

**You're from Manchester and that background is often talked about as an important part of your own 'storyline'. What brought you to London?**

We were taught by our teachers that you had to get away from home, so I left and went to Cambridge, then Australia and various other places. But London was always the goal because there was a sense that if you were ever going to do whatever it was you wanted to do, it had to be there. I finally got my first novel published at 40 and it was then that I thought, it's time to live in London, so I bought a little flat with my then wife in Clapham Old Town.

**Where do you live now?**

Lots of my moving around has to do with failed marriages and the like. I live now with my third and final wife in Soho in a glass mezzanine penthouse. It's flooded with light, my books are everywhere and I can look out over the city. I've lived here for 20 years and, in my old age, I finally got what I wanted. Everything is walkable, so I live a wonderfully pedestrian existence.

**Do you have a favoured neighbourhood haunt?**

I've been going to Dean Street Townhouse (69–71, Dean Street, W1) for breakfasts for more than a decade. We're known there and I often take friends. I have a particular table outside and if I ring up they'll keep it for me.

**'They're the creature I love the most. They're awkward and badly designed'**

**Where are you most at home in London, when not at home?**

Marylebone. It's more middle class and less bohemian than Soho, but I enjoy walking there. I'm also mad on St James's Park because it's got pelicans. Other than human beings, they're the creature I love the most. They're awkward and badly designed, in the way I feel I'm awkward and badly designed.

**You've spoken about your longstanding mission to find the perfect bagel. How is it progressing and where is currently top of the pile?**

Panzer's in St John's Wood (13–19, Circus Road, NW8) does a very good bagel. Purists think that bagels shouldn't have anything



THE CAPITAL ACCORDING TO...

# Howard Jacobson



Booker Prize-winner Howard Jacobson talks to Harry McKinley about life in Soho and London's best bagel

on, but I think you've got to have seeds and the poppy-seed bagel from Panzer's is a great delicacy. The perfect bagel, you see, has to be sufficiently crusty on the outside and soft on the inside. You should always feel it's still warm from the oven.

**You grew up in a particularly Jewish neighbourhood of Manchester, do you have a connection with 'Jewish London'?**

St John's Wood I do love. I used to visit Harry Morgan deli before it closed. Now I like the Brass Rail in Selfridges (300, Oxford St, W1) for the salt-beef sandwiches. I'm what you might call a 'stomach Jew', more interested in the food than the religion. But St John's Wood reminds me of growing up in Manchester and being sent to buy bagels, chopped liver and challah; the colour of it. There's also a little park at the Lord's end of Finchley Road [St John's Wood Church Gardens] and my wife had a bench dedicated to me there, with a quote from one of my books. I'm terribly sentimental and write about benches a lot.

**Any lesser-discovered recommendations?**

There's a little Italian café at Russell Square that I like (Café Tropea, Russell Square, WC1), but I'm not generally an adventurer who digs out things other people haven't found. For dinner, I'm happier at The Wolseley (160, Piccadilly, W1) or Scott's (20, Mount Street, W1)—where the people-watching is full of fun. Get the right seat and Scott's is a prime spot to see the people of Mayfair parading in their finery.

**What, for you, does London do better than anywhere else?**

Cyclists annoy me and I'm at war with scooterists, but it's terrific that you can have a fight every day of the week, because that vitality is what makes London London. As Dr Johnson said, 'a man who is tired of London is tired of life'. In short, there's nothing in heaven or earth that is not here. 🐦

Howard Jacobson's memoir, *Mother's Boy: A Writer's Beginnings*, is out now (Penguin, £18.99)