

The Last House on Flewitt Street by Bobbie Brotherton

Against the dusty sky I stand, bricks
shades of rusty brown. Alone
on a curb side sweep of concrete,
awash in an asphalt slate-grey sea
that shimmers through reluctant light.

Hollow-eyed, from ragged glass I stare
blackly at my neighbour, now entrenched
in piles of rubble. Overlooked
by a line of telegraph poles stripped
of communication which fade into
the No-man's Land which cuts us off
from civilization.

Although empty outwardly,
I still teem with life which once
resided in my walls. Voices
murmured to little ones, screeched
to children, shrieked to husbands over
mud trampled in, money running out.
Shouts of anger, squeals of joy.

Etched in my floors, footsteps
of all the people who've passed through,
their handprints embedded in my walls.
Smoke released from chimney pots
still permeate the air which kept
my families from the cold.

Danger Demolition by Sue Byrne

A solitary red-brick shop
waits stoically for its demise.
A wrecking ball stands by to obliterate
a community treasure.

Stone-smashed sash windows,
corrugated iron shutters shudder.
A chimney stack has puthered its last
on Flewitt Street.

St Anns' back to backs,
reduced to rubble, dismantled
like the cohesive communities
they once housed.

Gone are groups of wooden chairs,
tin baths and buckets tied to a lamppost.
Gone are unlit, outside bogs, inside bugs,
coal fires, cellars and families.

Keeping Clean, mid 20th Century by Tony Challis

There's always the sink.
Stand your small self in that,
splash water hot, cold, hot
over your compact form,
erase the stink.

On a special day
have fire blazing,
place tin bath on rug,
kettles, pots, pans poured,
warm shallow bath,
a gala performance.

Later, a journey
to large, austere Baths;
smells and sounds of swimming,
but you queue with mate,
watch cubicles being
swabbed out by cleaners.

After seeming hours waiting
- a bathroom; lock door,
hot water, suds, foam,
lie back – too long dressing
and the door is hammered.

Eventually,
 graduate
 to studenthood

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Nostalgia, me and him by Charlie Davis

He is me and I am him. Where I end and he begins is never clear. How we see life is complicated by refracted memories of shared experiences. We never really agree nor disagree because the horizon of understanding is always beyond our grasp. Getting old does that to you, so it does. Life keeps taking us back to the place we call Home. Nostalgic wanderings, and wonderings, prompted by the flickers of otherness which sometimes disrupt the banality of quotidian rhythms. Local accents not like the one we share; cobs not baps and chip shop peculiarities transport me and him back to that place we left long ago. I'm never sure whether life back then was as he imagines it or as I see it. When he takes us back to the estate, boys were boys; mischievous skitters never in trouble, but never out of it. Out at sunup, back at sundown; life was supposedly safer back then. Knees were put out of trousers without care; honourable pugilistic encounters behind the park solved everyday disagreements; mothers screaming from backdoor steps for dirty faced weans to get in for tea. When I transport us back, however, knees put out of trousers caused parental despair because money to replace them was exhausted; pugilistic encounters were often cruel and far from honourable; some mothers never called; some faces were dirtier than others and some bellies groaned with hunger more than others. As we nostalgically drift further away from back there, I can never be sure whose memories are whose. I'm not even sure who it is writing this.

Corner Shop by Jeremy Duffield

Zinc pails, wool, shoes, clothes and knick-knacks,
a chair so low a cat could curl up on –
a real corner shop –
one window on one street
the side window on Flewitt Street
and a door, at an angle,
on the corner between the two.

Gordon Holmes had a similar shop
on Nottingham Road in Alfreton,
away from the town centre, on the outskirts.
Gordon's half-sold screws and locks
and keys, firewood, buckets and tools
and paraffin, everything for the home handyman.

His wife's side sold wool, in balls and skeins,
cotton reels, pins and needles, bobbins,
calico, hankies and underwear,
everything the enterprising housewife found useful;

and in the middle coal-tar soap, washing powder,
and matches, for everyone,
and the whole shop, and everything in it,
always smelt of paraffin.

Cast-offs by J Filimon

War is over, battle lost, waiting
for the final blast, demolition dust
has settled into urban mist.
Evidence of fractured lives, braces,
pram wheel, slingback, wash tub,
wedged into the rubble.

Cornerstone of friendship,
community and thrift, giggling
gangs would lean the lamppost,
pose in heels, feel the fabric,
cadge or sneak a penny
for a gobstopper or cig.

Mrs Simmons' ample back
would rummage in the bargain bin,
then bellow out to Tom or Frankie,
'Stop yer larking, come in 'ere.
Try these shoes on,
there'll be no more 'til yer working'.

Waiting for the wrecking ball,
alone within the devastation,
walls echo to the stammered stomp of
hopscotch boots upon the pavement.

What do you know? By Julie Gardner

That tea and toast can be a feast.

That you will always worry for your children.

That just because you think it

doesn't make it true.

That walking helps – and watching sky.

That your mother kept her secrets.

That there isn't always time.

That fear and hope go hand in hand.

That bad days pass and good days

must be grasped and held.

That love survives death.

That cats have attitude.

That black lives matter.

That you should turn off the tap

while cleaning your teeth.

That the unseen still is.

That your dad was wrong

when he said you'd never make a driver.

That hanging out the washing

brings you joy.

That you'll always regret not asking.

That sometimes life doesn't go on.

That it's okay to cry.

Comrades by Adam Matthews

“Adult education centre opened up next door.”

“A what?”

“Adult education, you can do a course. Fancy it?”

“Go back to school? Not me. I didn’t like it much the first time round. School of life, I’ve been to.”

“You never know. It might be your ticket out of that factory.”

“Well, now you put it like that, let’s have a look at that brochure.”

“Creative writing, needlework, social studies, painting, political science they’ve got loads.”

“I do need to decorate the front room so painting might come in handy. What’s creative writing?”

“Writing creatively, I suppose.”

“Are you going to go?”

“A fella at work said they have free tea and sandwiches.”

“Hmmm, no such thing as a free lunch. I get the front room painted and learn some new skills, but I could end up a Marxist. I’ll have a think about it.”



Image (c) Peter Richardson, from St Ann's, *The End of an Era*.

Available at <http://www.fiveleavesbookshop.co.uk>

A Brief Encounter by Denise Morton

"Evening, Alf," said Kath as she spotted him with his string bag bulging with paper-wrapped parcels from the chippy.

"Evening, Kath," he replied, with a smile, pausing outside number 41.

Kath thought he looked as impeccable as ever. He'd always been a sharp dresser. There he stood in his tailored tweed jacket over his waistcoat, his tie neatly clipped with a tie pin, his highly polished shoes gleaming, and his hands encased in what looked to be kid leather gloves.

Bet they cost a bob or two, she thought.

She'd always liked Alf. It went right back to when they were kids. But then they'd left school, grown up, and gone their separate ways. Each of them had got married, had their children, then grandchildren, and now they were both widowed.

They didn't often bump into each other, these days, so she thought she'd seize the opportunity to chat.

"What do you think of these evening classes they're running down at the church hall?" she asked.

"Don't know anything about it," said Alf.

"Oh, they do lots of different courses," she enthused. "You can learn how to do all sorts of things! I think it's run by them up at the university."

"Oh, I see," said Alf.

"I fancy having a go at writing," said Kath.

"Really?" said Alf.

She remembered he'd always been a man of few words.

"Oh yes, I've always wanted to write," she continued. "But what with the kids and that, I never had the time. Never knew how to go about it either. Wouldn't know where to start. Anyhow, I've made a few enquiries and found out they teach you how to do all that. So, I'm going to have a bash at it. You never know, I might write a whole book!"

There was a pause in the conversation, and then Alf took a deep breath.

"Do you know what, Kath?" he said. "I've always dreamed of being an artist."

"Well, I never knew that," she replied, quite astonished by this revelation.

"It's true," he continued. "I loved drawing when I was a kid. Was good at it too, according to my mates. But it's just like you said. You grow up, start a family, and then it's all about putting food on the table and clothes on their backs. No time for doodles and dreams."

Kath had never heard him say so much.

“Do you know, you’ve got me thinking now,” he said. “I can just see myself in the middle of a field with my easel and paints capturing Nature’s raw beauty! I might even get one of them artist’s smocks!”

They both laughed.

“Oh Alf, I can just see you!” chuckled Kath.

“I think I might go and take a look at them classes,” he said.

There was another pause. Alf glanced down at his shining toecaps and then back up at Kath.

“If you’re not doing owt else,” he said. “Do you want to come in and share a chip supper? I can warm it up for us.”



Image (c) Peter Richardson, from St Ann's, *The End of an Era*.

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Slum clearance is more than just moving house – a street conversation by Jan Porter

George is coming back from the corner shop, carrying his string bag which contains 3 slices of ham, and a quarter pound of broken biscuits. It doesn't matter, the brokenness; George and his wife love the sweetness of a custard cream. It is something to go with their evening cup of cocoa. The grandchildren also love them, not that they come over, now they are older and live on a new estate. George sees Mrs Cross from number 9. They have been living in the same street for many years, sort of grew up together - neighbours and friends through their 20s, 30s and the decades that followed of children, grandchildren, work, strikes and hardship.

'Hello darling,' George shouts as he crosses the road to pass the time of day and catch up on gossip and news.

'Hello George, you're looking very dapper this morning with your suit on. There's a nip in the air, so good job you remembered your gloves. Where've you been?'

'Council offices first thing, then to corner shop.' George smiles, a sad knowing type of smile that says not all is well. She picks up on his mood and asks him what has happened.

'We got our bloody letter yesterday, back of beyond they are trying to send us. Well to be honest don't really know where it is. Some estate or other,' he replies.

Mrs Cross tuts, 'Bloody council, what do they think we are. They're trying to shift us out instead of doing our houses up properly.'

'Have you had your letter yet?' George asks Mrs Cross.

'Yes,' she replies. 'It came a few days ago. Grove Hill, it says. I think that's the other side of town. We will have to depend on buses and God knows what. Nothing will be just a short walk down the tarry path anymore. I said to the girl at the council last week: 'Where's bloody Grove Hill? What's there?' As usual these girls 'um and ah and then you get – "it's very nice and you will have a garden".'

'Yeh, you're right, they're just herding us out to fields, like cows into pastures.' George sympathises with her. 'Did you hear about Mrs Jones and her husband? She told Lizzie they are bein trundled to Whitley Banks. I heard the houses there are not much better than these places we have now. She's too old for this rubbish of move here, move there, but nobody cares. The government is shite!'

'Yeh, do you remember after the bloody war, government got our votes with their promise of "We will give you houses fit for heroes," well someone needs to tell them, they're not fit for anyone now!' Mrs Cross says angrily. 'But just think George,' she says, 'You'll have a garden!'

They both laugh. George stops laughing and says, 'Yeh, but I won't know anyone on the street. Who will I stop and chat with?'

'Maybe you will know some people, George. Others may go to the same place,' Mrs Cross says kindly.

'No, I'm not sure about that. Haven't you heard about Mr and Mrs Reed? You know them, they live next door to their daughter Josie.' Mrs Cross nods her head.

George carries on, 'Well, they've been given one estate and Josie has been given another. How on earth are the young 'uns supposed to manage and learn? Mrs Reed looks out for the grandkids and Josie does her shopping, takes her to the doctors and things like that. We look after our own, as we always have.'

'Doctors, George, I hadn't thought of that. We will probably have to change doctors! What am I going to do when me back's bad?'

'No answers to that Mrs Cross. Well, I better get on, Lizzie will be waiting for the ham. But in the words of the council, "at least you'll have a bathroom and inside toilet.'" George gives a wry smile.

'Something to be grateful for I suppose, but it's bloody not right, when our life's worth is an inside lavvie.' Mrs Cross leaves George as they both laugh, even though neither think it is funny.

Out of darkness by Bobbie Prime

rattles the cage; gates clang;
men, unspeaking, emerge like moles,
faces blackened, eyes white-ringed,
blink in sudden sunlight..

Pit boots hit the ground, crunch
on cinders with a metallic chink;
shiny snap-tins dangle, bump
against grime-stiffened trousers.

He turns his back on sliding slag-heaps,
strides ahead, begins to whistle softly;
gazes at waving Spring birch branches,
hedgerows sprinkled with pink meadowsweet.

In the cold scullery he heats up water,
fills the metal bath, removes his grubby clothes
scrubs off the shroud of dust,
rubs away the weary day.

Seated in clean clothes at the kitchen table,
he strokes the smooth white paper,
picks up the waiting pen, polished, pointed;
poised above the ink pot;
feels the tingle.

Another tool,
sharper than the pick that strikes at darkness.
He begins to write in flowing copperplate,
swirls and loops that will open doors,
let in the light.

Knowledge is Power or is Power Knowledge? By Connie St Louis

The whitewash brush of history erases from the canvas, those
unseen and invisible.

Who is obscured?

Whose story is told?

Who holds the brush?

White washed, history washed.

The rooms and walls burst with white bodies, poor and working class.

Since AD43 we joined armies, in 668 led your churches.

We dip our toes in the millpond of privilege,
not allow to participate,
not allowed to be present,
not allowed to belong.

Inside the Head of Mr Cyril Mansbridge, October 1979 by Patricia Stoa

*On May 3rd 1979 the Conservatives won the General Election and
Mrs Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister ...*

I will sing of comfort and prosperity
I will sing of Mapperley Park.
Of properties gracious and spacious,
gardens clipped, full of roses.

Far off, I hear the bleating of sheep.
They complain. Evening classes cancelled.
I see no need for evening classes.
Margaret has no time for bleaters.

I will sing of my contribution to society.
I play golf. I chair the ratepayers' association.
Nothing is wasted on frivolities
that do not benefit me personally.

The wife, mind, misses her local history.
She spends hours at the library.
Wasting time. She "likes to get out of the house".
Why, I don't know. Can't make women out.

I will sing of the pocket of the working man
who lives in St Ann's, content with beer
and fish and chips; what does he want
with the university and higher education?

The poor are always with us. Evening classes
Will not change that. Handouts,
something for nothing. Bankrupt the country
if they had their way.

I will sing of narrow red brick houses
of streets where kids run wild.
I will say that something must be done.
But not until we've sorted out inflation,

and made the country safe from immigration,
and cut the rate of income tax for all
the upright citizens who feel the pinch,
and aren't about to give the poor an inch.

House Of Cards by Gail Webb

There is little in the way of food
and education is done in the streets.
Families live on basic rations,
but the corner shop is a place to meet.

It is a treasure trove, a cornucopia
of gossip, a day in the life of the town
but next door is already boarded
and this community is on the way down.

The shop has been curtailed,
chopped to bits, bricks scrambled
as they spill onto pavements,
poverty driven out, manhandled.

A fragment of cloth hangs at the window.
It stands as sentinel to a peeling past,
where once were clothes, all sorts of goods,
there are cracks and pieces of shattered glass.

Put your ear to this hollow shell.
Listen carefully to sounds of St Ann's,
the freedom, as boys and girls play free,
crowd the pavement with cheerful sounds.