

Leeds Back in the Day

Otley Road, Headingley, 1908:
a tram on its way down into Leeds,
an out-of-focus woman dressed in black,
two bobbies standing outside Three Horse Shoes;
the tall one is a picture of authority,
the short one's doing 'I'm a little tea pot.'
A loved-up couple looking in shop window,
a butcher wiping hands on once white coat.

Otley Road, Headingley, 2003:
a bus on its way down into Leeds,
Sherlock Holmes, Superman and Jesus
entering the Rajput Curry House.
Him and her outside Three Horse Shoes,
deciding on The New inn, Taps, or Arc;
just good friends three hours before *that* kiss
while they waited for a cab at KFC.

Mark Connors

Amen Corner

Remember the farrier's lad
came back from El Alamein
without so much as a scratch?
We said, *he must have the luck
of a thousand horseshoes.*

And his sister,
the day her boss said,
you're not the fainting type, are you love?
Then led her past the other women
paused from their stitching
and out of the factory
to where Bunny was waiting,
beside herself with grief.

Remember the farrier's lad
from the rifle brigade?
He rode his bike on Armley Ridge,
round the back to backs, criss cross streets
and down the hill, like a man set free.

Joanna Sedgwick

Wędkowanie

Frank doesn't know it yet
but from next Sunday
Dave will do his fishing
near the bridge at Amen Corner.

It's not as if they're close;
they have jack in common -
just their favourite towpath spots
and Dave's had his fill of Frank.

There's been one too many rants:
"They never throw 'em back!
Fancy eating roach, the mucky twats!"
Frank's always talking bollocks

about the Euro, Islam, Scots,
and why he loves Farage.
Their fellow Polish fisherman
have not escaped his wrath.

Frank hasn't let it rest
since the Poles set up near them
a respectful three trees down.
They've been coming here for weeks.

He doesn't like them drinking
so early in the morning
but they're always nice and quiet
no matter what they've supped.

They've been sound with Dave.
They offered him a beer today
and Dave could not say no
so he thanked them with a "Dziękuję."

They nearly spilt their bait.
Dave told them about Jakub
who he'd worked with on the bricks
for over thirty years.

Then Frank turns up, says,
"What's this? It's a bit early, innit?"
"Early? "It's never too early for Zywiec!"
Dave's accent cracks them up.

And then, the awkward silence;
Frank is not best pleased.
But poor Frank never will be
'til all the poles are out of Leeds.

Mark Connors

Lunch Hour

The office workers leave at twelve o'clock,
to eat Starbucks' sandwiches by the canal.
They chew sun-dried tomatoes and discuss
the therapeutic effects of narrowboats.

The mill workers watch them from the other side.
Their sallow faces pressed against glass.
Look, authentic peasants, Phoebe says
taking a pic on her phone. *I love SteamPunk*.

After lunch, and half-mad on pesto, they return
to the office block, affectionately known as Dalek.
They all clock-in, except one, who shouts,
power to the people and is sucked into a wind tunnel.

Joanna Sedgwick

Somewhere Only We Know

If I was a location scout
for ITV procedurals,
I'd show them places made for murder:

the allotments on Low Lane,
the air-raid shelters in the woods,
Clayton Quarry, Bray's roof,

the pond where the soap mill once stood,
and a hundred other spots
where we hung out as kids.

Or we could go to Alma Road,
New Street or Prince Philip Playing Fields;
but that wouldn't be the same now, would it?

Mark Connors

Brick Man

Commuters miss the surprise, his red silhouette,
thirty metres high, on a triangle of scrubland in Holbeck.

And we miss those summer afternoons:
when we'd enter through a door in his heel,

look up, inside his hollow body, to where light streams
through his ears, and pause, as if listening to the sun.

Joanna Sedgwick

Greetings From Holbeck

Dear Timmy, I hope this letter finds you well.
How's life up at the Silver mines?
Being a sparky beats selling toys, for sure.
I'll be a busy man this Christmas!
Last week, we moved out of Quarry Hill
and now have our own one-up-two-down
in Holbeck, about a mile outside the city.
I miss the craic with the lads back at the flats
but living on top of each other like that is not natural.
And Jesus, the stench off the toilets!
Here, we have to walk up a snicket
to the karzy but we all keep it clean.
They gave us a key for it when we moved in
and it's got a little cotton bobbin on it.
You'd think it was a potting shed!
The bloke next door took me to the local
where I met a fella from Ross Crea.
We played dominos over a few jars
but the black stuff here's just not the same.
On Saturdays, we can hear the crowd
at Elland Road. We don't need the radio
to let us know when Leeds have scored.
I could walk there in the time it takes you
to get to the hurlin field from yours.
The wife's doing well and it won't be long
before our first shows its head. I want a boy,
she wants a girl. Serve us right if the Lord sends both!
I'll bring them over to Nenagh next summer,
if I can talk her on to the Liverpool ferry
but she's not keen on kipping with the livestock;
these soft Brits don't know they were born!
And before you ask, no, I never miss mass.
I still go to St Patrick's on York Road
where the Quarry lot confess their sins.
He's a busy priest, that Father O'Hanlon!
We don't see much of me Dad. I can't take to the woman.
She's nice enough, but it feels wrong somehow.
Me mother's not been dead a year. I do me best.
The wife's father's a bit 6 to 4 and he's so tight,
he waters down the brown sauce, so he's not all bad.
Like a lot of Brits, he's highly strung. Her mother's grand
and a dab hand with a paint brush. Just as well.
I'm not much for the DIY meself. So, that was the news.
Send me best to the rest and write back soon. Mick.

Mark Connors

Leaving Leeds

Life begins somewhere beyond Stevenage,
but you're stuck with me in traffic.
You wind down the window, turn off Leonard Cohen.

Yes. We should've taken Otley Road.
There's nothing to be done about the quick minutes
or the slow ride past Kirkstall Abbey.
You're used to tricking time, shuffling hours
in London, New York, Hong Kong.

I have a clock, to sync with each city you sleep in.
The train won't wait for you, but I will.

Joanna Sedgwick