

# Undercover

Behind the sleeves with: **Verve's A Storm In Heaven**

**When:** June 1993

**Where:** Thor's Cave, Manifold Valley, Staffordshire

**Why:** Richard Ashcroft and co-charged photographer Michael Spencer Jones with the task of coming up with a suitable image for their debut album. "I wanted to do something with a cave," says Jones, who went on to shoot the covers of Oasis' first three albums. "Richard was into the idea." Cue a lengthy hike around the Peak District for Jones and designer Brian Cannon...

## SYMBOLISM

The sleeve is loaded with hidden meaning. "The whole artwork is a progression through life," explains Jones. "The cave is about birth - it's very womb-like. There's a teenager on the back of the booklet, and then a shot of television - adolescence and middle age respectively. On the back cover is a man standing in a graveyard. Meaning death, obviously."

## THOR'S CAVE

The 30-foot high cave has a gory past. According to legend, eighth-century martyr St Bertram left his pregnant wife here while he went to find a midwife, only to find her devoured by wolves when he returned. "I stumbled across it when I was out walking with my girlfriend," says Jones. "It was the perfect location for what I had in mind."



## FIGURE

"I thought the photograph really needed some kind of subtle human element to it," says Jones of the ghostly silhouette in the cave's entrance. "The figure also ties in with the idea of birth, and the cave being a womb." The figure was actually the father of a friend of frontman Ashcroft.

## FIRE

In order to make sure the band's logo wasn't lost, Jones and Cannon opted to wrap the letters in wick from oil lamps, douse them in paraffin and put a match to it all. "I had to set fire to them fairly rapidly," says Jones. "By the time we got to the E, the V would have gone out." As for the dangers of using large amounts of paraffin to start a fire in a confined space? "Health and safety was something we chose not to worry about," says the photographer.

## METAL LOGO

The band wanted their name (the "The" prefix wasn't added until the following year) to be part of the cover shot, rather than added afterwards. Jones asked a welder friend to construct the name in iron, then set it on fire. "It was pretty unwieldy, and a real pain to cart all the way up to the cave," says Jones. "I'm not sure what happened to the letters. I think they just got thrown away."