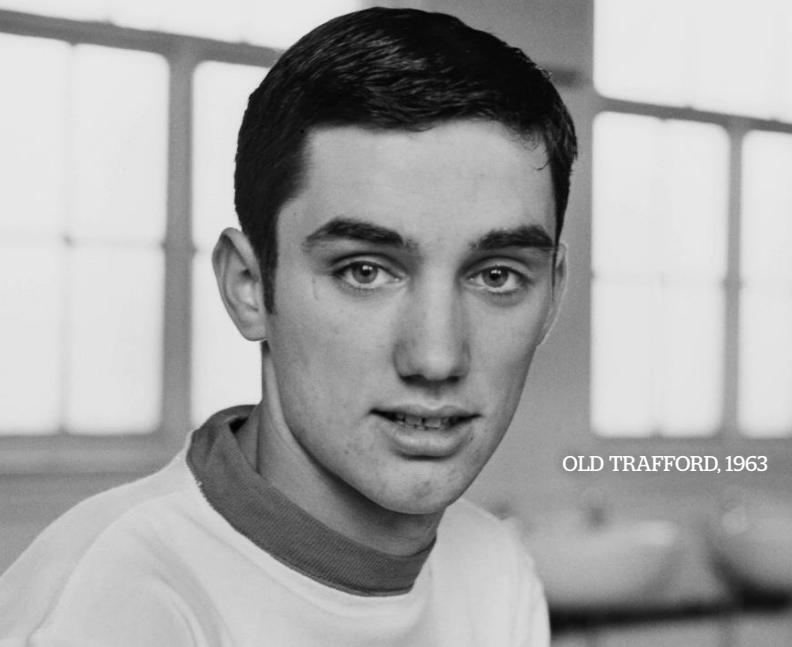


The Oval

Glentoran Football Club has a history that goes back to 1882, and The Oval on Mersey Street has been their home ground since 1892. George's paternal grandfather, James 'Scottie' Best, lived nearby. As a young boy, George was a keen 'Glens' supporter and he came here to watch them play almost every week with his father or grandfather.

Many former Glentoran players such as Danny Blanchflower, Peter Doherty, Billy Bingham, Jimmy McIlroy and Terry Conroy have gone on to play for teams in England and Scotland.

GLENTOAN.CO.UK



OLD TRAFFORD, 1963

To Manchester

"At Old Trafford there are seven or eight youths aged 15 to 18, who are known as apprentice professionals. They are paid £9 a week, £4 of which is for lodgings. If the team wins, there is a bonus of ten shillings for each player . . . Besides matches in the winter, we play in a summer tournament in Switzerland, which United have won for the last five years . . . It's a great life and I wouldn't give it up for anything."

George writing in the Lisnasharragh School Magazine

The Oval



A return visit

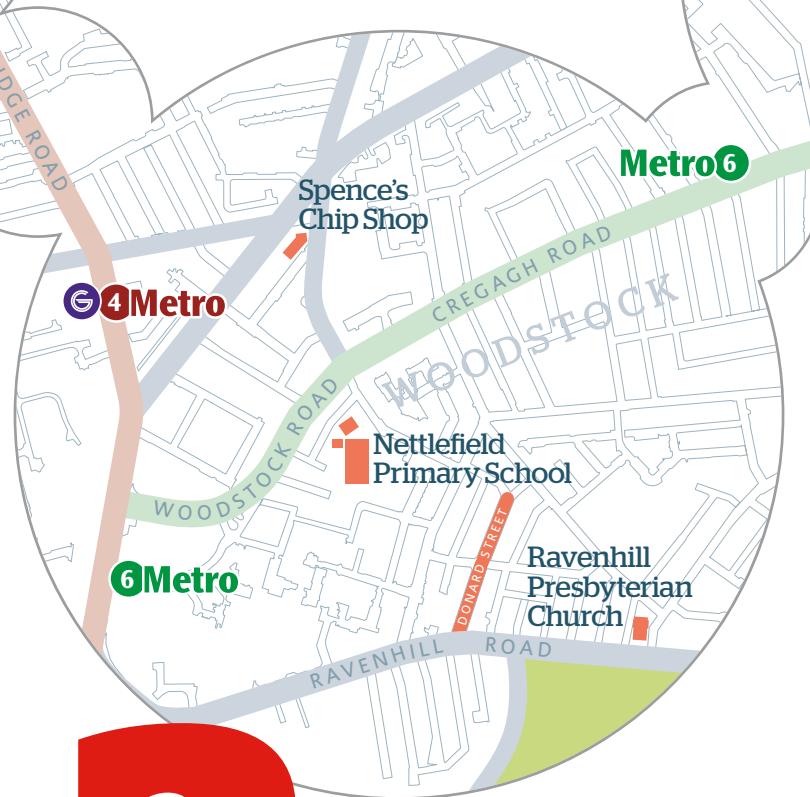
In August 1982 Glentoran were lined up to play a friendly against Manchester United. The occasion was to mark the club's centenary.

In the starting line up for the Glens that afternoon was none other than George Best, who had been turned down by them some twenty years previously for being too small and weak!

No. 11 - George Best

2

**CHURCH,
CHIPS, &
AN EXCELLENT
REPORT**



This section of the trail lets you explore the Woodstock Road where George went to church and also enjoyed a traditional 'fish supper'.

George took a bus to Nettlefield Primary School and every morning he would dribble a tennis ball from his house to the bus stop, then jump off the bus and dribble the ball all the way into school. The process would be repeated on his way home. Needless to say, the tennis ball became very bald!

As his 1953 school report shows (see overleaf), George was happy and conscientious and was described by his teacher as an "excellent" pupil.

Break times were spent playing football in the school yard. This usually meant playing with George's old tennis ball, because due to post-war rationing, plastic and rubber balls were hard to come by. The boys might even have used an old, burst leather ball, stuffed full of rags or newspapers to keep it in shape.

Woodstock

NETTLEFIELD COUNTY PRIMARY SCHOOL BELFAST

REPORT OF PROGRESS AND ATTENDANCE

For the term ending 31st December, 1953.

Name of Pupil George Best Class Ib.

Number of Pupils in Class 44 Place in Class 11th

SUBJECTS	TOTAL
READING	100
SPELLING	92
WRITING	94
COMPOSITION	100
GRAMMAR AND CONSTRUCTIVE ENGLISH	88
ARITHMETIC	92
DRAWING F. M.	76
GEOGRAPHY	
NEEDLEWORK	V.G.

No. of Days Absent 3½ Punctuality: Very good.

Home Lessons Excellent. He neatly works in the class.

Conduct: Excellent.

Principal's Signature: A. H. M. Roberts.

George Best.

MARADONA
GOODPELÉ
BETTERGEORGE
BEST*

*BELFAST TRUISM

Donard Street

George spent a lot of time with his maternal grandparents, the Withers, who lived on Donard Street, close to Nettlefield Primary School. He would often go to Granny Withers for lunch . . . not that he stopped long to eat. For George, that meant wasting precious football time.



George, his parents and sister Carol, lived in the Donard Street house for a year before they moved into Burren Way. It was here that George started to kick a ball. There is a wonderful photograph of him (above and on Page 1), wearing his nappy and kicking a ball outside his grandparents' house at the entrance to the alleyway (pictured below). Even at that tender age, the image reveals the poise and balance that were the hallmarks of his footballing artistry.



Ravenhill Presbyterian Church

George was very fond of his Grandad Withers and on Sundays, he and the other Best children would go with him to this church and sit in the family pew for the service.

Just before the minister delivered his sermon, all the children left the main church and went into another room for Sunday School. Afterwards, the family usually went back to Donard Street for Sunday lunch.



Spence's Chip Shop

Eddie Spence's Chip Shop was, and still is, something of an institution in east Belfast. It was founded in 1921 and some would say it serves the best fish and chips in the area.

The Bests certainly loved to go there . . . George was particularly fond of the crispy scrapings from the fryer.

If you visit Spence's look out for the small exhibition dedicated to George in one corner of the chip shop.

It should take no more than half an hour or so to walk the length of the Cregagh Road. But take your time and make sure you call in and refresh yourself at one of its many coffee shops or bakeries.

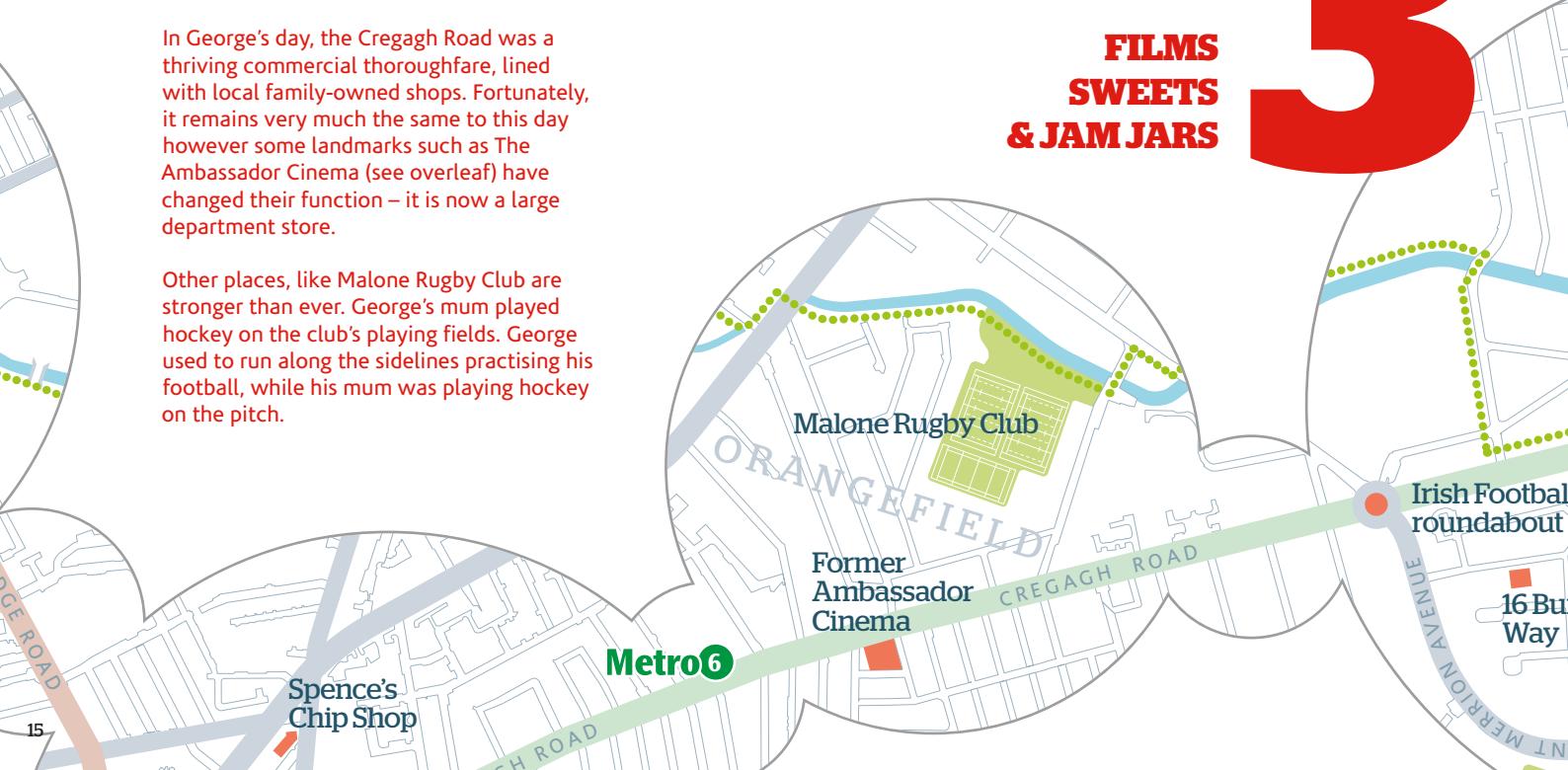
In George's day, the Cregagh Road was a thriving commercial thoroughfare, lined with local family-owned shops. Fortunately, it remains very much the same to this day however some landmarks such as The Ambassador Cinema (see overleaf) have changed their function – it is now a large department store.

Other places, like Malone Rugby Club are stronger than ever. George's mum played hockey on the club's playing fields. George used to run along the sidelines practising his football, while his mum was playing hockey on the pitch.

Cregagh Road

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FILMS
SWEETS
& JAM JARS





Trolley bus on the Cregagh Road



Former Ambassador Cinema

Growing up

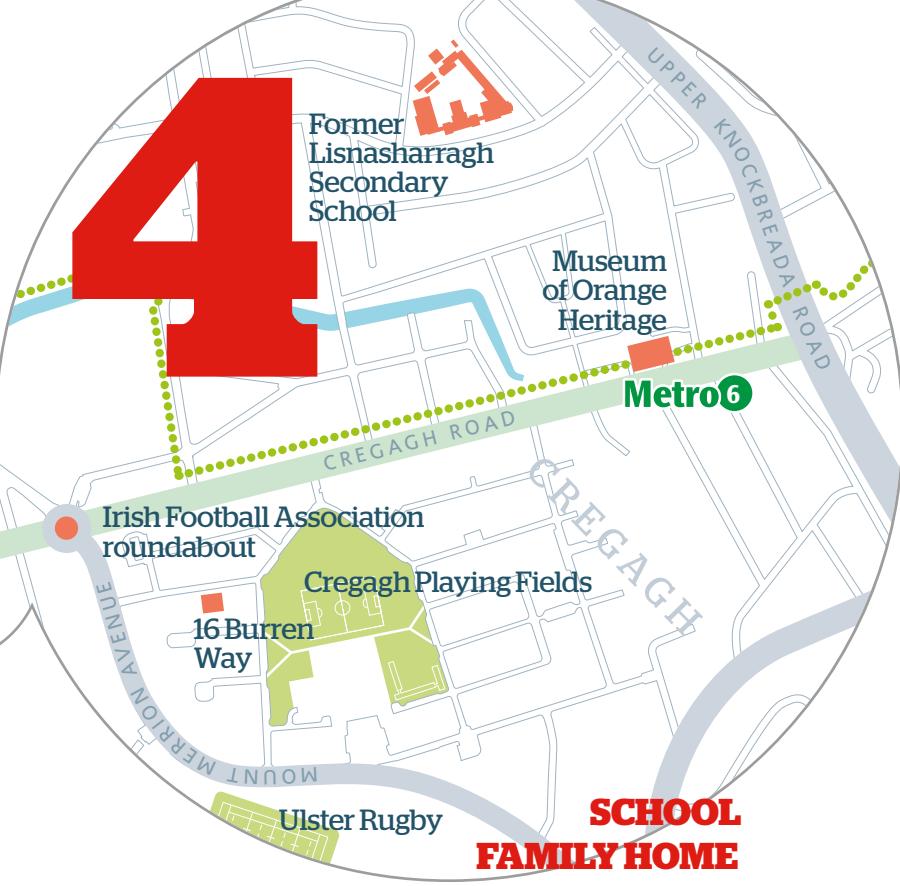
George came from a solid working class background. His dad brought home his pay packet every week, while mum, who sometimes worked part time, managed the home and raised their family.

In the 1950s and 1960s, money was tight and working class families like the Bests didn't enjoy the sort of luxuries that are taken for granted today. A typical 1950s home had a cooker, vacuum cleaner and a plug-in radio, but only one third of households had a washing machine. Few households owned a car or a refrigerator, so food shopping was part of the daily routine. It was quite normal for a housewife to visit separate shops to buy bread, meat, vegetables and fish. This meant that the Cregagh Road was an important shopping hub for the Best household, and others in the Cregagh Estate . . . and of course, it still is.

Ambassador Cinema

The Ambassador Cinema opened in 1936, the boom period of cinema history. Art deco in style, its 1030 seats offered the residents of Cregagh an escape to the glamour and razzmatazz of Hollywood. During the Second World War, cinemas like the Ambassador played a vital role in boosting public morale. Newsreels kept the audiences informed about what was happening on the front line.

The young George Best would have come here with his friends for many a Saturday afternoon matinee, shouting support to their heroes, and booing the villains in such films as Hopalong Cassidy, Quatermass and the Pit, Shane, The Robe, Spartacus and Zorro. He may not even have had to pay – a glass shortage when George was young meant that the cinema would let you in for free if you turned up with a jam jar!



Home Turf

**SCHOOL
FAMILY HOME
& FIRST KICK**

By following Map 4, you can explore Cregagh Estate and the places that were closest to George's heart - nowhere more so than his home at 16 Burren Way.

Cregagh Estate was built in the late 1940s and is characterised by its unusual flat roofs. This was George's home turf until he moved to Manchester.

In the autumn of 1957, aged 11, he won a scholarship to Grosvenor High School, which at that time was in west Belfast. But George was far from happy at Grosvenor. His grades fell and he frequently 'mitched' off school. One of the reasons for this was that rugby was the chosen sport at Grosvenor, so George couldn't play his beloved football. Ironically, George's house in the Cregagh Estate was only a long-ball from Ravenhill (Kingspan Stadium) the home of Ulster Rugby. When George visited the stadium many years later he received a standing ovation from the crowd.

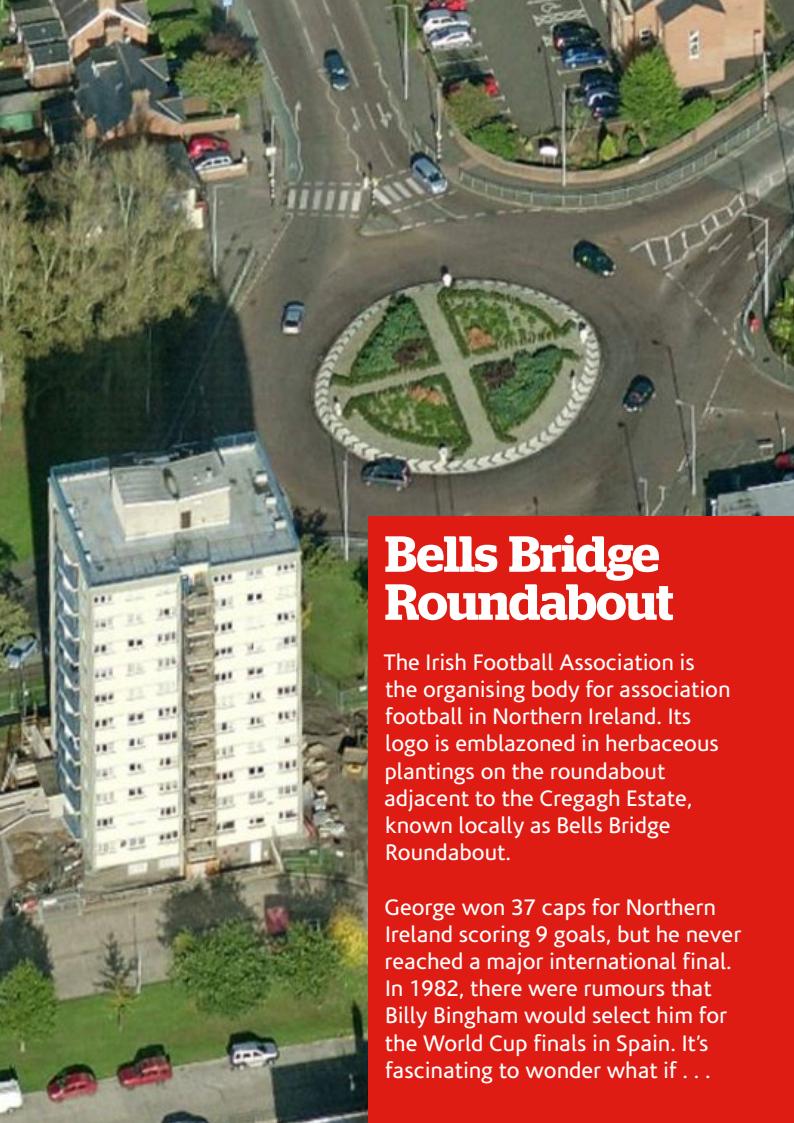
So the decision was made that George should transfer to the now closed Lisnasharragh Secondary School. Reunited with his friends and selected for the school football team, his grades quickly improved. George thrived at Lisnasharragh and was made a prefect in his final year.

Cregagh Estate

As a boy, George played football on open playing fields at the centre of Cregagh Estate with his friends and team mates in Cregagh Boys' Club. Their changing room was a cold, damp store room at the end of Burren Way (you can still see the store doors today), but George and his friends didn't mind – all they wanted to do was play football. Cregagh Playing Fields have since been protected in perpetuity through a legal Deed of Dedication between Belfast City Council and Fields in Trust.

George's dad, Dickie, used to coach him for hours. Dickie had been a quick, agile footballer and he passed these skills on to his son. However, he didn't go along to watch many of George's games, as it made George nervous and he didn't want to put his son off.

George's mum, Ann, played her part too. At half time on winter days, she would arrive on the pitch with mugs of hot Oxo for the team, or in the summer, slices of fresh orange. She used to take great pride in washing the team's kit, scrubbing the jerseys on a washing board and even pegging the socks out on the line so they all faced the same way.



Bells Bridge Roundabout

The Irish Football Association is the organising body for association football in Northern Ireland. Its logo is emblazoned in herbaceous plantings on the roundabout adjacent to the Cregagh Estate, known locally as Bells Bridge Roundabout.

George won 37 caps for Northern Ireland scoring 9 goals, but he never reached a major international final. In 1982, there were rumours that Billy Bingham would select him for the World Cup finals in Spain. It's fascinating to wonder what if . . .



**“I
think
I’ve found
you a
genius”**

Bob Bishop
MANCHESTER UNITED TALENT SCOUT

16 Burren Way

GEORGEBESTHOUSE.COM

In January 1949, Dickie and Ann, and their young family of George (aged 2) and Carol, moved into their new home at 16 Burren Way. The Cregagh housing estate was newly built and the house featured the very height of luxury – an inside bathroom. George's sister Barbara was born in 1952 and after he moved to Manchester, 16 Burren Way became home to his twin sisters Julie and Grace and then his young brother, Ian.

In order to retain the heritage of this special home, local regeneration charity, EastSide Partnership, purchased 16 Burren Way from the family following the passing of George's father in 2011. There are regular tours and visitors can now even stay here through AirBnB. George's room has been restored to how it would have looked in the 1950s and includes a Wolverhampton Wanderers football kit – the team George supported growing up. Guests can browse copies of George's old school reports donated by the Best family and enjoy the unique 'Tunnel' exhibition charting George's extraordinary football career. Framed family portraits help to remind you this was a warm and welcoming family home and somewhere which George loved to return to throughout his life.

Schomberg House

ORANGEHERITAGE.CO.UK

The Museum of Orange Heritage (Schomberg House), on the Cregagh Road, is the headquarters of the Orange Order. This institution remembers and celebrates the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, when King William III defeated King James II in Ireland. George's father and grandfather were members of the Orange Order and the Royal Black Perceptory. One year, George took part in the annual celebrations and Dickie got him a collarette to wear, which is on display.

DREAMS OF GLORY



16 BURREN WAY



16 BURREN WAY

HUMBLE BEGINNINGS



16 BURREN WAY



9 Ryecroft Ave,
Chorlton,
M15 21.

Thursday 11/15.

Dear Mum + Dad,

Well we done it! We won 3-0. It was fabulous! Steve said the crowd think I'm another Johnny Berry. I started on the left wing but switched with Willie Anderson. I laid on two of our goals. Everyone was very pleased they said I was the best forward. It was a great feeling playing in front of such a big crowd. The noise kept buzzing in my head.

SMASHING!

We play Staff Wed. now in the quarter-finals (Away) I'm just going to the ground to get my wages. I think I've earned them. I'm dead beat. Maybe if I'm lucky Joe will give me something extra (Bonus?). Wilf McGuinness told me after the match he had put my name forward for Irelands Youth team. Well that's really not much to say. I just wanted to let you know how we went on. Love to Carol & Baby,

Your loving Son,

George

XXXXX > XXXXX
~> X XX > XX

The Final Whistle

George Best passed away in London's Cromwell Hospital at 12.55pm on 25th November, 2005, aged 59.

For his dad, Dickie, there was never any question that his son would be brought back to his home city to be buried. On 3rd December, after a private blessing at the family home and a public service at Stormont, the cortege moved off to a private burial at Roselawn Cemetery.

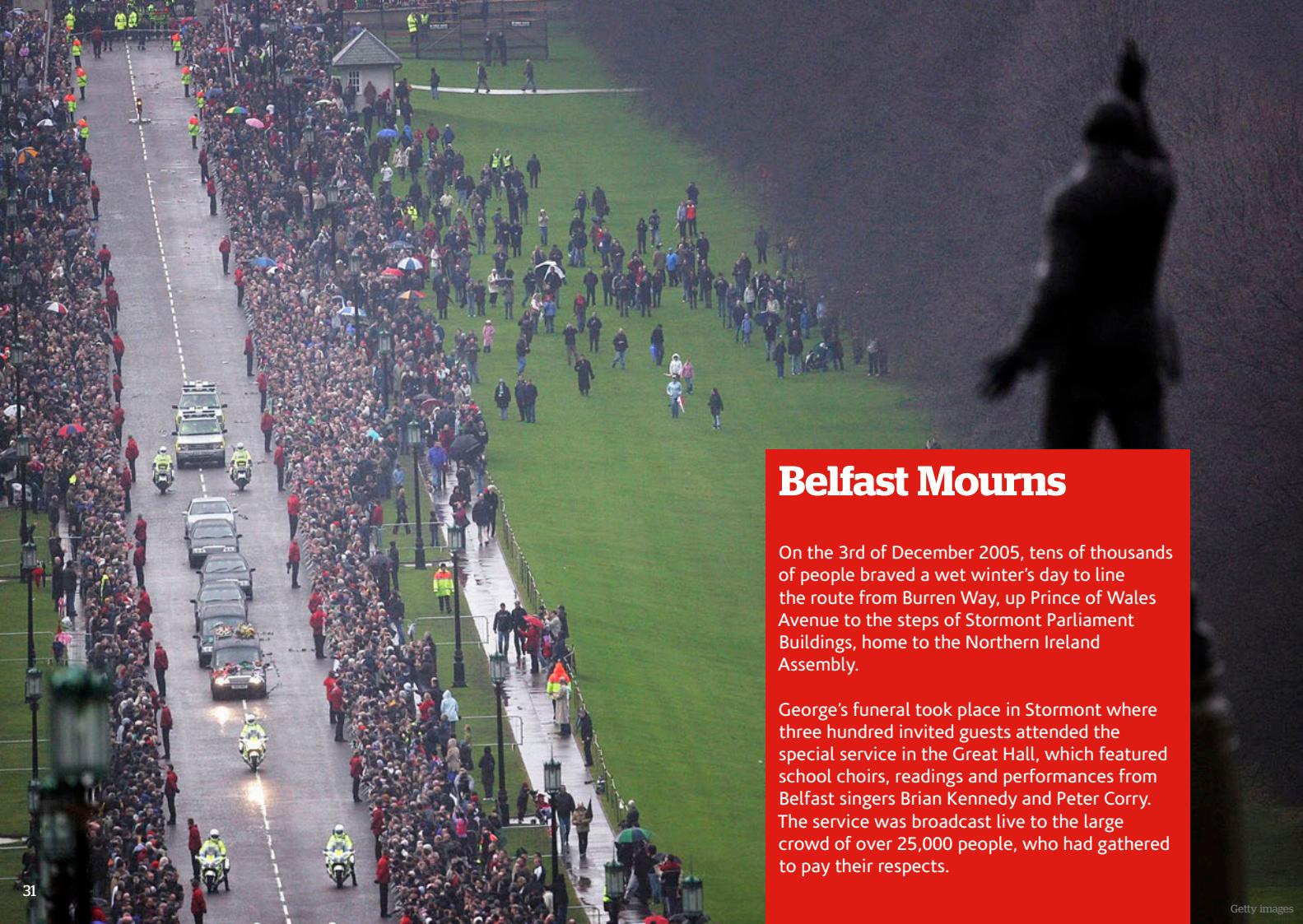
George was buried beside his mother as per his wishes, their grave (S295) is marked by a plain and simple headstone.

The cemetery is situated on the Ballygowan Road, in the Castlereagh Hills on the outskirts of east Belfast. To get there, take Ulsterbus no. 12 from Laganside bus centre, Oxford Street in Belfast city centre.

5

HIS FUNERAL
HIS LEGACY
& FOUNDATION

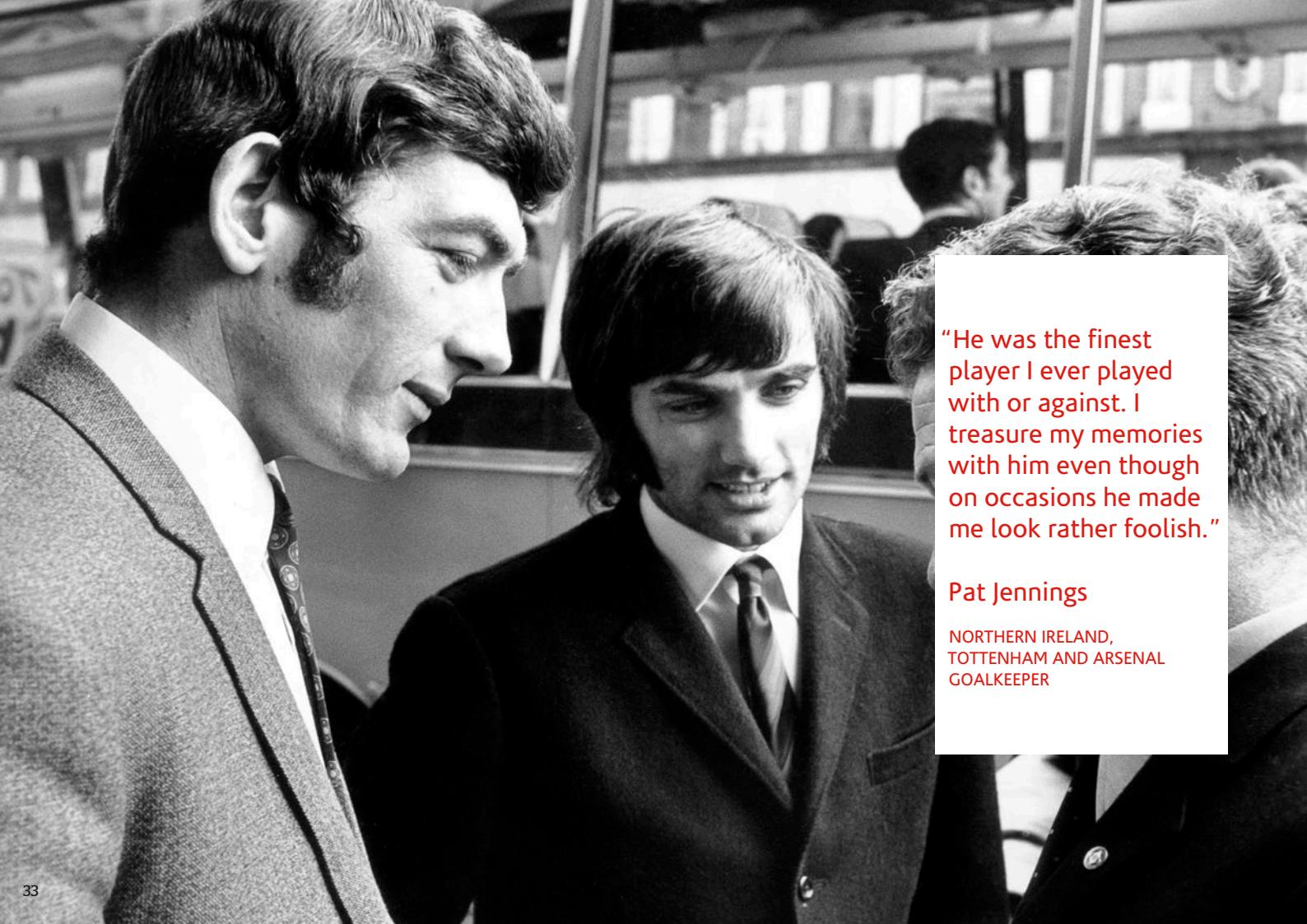




Belfast Mourns

On the 3rd of December 2005, tens of thousands of people braved a wet winter's day to line the route from Burren Way, up Prince of Wales Avenue to the steps of Stormont Parliament Buildings, home to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

George's funeral took place in Stormont where three hundred invited guests attended the special service in the Great Hall, which featured school choirs, readings and performances from Belfast singers Brian Kennedy and Peter Corry. The service was broadcast live to the large crowd of over 25,000 people, who had gathered to pay their respects.



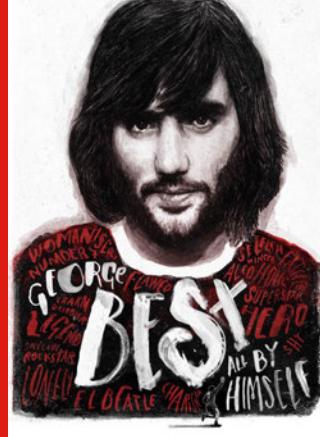
"He was the finest player I ever played with or against. I treasure my memories with him even though on occasions he made me look rather foolish."

Pat Jennings

NORTHERN IRELAND,
TOTTENHAM AND ARSENAL
GOALKEEPER

The legend lives on

EastSide Visitor Centre

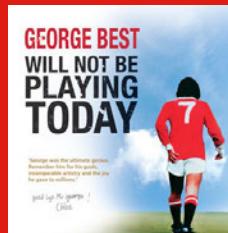


Poster for the documentary
George Best: All By Himself

Ulster Bank £5 note



35 Airport renamed, 2006



Literary tribute



Subbuteo figures



CONNswATER COMMUNITY
GREENWAY

The George Best Trail was developed as part of the Connswater Community Greenway, a 9km linear park in east Belfast, following the course of the Connswater, Knock and Loop Rivers. The Greenway is a visionary urban regeneration project that is transforming east Belfast through the creation of vibrant, attractive, safe and accessible parkland and pedestrian/ cycle routes for leisure, recreation, community events and activities.

This is a self-guided trail. Check out VisitEastSide.com to book a guided tour. To book a stay in the George Best House visit GeorgeBestHouse.com



/EASTSIDE VISITOR CENTRE



/EASTSIDE VC

VisitEastSide.com