

Change of Scenery

Quarries used to be a secret the maps wouldn't tell you;
big-earning holes opened and closed as
quick as the temporary landfill sites of our own time,
 between the mapping's deliberative surveys.

Yes, you had to decode and deduce.
Or catch a memory before it went under
(as with a name you'd think built for revelation, Butcher Hill).

Woodhouse Ridge, Queen's Wood at Beckett Park - they'll shyly let you know;
Hawksworth Woods, a coarser place with rather more to say,
While no-nonsense naming can speak with forked tongue,
Mappishly concealing the many by naming the few
Like Quarry Hill with stone so plentiful good and well placed
It ate the hill away, leaving a monumental name
That meant enough to be handed on, and handed on again.

Out of town, and more homely, Quarry Mount ; not quite
a match for quaint Delph Lane's picturesque fact.
Meanwood Park, The Hollies, even Golden Acre.
And, earth-shakingly, Roundhay Park's bountiful
Mineral extraction bequeathing both woods and lakes
 In place of mess. Many, many more.

Nowadays the morphological truth has slipped
Out onto info-boards in parks both great and small.
But the easy, the still surprisingly reliable, rule of thumb tells more :
if woodland of great trees now holds the ground,
their planting was in the tousled soil and spoil
 where quarries gave their all.

And Butcher Hill? Abbey Grange's meadow-flat playing fields
(as surviving elders may tell) settled over memories
Of hurtling wartime fun on schooldays' pitching quarry slopes.
 What then of Meanwood's village cricket ground?

And how many million cubic feet went before us, making room
For our days of carefree walking at Hardcastle Crag,
 That much-needed change of scenery?
No need to look for a precise answer. A very rough figure will do,

The sort that would be massive enough to account for, say,
The near-vertical cut of Hebden Bridge's airborne accommodation.

John Hepworth

Ghost of Industry (Roundhay Park)

Listen.

When the wind drops and conversation lapses into silence
the sound of pickaxes and heavy machinery can be heard
rising through a million hairline fissures in the ground,
audio roots that tap down through the generations
to when these hills were eaten away to produce coal
that fuelled the city and sandstone was so plentiful
it was quarried to build the boathouse and mansion folly.

Long abandoned and landscaped, the ghost of industry
forces water in the Upper Lake through hollowed shafts
that are rich in iron oxide, staining the shoreline orange
in air bubbles that float to the surface and burst
with the harsh, grinding roar of ceaseless apparatus
and the enervated cries of workers whose hands bled
as they picked out slate and other refuse from the coal.

Their voices tumble down the waterfall in deadly clouds
that are filled with dust that pockmarks lung tissue
and sows toxic promises of asthma and pneumoconiosis
even while the Maid Of Athens rides on Waterloo Lake,
the steamboat's bell clanging in the soot grimed waves
where it was sunk at the end of its useful life of leisure:
bequeathed to the tar hewn god of mineral extraction.

The gift accepted, crayfish nestle underneath hidden rocks
where once hands were mangled and torn in equipment
and a solitary roe deer ventures out of dense woodland
that was planted on spoil, nervously lapping at the lake
as its eyes strain for the apparitions of blackened stone
and its large, mobile ears swivel as the wind picks up,
conversation resumes, and the past quietly slips away.

Susan Darlington

Engineering the Perceptions

Let's hear it for the real landscapers.
Capability comes in many forms,
not least the true waters of
upliftment and benefaction ;
which, like those great moulded parklands, are still
barely geomorphic toddlers at two
to three hundred years old.

For furnishing a landscape
with a view to style and quality
Canals have no equal. (Away in distant almost riverless
Birmingham the cuts even knotted the place together).

It doesn't take much. Our hill-smashing
Tunnel-free M62 isn't fifty yet - but you've
only got to look at it to see it's always been there.
Leeds to Liverpool ; a doddle. And
Liverpool to Scarborough : just skim it
on those transpennine rails

so harshly set, in some ways, by comparison
with the less compromising path
of later earthmovers.

John Hepworth

Counting To Zero

Metallic glow-worms blink across the valley,
signalling in time to the car's indicator
as they disappear behind the crown of oaks
and the deadened screen of flatbed trailers
that speed down pot holed, silvered roads
which have been smashed into the hillside.

I map this line of sodium lamps back to base -
a petrol headed crow who slices the district
into arrow straight lines - and I check them off
as we drive in silence through the glaciated vale
of Cross Roads with Lees, the Victorian reservoirs
of Chellow Dene, and Drighlington's battle stones.

Shifting in my seat I watch the chill shadows
of backlit place names and late night walkers
ghost dance across the planes of your cheek;
a mirror-black film that will roll its final credits
when the lamps have been counted back to zero
and the car engine has started to cool on the gravel.

I trace the crease of the silhouettes on your skin;
edit the rolling highway script with diversions
that will make the geomorphic landscapes crumble
and the streetlights flicker into lustrous darkness.
Because I don't want you to stop driving tonight.
And I don't want you to take me back home.

Susan Darlington

Shine On Civic Pride

'Portland stone this time - show 'em who's in charge',
with this material of the nineteenthirties.
For jewellery there's jade - fine for nicknacks too;
crushed eggshell surfaces [vb.] your cigarette lighter;
but for the State, let there be granular molluscy particles
in such number that all shall work as one
for our enormous purpose.

How the bright white sight of that Parkinson tower
Must have fired ambition in Europe's
Most crowded terraced housing
(Harehills, wasn't it? - round the Bayswaters?)
Not a thing of ivory, mind, but a built vision
of schooling's torch : the stuff to lead you forth
out of these ill-meaning streets.

From rural Tong the slabby shock was seen
Seeming there more a slice of
The flashy future's hard elegance.

Far from being the first appearance of its imported importance,
the Portland for the Parkinson came in two deliveries,
the tower a world war away, and an education act ;

the Building's main body standing in the wake of
a wispily totalitarian Civic Hall of 1933 (: now there was a year for you),
and the Queen's loftily confident screen of a Hotel ;
and indeed decades after Christian Science's assertive
new neighbour for post-regency Buckingham House,
Vice-Chancellor Sadler's busy dwelling-place.

The late lighting of Parkinson's cuboid beacon is nothing to lament at all,
Sparing it the blushes of Barnsley's rather similar town hall
- 1933 again, and a bit of favourite wi' them Luftwaffe kites
they-say-you'd-'ear-it-said-rahnd 'ere,
With sad pained humour black as night :
"Juust turn left f'Shivvild, Fritz - yu'gerrin' near."

John Hepworth

Tithonian Dreams

Where god played exquisite corpse with living beings –
the ammonite's shell coiling into an imperfect smile
as it propels itself across warm, shallow waters –
there's now the molluscy particles of oolite limestone.

Quarried and transported from the Isle of Portland to Leeds,
cut to the scale-fine specification of Lodge and Lucas,
the campanile of the Parkinson Building owns this urb-scape
of dark, sleeping windows and louring, amber-clad mills.

The smell of saltwater carries from the bricks over the city
and down the art deco tower into the skin of scholars
who are bathed in the blue wash of their computer screens
as they research the geology and fauna of the late-Jurassic.

Yawning pterosaurs rise from the building's cuboid beacon,
conjured by their academic words, and wipe out the library
as they crash into books when they veer to avoid the tread
of sauropods that roam the steppe of parchment and ink.

They absorb the granulated full stops of student knowledge
and, when the laptops' power is killed, sink back into the stone
to chisel essays that palaeontologists can unearth and dissolve
in seas of formic acid in the hope of decoding Tithonian dreams.

Susan Darlington

Before the Bronte's Saw Us

The stuff was always there. Only the names are new,
seeming at first to be in a tongue most wondrous :
like Linnaean plant-names before you know the trick,
or the magic of false eyelashes worked upon the uninitiated.
Future fossils knew not who they were, let alone their eventual designations;
And it can take a brain-twirl or two, even to consider how Old Town
and its type were known when not named for their antiquity.

Some bed in better than others : eighteenth century arriviste
Pennines has an ancient feel – so authentic
of flavour you'd take the word for genuine,
if not quite an expression of the land's own people :
One has to simply give the dodgy pedagogue his due
For such fertile romancing with our central hillscape.
Not for Bertram a backbone of Lymeswold.

So how about the old withens and withins of our prunty places?
Squabble on, scholars : whether withins be withens,
whether willows' withy be a worthy wordsource.
Let it be withens as a better kit for wuthering,
But pray find it in your chalky hearts to grant us
Withins for simplicity of meaning :
an enclosure, within like intake.

(an established term that one,
but not a word to settle into its surroundings like a Pennine
farmstead with material and form from the ground it stands on,
by generation merging more in tone and shape with its own hilltop site.

In fact intake is beaten flat by Beechings,
Thorner's tree-girt residence on a former railway plot.

John Hepworth

Rise

Let the lions rise from their plinths,
shake soot from their limestone fur
and descend the Town Hall steps.

Let the marble dogs yawn from the handrails,
stretch away one-hundred years of sleep
and pass unseen through the Library's doors.

Let them stalk the city's streets in freedom,
their claws clipping on the paving slabs
as shoppers scatter along The Headrow.

And let you and I ascend the vacant plinth:
this look, this touch, this kiss being petrified
in alabaster until all of yesterday's tomorrows.

Susan Darlington