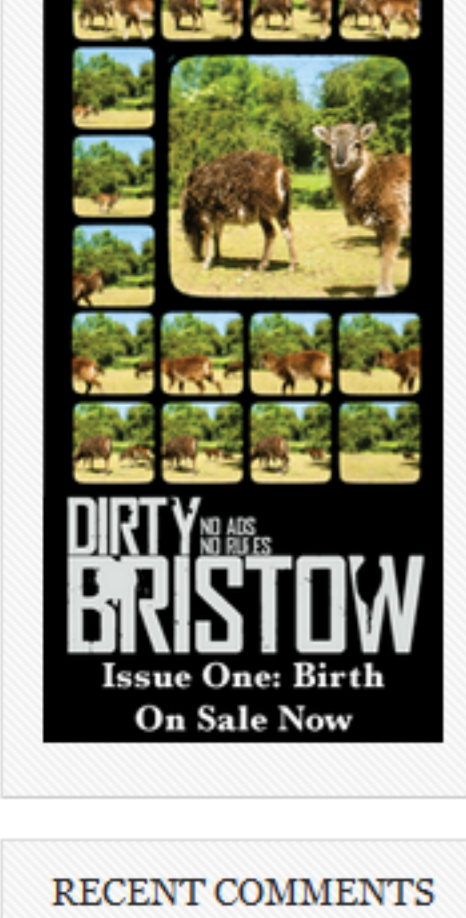


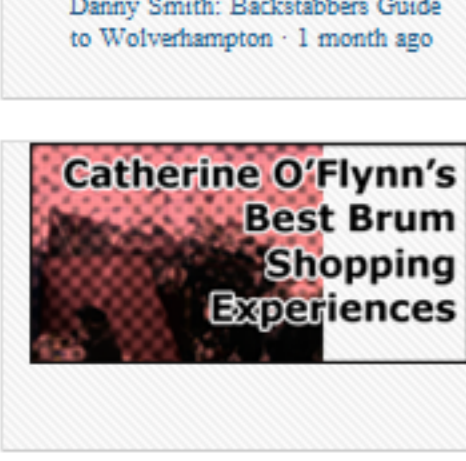


Birmingham: It's Not Shit loves Birmingham, its people, arts, animals, buildings, parks, grass verges, factories and bus stops. We've even got a soft spot for the Black Country.

BiNS runs The Brummie of the Year Award, Talk Like a Brummie Day and organises odd stuff like spending all day on the eleven bus.



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Birmingham's emotional wellbeing* on Saturday 28th of May 2011 07:31: 57.8 % (average)

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*Every ten seconds this site reads the 1000 latest Tweets from within a 10 mile radius of the centre of Birmingham and rates the words against a database.

How does this work?

Danny Smith: Winterval starts here

1 November 2010 By Danny Smith

The opinions of Danny Smith do not necessarily reflect the views of the publishers of this blog, its affiliates, or any sane adult human beings. He currently lives in your cupboard, watching, always watching.

Last year Birmingham City Council held a Christmas lights ceremony that ended in what most called a 'fiasco'. Our crap Altamont was down to nobody guessing that one of the biggest bands of the moment giving a free concert would be popular.

This year instead of a big fuss there will be a Christmas parade. In November. One month and ten days before Christmas, reindeer and whatnot will be kicking off our celebrations. With no pretence at trying to encompass other celebrations to draw out the shopping season, at least with 'Winterval' they were trying. Its an old rote that Christmas starts earlier and earlier each year but five weeks before Christmas is bordering on silly, seeing as most men are still be scurrying around in the dark on Christmas eve wondering if a bottle of screen wash is a suitable present for a ten year old. Granted, Jesus was probably born in April but lets try to stay within December eh?

The Thursday after we welcome the disruptive crapfest most call the 'German market' but the council insist calling the 'Frankfurt Market' because according to the website, 'Birmingham has been twinned with Frankfurt for more than 40 years. But the connection is so tenuous you might as well say that Birmingham is twinned with Elvis, or Monster Munch or the colour blue.

Hordes of you are positively wetting themselves at the thought of spending four pounds for a hot dog, standing next to loudly taking suits getting even more unbearable because they cant handle the strong cloudy bitter larger, or pushing past idiot tourists blocking the pavement because they're staring at the badly made wooden statues of frogs like it was a holy relic because it makes a frog sound when you rub its back.

Apparently there will be 180 stalls this year. The stalls will be a combination of, a wooley hat shop, foul tasting sweet stall, two bars, a candle stall, and a stall selling polished rocks 100 times.

The thing that bothers me is not our misplaced sense of pride in what is repeated in nearly every major city around Christmas throughout Europe. It's that it is a simulacrum of a German market, a Disneyfied version of the very real markets of eastern Europe. Despite the tourists, the open market in Prague is a earthy authentic place, covered in stag piss, where dodgy looking men shout at each other, blacksmiths make jewellery in front of you with ferocious delicacy one minute and shoe a horse the next and where the food is cheap and good and warming, a place with heart and soul.

This is my proposal, in line with the councils desire to have a digital quarter. We scrap the German market and have a traditional Christmas Japanese market, dodgy electronics, improbably and baffling mobile phones, food stalls that sell noodles, raw fish, and bubble tea, and bars where men in business suits can drink sake until they call their bosses dishonourable dickheads.

And we can have it whenever we want, because most Japanese people couldn't give two shits about Jesus, let alone his birthday.

Tags: christmas market, danny smith, Frankfurt, market

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Russ L 6 months ago

The Reindeer Parade was in the middle of November last year, too. I don't mind, though. I like Christmas, so I'm happy to start as soon as possible.

The best alternative-version-of-the-German-market was the year that Wolverhampton had a Hungarian market. I feel a lot can be learned about the relationship between Brum and Wolves from that one.

Danny Smith 6 months ago in reply to Russ L

Really? I like Christmas too, but anyone with a passing interest with economics will tell you that the more of something there is, the less it's worth. Do you not think by starting Christmas in November you devalue it somehow?

Karl 6 months ago

To be fair, the look and feel of Birmingham's German/Frankfurt market is on a par with "actual" German markets in, erm, Germany. Disclaimer: I've lived there. A lot.

To draw a link between the stag-piss-drenched affairs of "eastern europe" (I'll defer to your greater knowledge of these evocative examples of rus-in-urbe) and christmas markets in Germany in order to have a go at Brum's "simulacrum" seem unjust. For starters, Germany is manifestly not in "eastern europe". It is, in fact, a very western-oriented and heavily Americanised place. And it too suffers from xmas-creep (facilitated even more by their observance of St. Nicholas' Day on 6 December).

On another point: I invite you to partake in the delights of, say, the Sheffield "German Christmas Market", as I did last year. I'm sure you'll return with a higher opinion of what Birmingham offers in this respect. As indeed do the traders from Frankfurt (and, yes, from a load of other places in Germany), who come back year on year. Why? Because they make shitloads of money - but that's because people here have got it and are willing to spend it on the novelty of a pretty good sausage (go on, admit it!). And yes, because people here appreciate the difference it can make to the drab cookie-cutter high street that defines Birmingham in particular.

Danny Smith 6 months ago in reply to Karl

Cookie cutter nails it, it seems we replace the cookie cutter high street with the cookie cutter market. the same stalls repeated over and over, every single year. Filled with tat.

ok the sausages are alright, but £4?

Karl 6 months ago in reply to Danny Smith

I'd love to refute on the price... but it does look like a hefty mark-up. Extrapolating from various sources (mwell, google.de), I reckon this year, christmas market patrons in Germany will be paying around 2 - 2.50 euros for a standard issue "Bratwurst", which I'd assume would come with bun and glop of condiment-of-choice (though anyone who chooses anything other than a "mittelscharfer" mustard is clearly wrong).

However, I have located a German industry report on Christmas Markets which does state what we all know to be true anyway: at Christmas, the economic rulebook goes out of the window. For teh Birmingham market, you need to add the clearly higher costs of providing the service while temporarily based abroad.

As someone with a German background, I'd advise this: patronise the "Schwenkgrill" type of stall, at which the sausages are barbecued on a suspended rack. That way you're getting some - ahem - "added value" in the traditional method of preparation; a nice "fired-not-fried" flavour (which will consign your earlier - and no doubt innocent- conflation of "wurst" and "hot-dog" to the "category error" bin - where it manifestly belongs!), all of which will lead to a greater sense of Gemütlichkeit.

That, and the Glühwein, anyway.

Russ L 6 months ago

Economics are very simply and very obviously not the same thing as either or both of awesomeness and added value. There are different rules.

Even if we pretend that economics do directly equate to A&L, November is nowhere near early enough to make a difference to me. You'd have to be pushing a good February-of-the-previous-year to even begin to do any damage, as far as I'm concerned.

Danny Smith 6 months ago in reply to Russ L

Then we must go for a drink, I want to rub against you and steal your christmas glitter. I want to like christmas, I really do. But starting so early I never really stand a chance.

Harry Vale 6 months ago

I like the market, and the overpriced tat, and mostly, I just love the sausage. There, I said it.

freeboprich liked this

freeboprich 6 months ago in reply to Harry Vale

Gimme glühwein and fresh waffles coated in cream and cherries - yes the prices are pretty ridiculous and you could get the same for cheaper at home (well, apart from having to buy the waffle iron). It's crowded and crazy, the smell of meat makes me want to vom - there's virtually nothing for me to eat there as a consequence - and it's rare you can find a place to stand once you have your sticky hot drink which you barged you way in for half an hour to get...

So yeah, for the most part I'd agree with you Danny - but I love being reminded of the Christmas I spent in Bonn, so this is about as close as it gets.

neil holland 6 months ago

The stalls never sell anything of any interest to any sane person. I like the beer but it's ridiculously expensive. The sausages are the same, but that doesn't bother me so much now that I don't eat meat. And it's just so fucking crowded all the time...

Chris Ivens 6 months ago

So far out of the umpteen times I have visited the market over the years, I have only ever bought food to consume immediately. The smells and sounds are very festive on occasion but being such a bored-of-christmas-grump and sick of it creeping further and further up the calendar I'm thinking of giving it a wide berth this year.

Last year I went once (briefly) and had a hotdog. Perhaps if they sold anything else of worth to someone who doesn't like hoarding crap then I might have bought something other than food.

I think my attitude may get skewed to the more accepting side in the next few years as my son grows up. Who knows, after all I'd like to enjoy it but right now I see no point.

Pete Ashton 6 months ago

Whenever I see the German Market I always think "this could be so, so much worse".

At least it's not sponsored by a budget airline or affiliated with Heart FM. At least it's a different style of cookie-cutter tat. And wooden stalls add a nice bit of variety to the glass, concrete and plastic high street frontages.

Never bought anything there though.

neil holland 6 months ago in reply to Pete Ashton

Actually, I think it usually is affiliated with Heart FM. Branding obviously not working that well...

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Reactions

ark3 6 months ago From Twitter

RT @BirminghamiNS go join in the row on @probablydrunk's Christmas market column http://is.gd/gBM7F /via bounder

BirminghamiNS 6 months ago From Twitter

go join in the row on @probablydrunk's Christmas market column http://is.gd/gBM7F /via bounder

CIPR_Midlands 6 months ago From Twitter

RT @annblackaby: German market = "crapfest" and "Disneyfied" according to http://is.gd/gzv2t. Totally disagree - can't wait for it to start up again

chrisathway 6 months ago From Twitter

I Saw xmas lights and tree lit up in a shopping centre yesterday... RT @BirminghamiNS Danny Smith: Winterval starts here http://bit.ly/dkRLWo

KeithGabby 6 months ago From Twitter

@probablydrunk I really liked your German market piece http://is.gd/gzv2t (via @annblackaby). Funny. Let's now end our mutual backslappery

annblackaby 6 months ago From Twitter

German market = "crapfest" and "Disneyfied" according to http://is.gd/gzv2t. Totally disagree - can't wait for it to start up again

nicktheowl 6 months ago From Twitter One more retweet from RichardBratby

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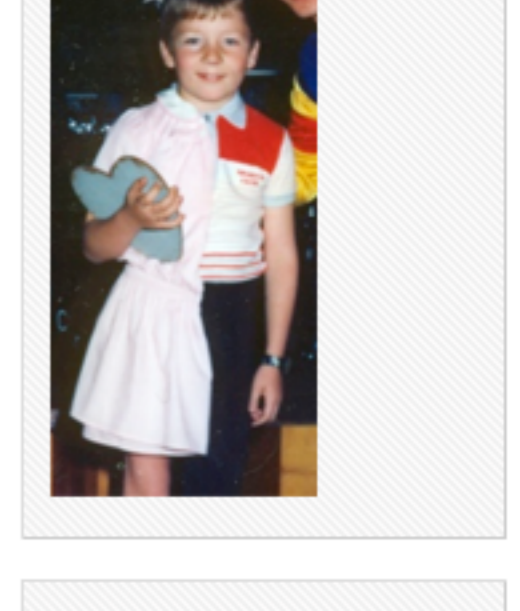
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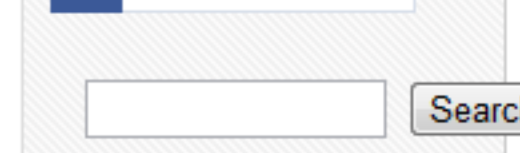


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BiNS is mostly by Jon Bounds, a Birmingham based social web consultant, producer and writer. You can hire him to work on your stuff, or follow him on twitter. There's also the odd bit of stuff from Danny Smith.

Feel free to send us anything you're interested in - or think we might be. If you've got gigs to promote, best to chuck them on the talk board.