

John Higgs

John Higgs is a writer who specialises in finding previously unsuspected narratives, hidden in obscure corners of our history and culture, which can change the way we see the world. His aim is to write "Like Bill Bryson with a more adventurous sense of what is interesting."



Current publication:

[LOVE AND LET DIE - Weidenfeld & Nicholson, September 2022](#)

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Publications

Non-Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
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**LOVE AND LET
DIE**

2022

Weidenfeld &
Nicholson

The Beatles are the biggest band there has ever been. James Bond is the single most successful movie character of all time. They are also twins. Dr No, the first Bond film, and 'Love Me Do', the first Beatles record, were both released on the same day - Friday, 5 October 1962. Most countries can only dream of a cultural export becoming a worldwide phenomenon on this scale. For Britain to produce two on the same windy October afternoon is unprecedented. Bond and the Beatles present us with opposing values, visions of Britain and ideas about male identity. LOVE AND LET DIE is the story of a clash between working-class liberation and establishment control, and how it exploded on the global stage. It explains why James Bond hated the Beatles, why Paul McCartney wanted to be Bond and why it was Ringo who won the heart of a Bond Girl in the end. Told over a period of sixty dramatic years, this is an account of how two outsized cultural monsters continue to define our aspirations and fantasies and the future we are building. Looking at these touchstones in this new context will forever change how you see the Beatles, the James Bond films and six decades of British culture.

**WILLIAM
BLAKE VS THE
WORLD**

2021

Weidenfeld &
Nicolson

Blake famously experienced visions, and it is these that shaped his attitude to politics, sex, religion, society and art. Thanks to the work of neuroscientists and psychologists, we are now in a better position to understand what was happening inside that remarkable mind, and gain a deeper appreciation of his brilliance. His timeless work, we will find, has never been more relevant. In William Blake vs the World we return to a world of riots, revolutions and radicals, discuss movements from the Levellers of the sixteenth century to the psychedelic counterculture of the 1960s, and explore the latest discoveries in neurobiology, quantum physics and comparative religion. Taking the reader on wild detours into unfamiliar territory, John Higgs places the bewildering eccentricities of a most singular artist into context. And although the journey begins with us trying to understand him, we will ultimately discover that it is Blake who helps us to understand ourselves.

**WILLIAM
BLAKE NOW**

2019

Weidenfeld &
Nicholson

The visionary poet and painter William Blake is a constant presence throughout contemporary culture - from videogames to novels, from sporting events to political rallies and from horror films to designer fashion. Although he died nearly 200 years ago, something about his work continues to haunt the twenty-first century. What is it about Blake that has so endured? In this illuminating essay, John Higgs takes us on a whirlwind tour to prove that far from being the mere New Age counterculture figure that many assume him to be, Blake is now more relevant than ever.

**THE FUTURE
STARTS HERE**

2019

Weidenfeld &
Nicolson

In the 1980s, we gave up on the future. When we look ahead now, we imagine economic collapse, environmental disaster and the zombie apocalypse. But what if we are wrong? What if this bleak outlook is a generational quirk that afflicted those raised in the twentieth century, but which is already beginning to pass? What if we do have a future after all?

John Higgs takes us on a journey past the technological hype and headlines to discover why we shouldn't trust the predictions of science fiction, why nature is not as helpless as we assume and why purpose can never be automated. In the process, we will come to a better understanding of what lies ahead and how, despite everything - despite all the horrors and instability we face - we can build a better future.

WATLING STREET

2017

Weidenfeld & Nicolson

A journey along one of Britain's oldest roads, from Dover to Anglesey, in search of the hidden history that makes us who we are today.

Long ago a path was created by the passage of feet tramping through endless forests. Gradually that path became a track, and the track became a road. It connected the White Cliffs of Dover to the Druid groves of the Welsh island of Anglesey, across a land that was first called Albion then Britain, Mercia and eventually England and Wales. Armies from Rome arrived and straightened this 444 kilometres of meandering track, which in the Dark Ages gained the name Watling Street. Today, this ancient road goes by many different names: the A2, the A5 and the M6 Toll. It is a palimpsest that is always being rewritten.

Watling Street is a road of witches and ghosts, of queens and highwaymen, of history and myth, of Chaucer, Dickens and James Bond. Along this route Boudicca met her end, the Battle of Bosworth changed royal history, Bletchley Park code breakers cracked Nazi transmissions and Capability Brown remodelled the English landscape.

The myriad people who use this road every day might think it unremarkable, but, as John Higgs shows, it hides its secrets in plain sight. Watling Street is not just the story of a route across our island, but an acutely observed, unexpected exploration of Britain and who we are today, told with wit and flair, and an unerring eye for the curious and surprising.

STRANGER THAN WE CAN IMAGINE

2016

Weidenfeld & Nicolson

'An illuminating work of massive insight' Alan Moore

'A sensational book. Heartily recommended' Rufus Hound

It is the century about which we know too much, yet understand too little. With disorientating ideas such as relativity, cubism, the id, existentialism, chaos mathematics and postmodernism to contend with, the twentieth century, John Higgs argues, cannot fit easily into a traditional historical narrative. Time, then, for a new perspective.

Higgs takes us on a refreshingly eclectic journey through the knotty history of the strangest of centuries. In the company of radical artists, scientists, geniuses and eccentrics, he shows us how the elegant, clockwork universe of the Victorians became increasingly woozy and uncertain; and how in the twentieth century we discovered that our world is not just stranger than we imagine, but 'stranger than we can imagine'

THE KLF

2013

Weidenfeld & Nicolson

'By far the best book this year, brilliant, discursive and wise' BEN GOLDACRE.

The strange tale of the death, life and legacy of the hugely successful band.

They were the bestselling singles band in the world. They had awards, credibility, commercial success and creative freedom. Then they deleted their records, erased themselves from musical history and burnt their last million pounds in a boathouse on the Isle of Jura. And they couldn't say why.

This is not just the story of The KLF. It is a book about Carl Jung, Alan Moore, Robert Anton Wilson, Ken Campbell, Dada, Situationism, Discordianism, magic, chaos, punk, rave, the alchemical symbolism of Doctor Who and the special power of the number 23.

Wildly unauthorised and unlike any other music biography, THE KLF is a trawl through chaos on the trail of a beautiful, accidental mythology.

**I HAVE
AMERICA
SURROUNDED**
2006
The Friday
Project

The brilliant first biography of the man President Nixon called 'the most dangerous man in America'.

Timothy Leary was one of the most controversial and divisive figures of the twentieth century. President Nixon called him 'the most dangerous man in America.' Hunter S. Thompson said that he was 'not just wrong, but a treacherous creep and a horrible goddamn person.' Yet the writer Terence McKenna claims that he 'probably made more people happy than anyone else in history.'

A brilliant Harvard psychologist, Leary was sacked because of his research into LSD and other psychedelic drugs. He went on to become the global figurehead of the 1960s drug culture, coin the phrase 'tune in, turn on and drop out', and persuade millions of people to take drugs and explore alternative lifestyles yet the tremendous impact of his 'scandalous' research has been so controversial that it has completely overshadowed the man himself and the details of his life. Few people realise that Timothy Leary's life is one of the greatest untold adventure stories of the twentieth century.

Timothy Leary led a life of unflagging optimism and reckless devotion to freedom. It was, in the words of his goddaughter Winona Ryder, 'not just epic grandeur but flat-out epic grandeur.' Leary's life is undoubtedly one of the greatest untold adventure stories of the twentieth century

Fiction

Publication Details	Notes
THE BRANDY OF THE DAMNED 2012 - 2017 The Big Hand	Funny, surprising and good-hearted, The Brandy of the Damned is a dream-like short novel which reveals different things each time it is read. It is the literary equivalent of stepping off the path and heading out into the woods, knowing that if you can't see what's ahead you will never be bored. The Brandy of the Damned is a genuinely original story told by a unique voice. It exists in a genre of one.
