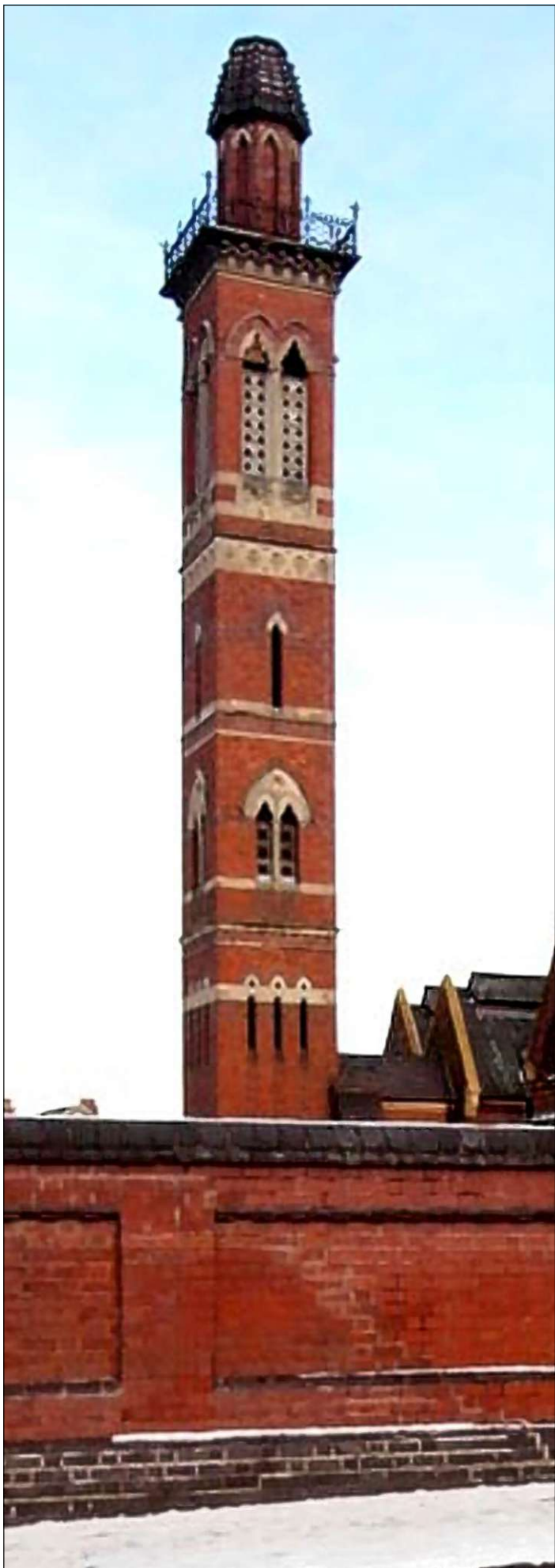


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THE RINGER

Ian Mat delves deep in the first of a two-part feature about Hobbits, landmarks and coincidences that come full circle

How life and fiction come full circle is a rare, pleasing experience for some. Such as a Glastonbury shop owner who surprised *The Hobbit* director Guillermo del Toro with a few home truths about its creator, JRR Tolkien.

Only now the ring of truth has swung back around on surprised Tolkien fan Lesley Wright, with the resurrection of

a forgotten fact in a place she once worked. A strange secret she came close to capitalising on without knowing. "Now someone I know is trying for a part in *The Hobbit* but I can't say who because it's a secret," says the shop owner. And she should know. Her son is *Hot Fuzz* director Edgar Wright, who has been aiding del Toro with cast suggestions. And Lesley is broadening the director's knowledge of

Middle-earth herself with some fan-favourite facts. Edgbaston Water Works and Perrot's Folly in Birmingham are thought by "Ringers" avid fans like Lesley – to be the inspiration of the mythical two towers of Tolkien's magnum opus, *The Lord of the Rings*.

Yet another location is Sarehole Mill, a childhood haunt of Tolkien's which Lesley visited and took photos off to send to del Toro, who was surprised to learn places of fiction were anchored in reality. But there was an even greater surprise closer to home for the Ringer.

"Me and my sons Edgar and Oscar did a lot of work at Cox's Cave in Cheddar Gorge in 1989 or 1990 to create a Tolkien-themed cave to tie in with an anniversary," says Lesley. "It was to be the quest of Misty Mountain against the dragon Smaug out of *The Hobbit*."

"Only it didn't turn out that way. It ended up as the Crystal Quest, a battle against Mordor the Lord of Darkness and his evil dragon Thynngar, only the smoke was coming out of the dragon at the wrong end at one point!"

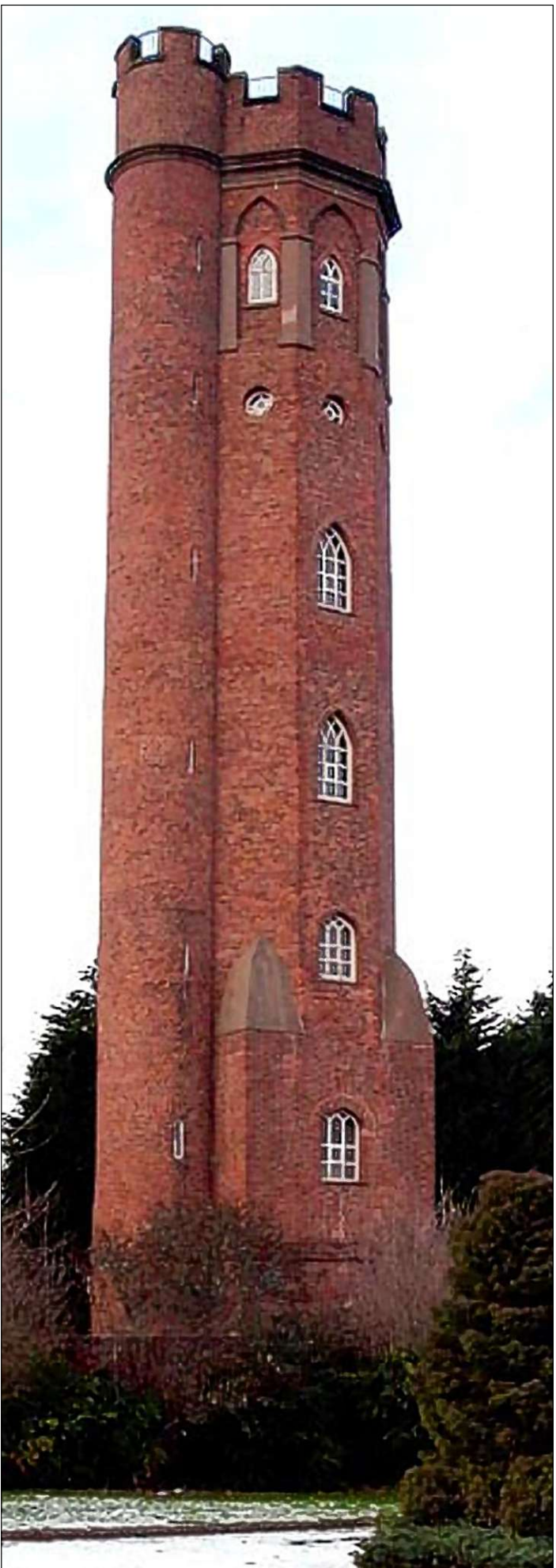
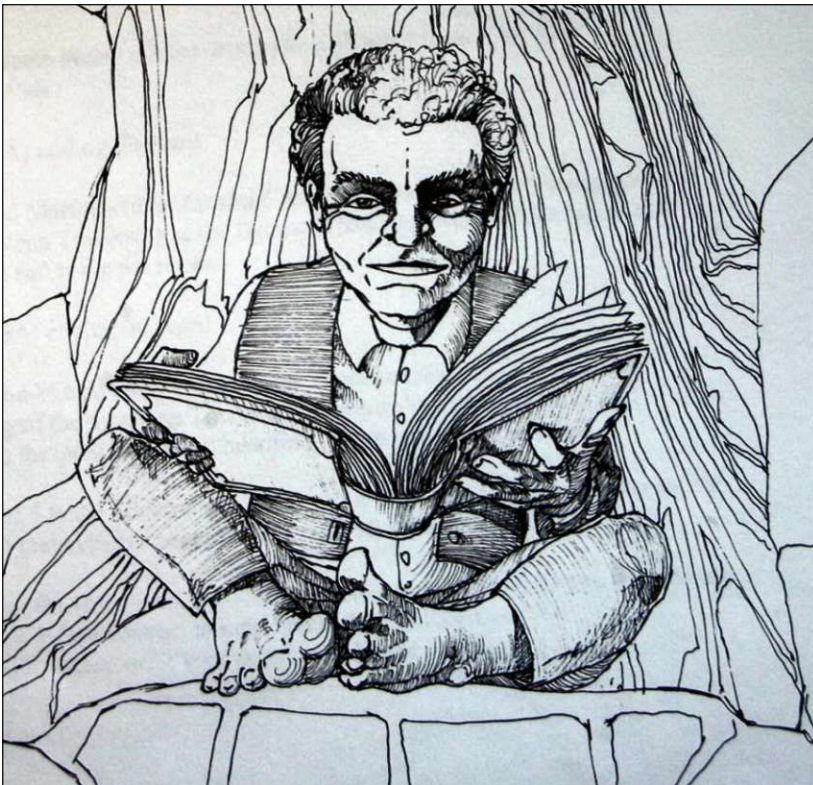
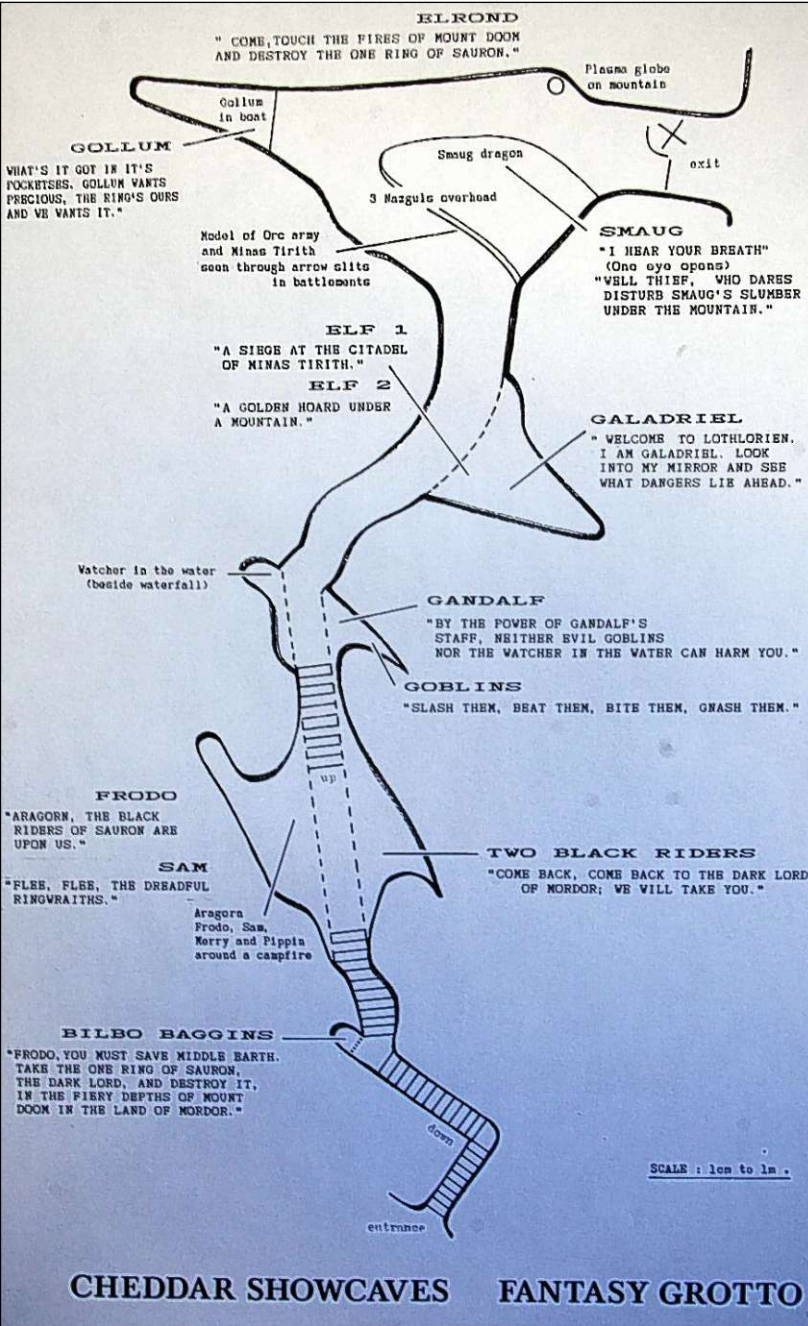
Of course, that event seems loaded with irony now history has come full circle 20 years later. The often-forgotten subtitle of *The Hobbit* is *There and Back Again* – a haunting phrase for *The Lord*

of the *Rings* fan who has just learnt that Cheddar Gorge is the basis of one of Tolkien's greatest battlegrounds – Helm's Deep.

Next week's feature reveals who resurrected this surprise fact and which *Lord of the Rings* hero liked Cheddar Caves so much he moved there. Finally, we reveal why March nearly spelt doom for mythical Middle-earth but became a joyful event for JRR Tolkien during his Cheddar

visit. The secret is hidden inside this feature. Your clue is a heavily edited version of a riddle from Bilbo and Gollum's poetic showdown in *The Hobbit*: "A box needing a key, lunar gold inside is hid."

Far left, Edgbaston Water Works, and far right, Perrot's Folly are thought to be the Two Towers that stoked JRR Tolkien's imagination from his time in Birmingham; right, Lesley Wright outside Sarehole Mill, Tolkien's childhood haunt; below, from left to right, a blueprint of *The Lord of the Rings* themed Cox's Cave, before it became *The Crystal Quest*, and drawings of Bilbo Baggins and Gollum by Oscar Wright – note how eerily accurate the image of Gollum, drawn for the cave 20 years ago, is to his movie appearance 12 years later in 2002



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