

JOHN PAUL KIRKHAM



ZIG ZAG ROAD

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www.johnpaulkirkham.com

Introduction

The poetry and prose is part prequel, sequel and companion to the 2011 anthology of poems "*In Violet*" and the autobiography "*I Saw Her Standing There*" that was published during the Covid 19 pandemic.

The places and everyone that appear in these poems are real and among many you will discover "*Dick The Barber*" and "*Doctor Robert*" and "*Elvis*" did make his appearance.

Born in the 1950s, growing up in Merseyside, training at the Laird School of Art in photography and design, Liverpool became a special place and many of the poems remember life, events and death in the north west of England.

As a photographer, capturing atmospheric moments in time in different monochrome shades has always been my preferred way of recording the joy or bleakness of light and so it is with poetry. Some of the poems recall

events as in that “*Cat in the Park*” or “*Zephyrs*” which visually appear stark, shocking and brutal but in no way are meant to offend and possibly offer instead a cautionary tale when words can often be mesmerising and hauntingly contemplative and in the end make you hopefully more thoughtful.

Scattered randomly throughout the book are a series of Haiku works inspired and woven by our natural world of sensual humanity, remembering that poetry is often written to stir emotion or passion. If any of the writings make you smile or weep or even angry, then maybe they have been worthwhile.

Whilst all of the people in the poems are existent and not imaginary, one or two of the names have been slightly altered or changed.

And as for “*Zig Zag Road*” ... you will meander there in the end ... and yes it really does exist and it is a road I have travelled and walked a thousand times or more.

Merseyside has two Zig Zag Roads, mine is close to the River Mersey, New Brighton, where I grew up but I guess we all have our own winding lanes that can lead us to often unexpected places.

John Paul Kirkham is a poet, writer, photographer living in the city of Liverpool and is the author of twenty books and collaborations including *In Violet* a large collection of poems that was published to rave reviews with award winning poetry and the autobiography *I Saw Her Standing There*, and is the official biographer of two Italian saints: Clare of Assisi and Gemma Galgani of Lucca. John Paul has written journal editorial, film and book reviews and has appeared both on television and radio.

And thank you

To Judie Tzuke for giving permission to use her song lyrics as a prologue and epilogue in the journey ahead. Visit Judie's website to find out more - www.tzuke.com

Prologue

They shut the gates at sunset

After that you can't get out

You can see the bigger picture

Find out what it's all about

You're open to the skyline

You won't want to go back home

In a garden full of angels

You will never be alone

But oh, the road is long

The stones that you are walking on

Have gone

With the moonlight to guide you

Feel the joy of being alive

The day that you stop running

Is the day that you arrive

(Judie Tzuke: "Enjoy The Ride")

All for an Empire - Part II

All for an empire
conscripted to hellfire
those who fought
and thought
and died for a king ... for peace ... for freedom
honourably remembered and rightly so
on some memorial obelisk
within a quiet country parish green or churchyard
victims of deception and death

But beneath these glorious trees of an English Eden
buried deep lies
the scandal of those who lied and died
and left behind their teenage brides
for what Haig termed ignoble crimes
and shame on Major too
to deny the final rights so due

Shell shocked fatigued and weary worn
from mental shrapnel all around
execution for the coward
dishonourable death their fair reward
to perish on another tree of staken oak
murdered there by friends not foes

Given twelve hours to write and pray
a scandal dammed to disobey
six armed men at break of day
set before the seal of fate
tied blindfold to the oaken stake

The echo of their rifle shots
into some young sons bleeding heart
dawn chorus fearful flies the lark
mainly conscripts manly boys
the 6.00am innocent sacrifice
all for an empire
loyalty and lies

Haiku No 1

Gentle wind blows east

Drawn in beyond the cosmos

Cherry blossom falls

Avalon

The sceptred stone sits
beneath the snowy peaks
ravaged raw
waiting for its King to come

For winter mists
hasten into spring
when a poor sovereign in disguise may pass this way
to draw a sword
from beneath the skies of Avalon

Fair now fades the phlox cyclamen
winter's old cold flowers
ringed round the rocks
for glinting icy cut steel pulled for a dream
beside the turquoise stream
under a setting sun
stealing shooting stars

before the black nights dawn
of Avalon

A barren stone now stands
under silent fallow clouds
and witch hazels
once burst with copper ovate wispy finger blossom
now perfume the new seasons boreal divine air
and the saffron yellow aconites carpet spread
before the King of Avalon

Before Bill Popped His Clogs

Bill my other grandad popped his clogs in the fifties
in his 50s
before I were born

Lying about his age
defying the law
keeping the law
sailing up the Yangtze
on the HMS Dragonfly
before the war

Deserting legally the navy
instead a runway navvy
fiddling with Bristol Bulldogs
and other nefarious schemes got you discharged
not quite honourably
who else can say they served of sorts
in three of the three forces

You deserted again your family
when your son was born
and died of a hare lip
running away to drift
blagging and bagging your way
to become Bob Hope's and Bing Crosby's caddie
leaving your dad to plaster alone at home
and business to crumble

A move next door but one to Lowry in Mottram
becoming his friend for a time
a model for a while
sitting in Piccadilly Gardens on that bench
bowler hat in a corner
and the man on the wall but no-one ever knew
apart from the red carnation
flowering from a breast pocket

An adventurous life some may say
it was years smoking tea leaves that did you in the end
I have a photocopy of a photo
rare so rare an image
of a old looking northern war worn man in his fifties
holding a pint to the camera
Guinness ... mild ... or brown ale I can't tell
its monochrome
and before I were born

Bird Bombers of Liverpool

Liverpool survived the blitz ... but it was touch and go
and we did lose a few chippies in the mix

Today the terror is not them Stuka's and Messerschmitts

or those other Fokker's

it's those diving bird bombers of Church Street

fearless they are them gulls and pigeons

driving our Judy in her Friday night curlers

to dash for cover into Primark or Lush

as they loop, swoop and poop at head height

excited by your donut, chips and fish batter

they'll get you in the end

but please not on my new DM's

they target groups of weekend hens

dropping from on high

on a new dress

on exposed flesh

evacuating white and greenie gooey guano

to tangle with a perm

There's a homeless fella
sits in a doorway in Whitechapel
with a "Help Me" cardboard plea
the pigeons will sit not shit
on his head and shoulders
they can sense a sensitive soul
offering grains of rice and a squished spring roll
refuelling before a second air raid
down Lord Street and the Pier Head

Broken Bones

How many people can claim that
breaking their leg
saved their life
twice

Seconds from signing for those red devils
shattered bones stunned the cheering crowds
on that Saturday afternoon
putting pay to those Korean battlefields

Well convalesced and working for the GPO
manning the top floor midnight Dial Tower shift
he took the call from the cold
and broke the news first of more broken bones
and death
in Munich

Close Encounters in The Back Garden and Beyond

Just before dawn
hovering at tree height
over the dewy lawn
orange disc
gently floating adrift
grey faces staring from a window
wishing to be seen though
for just a second
before a puff and shoot to outer space
or somewhere beyond

Trinity of silver spheres
sliding gliding near
stationary ... pulsating
watching and waiting
to make the first move
then an almighty vroom
hurtle and hightail to planet zoom
or another world

Come Don't Fly With Me

I fly for a reason
not for fun ... anymore
is it fearful to fly
like birds in the sky
and possible the reason why
I ask you not to fly with me

Thick trails of dirty black smoke
from the rear of a BAC ... One Eleven
forcing a landing at Leeds Bradford

A hole in the engine
Seven Four Seven
burn out in flames
after Bahrain
forced to limp lamely
and fly lowly
BA into Changi Singapore

You would think the best would be safe
Singapore Air short circuiting from water leaks
a drenched cabin
plunging the Big Top into darkness for twelve hours
all because a light bulb popped
and pumps lost their power

Followed by a storm
racing into the valley
rattling and shaking
just missing
almost clipping
the pine tree tops
passengers screaming
“we’re all going to die”
the pilot regains control
to get us down into Lourdes
I knew we would be safe there
despite the tachycardia

Air UK a calm breakfast
out of Stansted
then a BANG!
a lurch
an instant sharp dive
the short haul Aerospace One Four Six
one of its engines has exploded mid air
and we can't turn round
to corkscrew into Manchester Ringway
our hostess has to shift passengers
to balance the craft from tilting
it takes a great skill
to navigate into Edinburgh
as we brace
sirens singing
blue lights flashing
shadowing our final descent
to a bumpy ... well almost perfect
more importantly ... safe landing

Quietly sleeping before an erupting racket
seatbelts were off
sudden drop
we all lift off
two feet
out of our seats
over the middle east
plane dipping
and spinning
wildly
... sandstorm
breaching and belching
through the Tristar's triple tail engines
the sound so intense like machine gun fire
ricocheting round the cabin
food trolleys laden and rolling away
down the aisles to smash and dash
against the galley doors
putting pay to anymore snoozing
and boozing

The airline had already been reprimanded and fined
for being stingy on their gasoline
but here we were again
M . A . S . on approach to K. L. International
too foggy to land at 5am
and forty five minutes of fuel left to burn
Penang was now too far to reach
a failed approach
causing us to abort
and now only 25 minutes left
just enough for one final attempt
circling as long as possible
and that humid clammy fog
hampering the blind glide
bracing yet again
our cushioned heads
as we landed on fumes

So next time I may fly alone or not al all
whatever ... come ... don't fly with me

Haiku No 2

Stays, drifts and falling

Caressing the dawn rooftops

Autumn leaves again

COVID - A Call To Arms

November 5th bonfire night was quite subdued
and it was miserable and damp as well
still ... we managed a few good flashes and a bang or two
late into the night
breaking the midnight curfew
so there would still be some spent rockets to gather
that will have ricocheted off the garden shed roof
or next doors chimney pot

Just on the cusp of a grey dawn
before any cock could crow
opening the blinds and window
to inhale last nights
hanging smokey salt peter aerial infusions
through the hovering dense fog
I spied a shimmering misty camouflaged convoy
two thousand troops
heading to Pontin's Holiday Camp in Formby

Later that day in the centre of our ghost city
the lone soldier in command
gets out his gun
aims at the terrified old ladies head and shouts aloud
“thirty seven point two”

Damn That Torpedo

A slow reverse from Pier 54 into the Hudson River
elegantly turned by twin tugs
into the pale May midday hazy New York sun
steaming and stoked ready for a calm hometown run

Waiting ... waiting the stalker bides his time ...

U20

the terror laden tubes of menace
just ten past two ... ten miles from shore
perfect light ... perfect strike ... starboard dive
cold the water inward flows

Shouts and screams

confusion reigns

lifeboats crash

and crush the rush

choking cries

pulled down and petrified

Hordes diving like rats from their gilded cage
rivets creak and pop
snagging the clambering drop
turbine's hum louder
propeller blades rising out of the sea
to tangle, mangle and slice
a humming orchestra of death

A cold blooded enemy watches, records and notes
and slinks away to the west to deeper waters

As the masted deck
glides relentlessly to stricken depths
the last passenger
Barbara Anderson aged just two
lost and clinging to a submerging deck
is bravely lifted into the arms
of Purser and Scouser Billy Harkness
cradling her escape seconds from doom

The stern swings slightly and judders
before immersing vertically to its seabed grave
exploding beneath the waves
releasing a tidal wave of corpses and foam
a boiling cauldron in a wilderness
... then a placid sea
and the wreckage left was only human

Drifting on the tide off Kinsale Head
the Peel Fleet Wanderers sail into the Irish Sea breeze
to trawl and catch the surfacing surviving living flotsam
and amid the weeping for twelve hundred drowned
a lone voice carries across a setting sun
“Damn that Torpedo”

It's May again and I take a walk
along Canning Dock waterfront prom
shielding momentarily my eyes
from the glinting bronze propeller
a salvaged savage memory
memorial in the hazy sun

On the smooth worn cobbles
a child lays a single Cunard red rose
that is gently blown, rolls and tumble's away into the
Mersey
Sailing away to be reunited with Lusy's lost souls and
loved ones

Haiku No 3

Burnt orange sunset

Your flower has a pink tint

Lanceolate and sweet

Dancing the Sun Down

I came upon a summer fair
and found a girl with golden hair
and on the grass her feet were bare

She wore a wildflower daisy crown
arms outstretched she whirled around
and I watched her dance a wild sundown

December Scape

For midwinter it's mild
a solitary clanky cyclist pedals lethargically
along Mockbeggar Wharf and North Shore prom
onward and flatly to Meols

A puffing panting and passing Frenchie
pauses hoping for rest between Leasowe Castle
and the lighthouse
but a pat on the head is the best I can offer
as the sun slowly slides in a declining dip

The tide is ebbing fast
revealing rippled amber sand
receding rolling mercury with hands of foam

A wellied bait digger
casting long shadows
stakes his claim with a bucket and fork
and his lantern torch

Liverpool Bay once home to Roman bones
succumbs suddenly
to a smoky sky of indigo grey
the slightly chilly sea breeze whips up a whisker
through the liminal light
teasing through the dunes marram grass and scapes

Dick The Barber

Lets go into the parlour of Dick the Barber
in Vicky Road New Brighton
from behind his curtained back room cupboard
like Mr. Benn's tailor he appeared like theatre
a walrus moustachioed magician
wearing his nylon grey jacket with maroon cuffs
scissors and blade at the ready

If you were under ten he'd sit you on a wooden plank
a balanced bridge on the hairdressers chair
so your heads erect with available hair
as I graduated out of NHS glasses, rashes
and spray gun bay rum splashes
and crazy short back and sides
set worryingly alight for a smokey singed ending

Dick knew all the towns comings and goings
but mainly the comings
tonsorial tales of life on the liners
snipping here smoothing where its bare
with lurid tales to turn you green
about shaving ladies below decks
nudge nudge wink wink
he'd seen and performed it all down stairs

"What will it be today, anything but a perm"
they do those in our new Liscard precinct
so he created a Ziggy and for a year or two
I was just an insane lad
the metallic electric orange dye I had to do at home
which got me expelled halfway through my O-levels

Old men on the waiting corner leather bench
for a simple cut or massage with a white waffle towel
expired fag ends dangling from their lips ... like limp
dicks ... Dick would say

He knew about Julie
and Cherry my muse in Dalmorton Road
and always proffered "*something for the weekend young man*" (no sirs here)
his one ... well two house rules ...
"*always be prepared*"
and "*better safe than sorry my lad*"
whilst stuffing two free johnnies in my pocket

He was like an uncle Dick to me
and when I needed a job CV
he conceived a cursive bespoke note in royal blue
fountain pen ink
composed creatively in his other parlour above his
barber ... shop
and it did get me my job

He semi retired to Wallasey Village
a posher parlour
keeping his hands flexed part time
in peoples affairs ... of the heart
and then it was time for me to convert
from a starman to a cosmic sage
and it was off to get some curly permed locks in Liscard
and my abandonment of Dick
and his fading braided burgundy cuffs

Distant Outsiders

As distant outsiders

we observe from the comfort of a television screen

or newspaper tragedies that unfold each day

glimpsing superficially perhaps

... chaos, crisis and emergency

life in a cramped asylum seeking refugee camp

in familiar or forgotten places

striving to find a little piece of peace and love

Doctor Robert

Dr Robert was an eccentric fella
on his surgery wall a Spitfire propellor

His waiting room dog sleeps under the chairs
blissfully sleeping unawares

On the floor in the corner I spied some liquorice sticks
but closer inspection revealed them as sausage dog shit

To release trapped blood under my nail
he rummaged for tools he said never failed

A sewing needle held in pliers
into a bunsen burner and the blue flame fire

He misjudged the angle it wasn't quite right
a whoosh of draught air and the wallpapers alight

Nail pierced shoots red fountain pen ink
splattering my face I puked in his sink

Haiku No 4

Peacock screams and struts

Three pillars a perfect pair

Fan wings open wide

Dyeing for a Living

At school they taught us
all about Marco Polo's Silk Road
my nan said "*you can ignore all that*
the Silk Road begins in Rawtenstall through the Ribble Valley
and ends at Arkwrights in Preston"

"When I were a girl even before my teens
I doffed and spun them machines
and dusted white cotton snow
from under the clattering hammers"

Her dad was a bleacher and his dad a dyer
impregnating cloth
with shale alum mordant
from the Yorkshire coast
he was gaffer of purples, violets and indigo's
casks of snails and sacks of woad
steamed and boiled in barrels and becks
twisted ... scoured ... and rung again

then hoisted high on tenter hooks
and the clear river water that feeds the mill
leaves as ultramarine
then the tales would turn to Dolly Blue

Elegy for a Gentle Man

In 1952 all you had in your pocket
was the correct fare for a passage
from Dublin to Holyhead ... Anglesey
and the train to Liverpool
with maybe a night or two to spare in a boarding house
if you could find a kind Irish soul
in Everton's fair valley

A tip off and enquiry in Church Street's
George Henry Lee's
opened your door as a tea and post boy in the basement
as the decades past the steam would rise within you
to become our Captain Peacock
leading the charge and being in charge
of haberdashery on the top floor

It was 1971 when we became your neighbour
you never bought but rented rooms
on Mrs Delaney's upper floors
over the fence and always willing to lend a hand
gardening and building strange things with bricks
it was the first time we actually "adopted" someone next
door

When you joined the sea angling club
you used banana skins for bait
which I think was too big for our cods gob
then the rescue dog
came along

Joby ...
it took me a minute to work that out

Joe Bibby
Joe B
sometimes using our disused coal bunker as a kennel

World Cup 1972 our first colour telly
I told you it was magic
shout at the TV what channel you wanted
and it changed in a flash
amazing this ... BBC1 ... ITV
my brother was hiding behind our lounge door
remote control in hand

You walked everywhere from Wallasey ...
to Liverpool via the Runcorn Bridge
to Chester via Hooton and the hootin' traffic
with socks over your boots in winter
to stop you slipping
another daft idea ... that seemed to work!

Retirement came to one of those
Poirot styles council flats on Leasowe Road
and you let loose on a new lease of life
a wackily invented musical wheelie bin
powered by 45 batteries for Claires House Hospice
made the local headlines

and a spot on Look North ... a TV star for two minutes

You said that chips were always colder in London than Liverpool but they were better at the Chinese buffet but nothing could beat your daily breakfast at Liscard's Willow Tree

And those John Lewis socials and parties that you organised became the stuff of fame and acclaim

First in the queue for the Ryanair one penny fares from John Lennon Airport

just get on any flight ... Madrid ... Barcelona with a hand bag and ask the local taxi to take you to the cheapest bestest hotel in town

After 70 years and several attempts (I'm not sure how many)

a driving test passed and a new Astra banger in bright strawberry red

to roam around but mainly get lost around Britain

but you could now take Stan to Mass on a Saturday night
further down Leasowe Road at Our Lady of Lourdes
I spotted you on Songs of Praise at our Cathedral
on the front row as well

Joe in old age became a complainer ... well a
campaigner
unhappy that old folk
had to climb 40 steps
to Wallasey Village Station

“Good for the heart maybe but not for the legs”
unhappy that volunteer meals on wheels were taken
away from the WRVS
“to save just two pence ... a scandal”
but he did help save the Dome from Home from distress
and disrepair

Well into his eighties and still going strong
out of the blue my dad got a call from the Fire Brigade

"An old man had died at home, his electric blanket caught light and he died trying to put it out from smoke inhalation but we found your name and number in his blackened address book, sorry for the delay in informing you, this was last month"

Whilst helping many he never received any awards and his passing pretty much went unknown under that big radar

just his neighbours clubbing together to sort out the arrangements

it was painfully sad

that after dying in a fire

he had to be cremated

and scattered at the Landican

Several years later Julie the girl who sold us a house and used to work at John Lewis ...

I said *"did you ever know a Joe Bibby"*

"Legend" she replied

but didn't know he'd died

*"What a pity 'cos John Lewis would have looked after his
funeral"*

If they had known ... really known

Joe the man

who would do anything

for anyone

Elemental Child

Child of the northern fire
fanning the flickering flame

Child of the western wind
blowing the breathless breeze

Child of the eastern waters
spraying the splashing seas

Child of the southern earth
scattering the sowing seeds

End of the Day

The golden copper orb slowly sinking
is swallowed by a cumulous grey cavernous mouth
carried down to the end of the day

Everyone Knows Bobby Charlton

I happened upon a stretch of quiet beach
the mantis green palms flayed lightly
in an uncertain breeze
the coarse abrasive sand now cooling in the early
evening under a purple sky broodingly framing a round
tangelo sun ... slowly setting over the striated etched
horizon and the South China Sea

I sat upon a clutch of rocks worn to a smooth hollow
by centuries of the gorging tide coming and going
behind me a small array of attap houses on stilts stood
still from which a Malay family took to the water
laughing and splashing in the foaming surf
swiping from the air and feasting on the live leaping
sweet translucent prawns

They seemed careless carefree and simply happy
in worn cotton shorts and torn Man Utd tee shirts
flapping like flags

As the wind turned eastward
they stepped out of the waist high waves to
acknowledge me
with a smile and greeting words
“*Wer fom*”

I normally just say UK ... it's easier somehow
but this evening thoughts turned to what home is
and where home was
and as my dad was from Lancs
and in honour of their faded Red Devil shirts
“*Manchester*” I say ... a confident bluff
causing arms to wildly splay and display
and in turn a broken English reply
“*aaah Bobby Charlton*”

Everyone Knows Bobby Charlton - a version was published in *Football Poets - Swapping Shirts for Shakespeare*. A reworking with a different theme appeared in the previous anthology “*In Violet*” but here it is reproduced for the first time in its intended original form.

Haiku No 5

Silk purple passion

Entering the warm chamber

Glory vine entwines

Execution of Duties

In a quiet corner of a Staffordshire forest clearing
the dawn chorus birdsong
once fearful and long gone has finally returned

Three hundred and six sacrificial stakes
standing ... innocently ... hauntingly
and the burden of those weary souls
finally laid to rest in peace

Fallen Leaves

Even in a street without trees
the falling leaves
will find a way to your door

Gene Dream

Here comes the twenty second century city
shimmering buildings planted
grown from the landscape
orbs transport those that remain
sparking shocks of flame and pain

The young reside in tall slim lockers
behind thin grey doors
their last post is missed
forbidden thoughts become outcasts of the valley

The domain is permanently trapped in winter
bare and bent
duplicant's replicate the loosened of hell
silent enclosure of the ancient parish garden
contains the bones and souls
of the forgotten generation

A feral child carries a bag of stones
she knows how to throw
at a passing clone
weakness shows
as the shattering genes
bleed round red beads
that spill and scuttle away to die

Ghosts Among The Stones

Sharing strange tales from strange times
the ghosts among the stones
and as those shimmering spectres pass
the days remain as yesterday
it is to those times
those places I shall return

Gloaming

After what seems a season of suffering mizzle and gloom
bent branches dripping
hanging limp from sustained rain
dank mist creating eerie halo holograms in the hollows
the base of birch trees hidden and hovering
like floating grey ghosts shimmering in the dusk light

Hiroshima

Looking up to a clear bleached sky I can see
the grey and black atomic human shadows
blast etched by intense heat and light
onto the white washed walls of Hiroshima
the negative stains of mass destruction

The quietness of the park today is in harmony
with the gently distant resonating bell
tolled from dawn to dusk by those who yearn for peace
a small group of school children run up to my bench
and place in my hands their gathered flowers

**I Had a Dream I was Awake
and Woke up to Find Myself in a Dream**

Stanley sat every day
in his leather armchair
on the balcony
203 Oceana
watching the Santa Monica sunrise

Reviewing the day to come
letters to compose
maybe someone will ring or call today
asking for advice or an autograph

Its a long way from Ulverston, Cumbria
music halls, theatres and dad's first picture palace
yes a long long time
ten years ago I lost my babe Ollie
two of a kind me and my pal ... well oranges and
lemons

Soon be time to pop on the old bowler
for the late afternoon pacific boulevard stroll
looking for my diary with long inconsistent gaps
with how much love we made people laugh

After tea Stanley sits on the balcony
in his leather armchair next to Ida
watching the Santa Monica sunset
and the sparkling sea
each day a perfect day and early to bed

Haiku No 6

Moon rises gently
Illuminates forest floor
River runs into sea

In Another Landscape

Why did they lie to us
parted in these fields of shame
departing crime to hells domain

To a place of things we can't control
to talk about tonight tomorrow we're told
if by some fluke we may survive another day
the storm of guns and thunder rages on

Take the darkest night
and find the light
so sad to think of home and forever England
in this brown decaying slaying wilderness
fair fades the flower in my pocket
that photograph of Emily
in another landscape

In Liverpool

You're both home and abroad
where the world spins meets and mingles
Mathew street is the magnet
to roll, fold and find your hippy hole

From the quay landing stage
you are closer yes to Irelands green valleys
but beyond
America appears close as the Atlantic grey blue horizon
a nation taken by storm
conquered by our Merseybeat invasion

But in the end we all come home
and look back when we were younger
standing on that corner
clambering over still blitzed dust and rubble
go cart from me ma's old pram racing round the green
and the dream is still strong
in my city where I belong

In The Fields of Wildflowers

In the fields of wildflowers

we will weep

we will sing

we will heal

And I

and you

and they

will find our place

in the fields of wildflowers

We will entwine

a locked embrace

among tangled times

all our love

in the fields of wildflowers

We may fall
we may rise
to find our hope
in shattered lives

But in the end we will find our peace
in the fields of wildflowers

I Sat on a Wall in San Gimignano

It was one of those late spring Italian dawns
that reveals sparkling diamond frost just before sunrise
but by lunch a heat that beats you back into the shade

These were the streets ... the Innocenti that Fina played
her games in ... the house where she lay paralysed on a
plank and died and sweet smelling white violets
bloomed out of her decay

The Church of the Assumption just behind me
display her bones waned and waxed again
in life like effigy beneath her altar
in the coolest part of the day

Evening beckons
the shadows lengthen to distant bells
silver wisps and strokes of woodsmoke
rise from the tapestried valley below
as I sit on Fina's wall in San Gimignano

Kamchatka

The Sage from the west and the Sifu from the east
meet outside the high city walls
under a laden sky awaiting the dawn
comparing their visions of the night

The air is yellow from the dust borne sunrise
clouds rolling into thick white waves
dancing to the tolling bell

Behind a shingle beach
the wild wind blows away the harsh sharp sand
revealing the old stone bunker
open now to the elements
once a closed confessional sanctuary to guns of war

The Sage and Sifu point their hemlock staffs to the stars
Kamchatka and the eastern Kuril shakes
whirlpool to the western depths
awakes the slumbering Kraken
chaos as we tamper with destruction

Killed by a Cat Shitting in The Park

It was my first body forensically

Jane Doe

20 yrs old

laid out blotchy and eruptive

bright scarlet against a bleach white slab

toxoplasmosis

cut finger caressing the grass

while enjoying a picnic in the park

coming into contact with a cute cats crap

Midsummer in Granchester

The meadows by the Cam are cut and folded away
the light grassy dust mingles
with meadowsweet pale pollen
fresh from the frothy flowers
bobbing backlit in a balmy haze dance

English tea and scones
or buns
jam and honeyed
beneath the sweet orchard trees
cups are raised at ten to three

Remembering those souls and Brook
who roamed these hallowed grounds and land
whom have lived and been and gone
to further pastures wide and high and long
or rest in Saints Andrew and Mary's graveyard beyond

The village shadows silently lengthen
retiring and reclining in the garden of the Blue Ball Inn
to the narcotic buzz of nectar bees
competing with the hum
of hovering evensong lawnmowers

Haiku No 7

Once the tempest peaks

Pine tree wet damp and dewy

Moist glisten silky

Nan's Kitchen

After grandad died
in nineteen sixty five
and after four further years in Bury, Lancashire
and after much deliberation and suspicion
Nan sold up and we all moved to a super big house
on the prom
in New Brighton

Deep down I just knew this was a disaster
my mum and Nan simply never got on
and annexed to the best front room with a view
and the pokiest back bedroom
then there was total conflict in the kitchen
rows at night
and who was right
after three years the "For Sale" board appeared
after all it was Nan's money that paid for all this
disagreement
and so was reached a compromise agreement

We ended up with another big house down by the river
Nan a two up two down yellow brick terrace
Zig Zag Road was the ten minute boundary
but Nan installed her kitchen extension
whence I earned my degree in culinary skills

The secret of scones the size of fists
leftover dough for Chorley cakes
egg custard tarts large as you like
sterilised milk is the magic in the mix
lard rubbed to crumbs butter to line the dish

Meat and tatty pie baked on a plate
you need corned beef to disintegrate
King Eddie's diced and boiled
thick reduced oxo for gravy oil
a plate balanced on a worn copper skillet
to steam fish from the mersey
caught from our rods nice and early
with a Rake Lane delish
one penny's worth of chips

Fray Bentos puddings in blue domed cans
simmered in a dented deep old pan
Snack's were ham and cheese
from the counter at Woolies
and condensed milk on sweet tinned peaches
or Bournville chocolate ... dark brown silk

Conflict each Christmas
who cooks the dinner
mum or Nan
only one is the winner
our bone dry turkey
sprouts and hard sharp tatoes
or Nan in her apron
eying her succulent castrated cock capon
oh to be back in Nan's old kitchen

On Eriskay

On Eriskay I watch the tide rise
and pull in the olive gold tangle
to hang and cling upon the rocks to harvest

My friend Pony stares at me
stares at the sea
a wild mane parted by a drawn in quarter gale

Fires burn in the crofters cottage
waiting for the dawn
to guide the drove
across yon rippled beach
thru' deep pooling puddles of receding sea
North Uist to Vallay
for winter pasture

And on Eriskay I watch the tide rise again

Petrichor

Misty drizzle shower

Petals fall to ground

Lime's glossy sticky leaves

After the storm

Silence calms the dawn

Warmth of summer rain

Piddle in The Jar

I just didn'ae wan to go to Southport
my new itchy light brown tartan keks
even with half a can of talc
were abrasive as hell

Much happier would I have been flying
my new orange kite on the green
or shimmying up the telegraph pole ... the splinters
were quite ok
better still getting a shoulder up
the two tone indigo lamp post
for a good dangle and swing

As we passed Goodison Park
I back swallowed a toffee
that lodged on the epiglottis
causing distress and my pallor
to turn Everton blue whilst choking to death
I knew this day out was not going to end well

Still ... turned and hung upside down
suspended and back pummelled like a beaten carpet
I finally ejected the barley sugar projectile
whilst the passerby thought I was being duffed up for
supporting LFC

I just wished I was in our den
behind the greenhouse with Erica
playing swapsies
and you'd show me yours if I showed you mine

Somehow ... it was always the same
that ... parking in Southport would be bad ... very bad
always never a free place on the sea front
even the promise of chips mixed with gritty sand
blown in off the dunes was little compensation

I just wished I was back home
playing in goal against Johnny Dee's team
and losing 10 - 0 would be better
than what happened next

It was that last bottle of Corona cream soda

... after the chips that did it

it was only a forty minute drive home

... no need to stop

but that was a lotta pop

and it was looking like the emergency jam jar

in the glove box

I just knew this was going to end in disgrace

after expelling almost a full jar

in a pale Irn Bruish shade

the twisted lid on the jar wouldn't quite fit

“never mind chuck it out of the window”

liquid launched into the wind I did

only Nan wasn't quick enough to wind up her glass

aperture

and that breeze in Scottie Road caught my

airborne pee flow

like a high Mersey tide sweeping back in

to wash and whack her full in the face

I just wished I was doing something else
right then ... anything else but that
evening drive back from Southport
clutching my empty piddle jar

Rebel in The Classroom

We had one lesson in religion a week with Mr. Gobowen
“El Gobbo”
who still wore his black drapey gown

His choice of instrument
for any dissent
a slightly warped well used ruler
because a cane looked like his walking stick
and he was old

This weeks task was to spend twenty minutes
with our dog eared unruly unruled notebooks
drawing God

HB pencils shushing and shading
and occasionally ...
dropping onto the parquet floor
rolling away to Gobbo’s stern looks

One by one we had to stand and explain our creations
there were a few Charlton Heston portraits
but wasn't he Moses!?

faces in the clouds (I had thought about that one)
angels and harps and heavenly bodies

Then it was my turn
remembering past beaten knuckles and palms
a completely blank page
I displayed

with Gobbo flexing his ruler for the ready

*"but sir ... no-one has seen our God
... he's invisible ... isn't he"*

and while the class hummed approval
Gobbo flustered hot and bothered was stuck for words
and his ruler used for rebels was slammed back in his
drawer

Haiku No 8

Above the valley

The full moon rises swiftly

Releasing its light

Remembrance

I sit on a quiet bench almost hidden
in a tiny city centre park
thinking about those
who are setting out on their journeys
condemned even without their knowledge
by those who condemn ...
camouflaged by cowardly acts

Where I sit

I can just hear the rumbling hum of the underground
an enclosed space
exploding smoky shrapnel
forcefully tearing and pulling flesh from broken bodies
a final agony in the darkness

It's time to get going
and let someone else rest awhile
bringing their lunch hour picnic
escaping a stressful morning in the office or shopping

the new city wildflower garden is in full bloom
whispering ... bobbing in the breeze filtering up from
the Mersey

Revelation

Amid the rocks and ruins
and tumbled Tudor beams
the remains today stand vacant
perched cliff top by the sea

Collapsing arching cloisters
ancient aisles of stones
from eroding grassless ground
revealing ragged saintly bones

Setting of The Sun

Sometimes at the setting of the sun
I am reminded of a far off time of bombs and guns
and the fallen
across the water
in a wilder greener land

Sherbet Lemons

Your old mum was always telling me true stories from her past or things that she'd come across:

*"I always remember a little girl but not her name
quiet she was in our school
shared her sherbet lemons*

*with little Billy who was always being bullied in the
playground"*

*"Did you hear about that teenage girl in Tesco's
we always thought she were a tearaway
but last week she helped an old aged pensioner
after her bag was snatched in the car park
and made sure she got home safely"*

*"Did you read in the Echo about that young woman
who runs the local food bank and soup kitchen
collecting goods from all over the city
out in all weather, windswept and worn"*

*"Did you catch the news on the telly last night
that brave lady who survived that terrible train accident
only to crawl back inside through the choking smoke
to rescue a child from the blazing carriage"*

I remember well
that afternoon at Seaview Lodge Nursing Home
when I arrived just a few minutes after your mum Pat
passed away
the warden said:
*"Strange thing lad
a good looking lass
came to visit your auntie this afternoon
and was holding her hand at the end
I thought that was nice but do you know
... I never seen her before"*

On the way out I glanced at the visitors book in the sunny glass porch
and gently flicking aside a sherbet lemon wrapper revealed a blue smudgy squiggle that looked like a Mary

Sherbert Lemons was commissioned by Liverpool's Metropolitan Cathedral for filming and broadcast as part of a series of Lenten reflections in 2021.

Siege of Ladybrand

There was a green hill far away
that didn't have a name
defended by just six score men
within a failing old stockade

Surrounded by three thousand Boars
the Orange State and Transvaal war
canon's fire pounding down
machine guns mowing good men down

Five days to wait for help to come
the garrison held hanging on
defying odds the Worcesters won
the Siege of Ladybrand

Silence Sees The Dawn

No sound is needed

for the forest to grow

flowers to bloom

clouds to roam

The hush of the heavens and silver stars echo silence

in silence we breathe and refresh the soul

in silence is peace

Haiku No 9

Water enters creek

White waves jettison on sand

Spent tide retreating

Singing Kite Flyers of Kelantan

At daybreak a shimmering hazy light as gauze
filters through the casuarina trees
carrying a warm sea breeze
floating in off the South China Sea

The rice harvest is now gathered and done
and the kites are readied to be flown

The crescent moon butterflies launched
swiftly ascend in the late afternoon draft
zig zagging across the pale blue sky
to whistle ... hover and sing
an overture for the twilight fireflies darting at the
waters edge
the kites hypnotic hum making old men young again

Skimming Stones off Barricane Beach

It's mid winter
and a strange grey calm
has descended on the cove
the steel blue sea
once restless has subsided
to gentle even ripples

The old man of the sea
is resting on a flat rock
with his rusty wiry terrier
watching and waiting to tell me a tale or two

*"I thought we were being invaded
in 1944
at dawn
the roar of the waves washing in teams and tanks
gunfire and smoke
from the bay next door
all because we looked a bit like Omaha "*

The shells on the beach today are cowries
ocean spirits washed ashore by the gulf steam
from far away mystical depths of the Indies

The old man of the sea
in deep thought sheds a tiny crystal tear
or maybe its the slightly icy breeze
that has fallen upon us
making his pet shiver among the shale

Out of his waxed jacket pocket
he takes a brass cartridge found here
all those years ago beneath these sands of time
and passes it to me as an act of immortality
keep it polished is his only request
before challenging me to a round of
skimming stones off Barricane Beach
a battle he knows he will win

Statues

Beatles at the Pier Head

look for the hidden bits they're easy to miss ... many do

Paul clutching Linda's camera

George's belt etched in Sanskrit

Ringo's heel has a number eight ... his birthplace L8 ...

you'll be down on your knees to find that one ... I mean
the eight

John is holding two acorns to plant for peace

Somebody once made four hats for our four boys

some said they was a bit daft ... the hats

pennies for Paul

sun for George

yellow sub for Ringo

red megaphone hollering help for John

but they was ok ... the hats ...

till they blew away in a gale

Our Cilla in Mathew Street
outside the Cavern
outside the cloakroom
where she asked the customers to step inside
don't miss those hits
look close
she's wearing them

Billy Fury at the Albert Dock
beside the sea ... beside the old tug boat wharf
where our lad were a deck hand
on those towing boats
at eventide from behind
he's yo yo ing the sun down
from this ... his wondrous place

Catching a train ... or not then catch Doddy
waving you off ... or not with that tickle stick
at Lime Street
even if the day is a little grey
bringing a little sunshine and happiness into lives

Stanley Street ... you will have to wonder off
the main lanes to find her sitting lonely on a bench
Eleanor Rigby with her shopping bag taking a rest
a tiny sparrow looking for a scrap of food keeps her
company
with one eye on her milk bottle

Then back to the top of or is the bottom of Mathew Street
again!

John on his own quietly on the corner if there's no busker
but look up to see the four lads who shook the world
just imagine

Sweaty Balls

My sporting moments weren't good
although scoring two goals at Birkett Juniors
in a 3-2 win was a taste of success
but nobody could hold a candle to Bobby Clare and
Johnny Dee

Playing in goal for 5 a side 'cos I was the only one brave
enough
to dive
and slide
on ash veldt
but in the annual sports day relay
first place
and a blue certificate presented at morning assembly
probably ranks highly

Always last in line at rounders and wacking the ball
high over the trees into the Mersey made me hero for an
afternoon at Vaughn Road Juniors

A double decker corporation bus hired each week
to the Guinea Gap Baths in Seacombe
sharing double decked changing booths
boys above the girls
full of cock and bull or ball tales
and if you weren't sharing a cubicle with Kevin you
was safe from his bell ringing exercises
and his unusual curiosity for those of us who were
snipped at the tip

“Olly” always won our “ollies” each playtime
as he always used his glass eye as a marble
and nobody wanted to win that
as the whistle sounded break ended
shiny ball cleaned with a bit of quick spit
popped back into the gaping hole from whence it came

A fractured spine
in nineteen sixty nine
at Quarry Mount Middle
that bloody vaulting horse and hard rubber mat
put pay to most exertion on the field and gym
a grand excuse for the rest of school years
to avoid contact with smelly clammy boys bodies in the
sports hall

Half a day each week
the sport pacifist exemptions from P.E. were forced into
social work ... social care
shopping for the elderly and tending to their gardens
half the time they weren't in so we bunked off home
half the time they plied us with whiskey and buns
so all in all much better fun
than cross country and muddy rugby
with even bigger balls

Badminton ... too exerting and all those high nets
table tennis ... now I found my sport
at the local youth club
but my advice would be
when you are championship material
never ... ever volunteer to go ping ponging with the
girls

Jane pinned me 19 - 1 down
as a fair crowd gathered round
hoping to delight in my defeat
to turnaround as the comeback kid
I did
twenty straight points
with my drenched swinging rubber bat
and and those slippery sweaty balls

Tales From The Riverbank

A stretched midsummer day in Cambridge
resting under the shady waterside aspen trees
when a yell and shout
all about
a man in distress
a man in shantung and banded boater
punting his girl
hung just too long onto his pole
made a dashing splash into and under
the cooling waters of the Cam

Thrashing and lashing
making azure waves in the rivers flow
my brother kicks off his canvas espadrilles
and dives in bravely ... but then he knows these waters
opposite his Gonville and Caius

While he is courageously rescuing the suited suitor
surrounded by blue flashing lights and blankets
I gently coax in his shivering and shocked Guinevere
with tussled hazel tresses
and gossamer white frock
backlit through the wispy willows
whom I gallantly land
grasping finger tips to hands
she delicately and shakily faints into my arms

The Arrow of Time

Next door to the clock repairer
inside the old antique shop
the old man sleeps in the window
no one has ever woken him from slumber

Haiku No 10

Petals are open

The garden is now perfumed

How sweet is the scent

The Day I Met up with Dee Dee Ramone

That late autumn morning
when we met on an Essex village green
a private publicity session away from the crazy crowds
that you were used to here
... clean ... to help or put right
those fallen to the fruits of poppy fields

Your slight suspicion of gain and others motives
was put to rest when I said

*"I was there man at your Cavern gig Liverpool in 77
that was the best show ever that year"*

emotively triggering the memory you embraced me
bass hands clasped tightly
not wanting to let go
as we held that memory and the smell of leather
just for that moment
we shared a joint passion
for a lost time ... a past time
when you and I were young

Sadly you would succumb just once more
to opium ... to the high trails above
and leave this world in Hollywood
to rest in the shade of trees
lying beside other legends
lipstick on the black marble and a fans red rose

Sometimes
from time to time
when I saunter down Mathew Street
or stumble across a quiet village green
I can still hear the echos of Rockaway Beach

The Man Who Traded Whisky For A Toke

Please please pass the pipe
I'll trade you whisky for a toke
as starlight falls to earth
the band strikes up a note

Gentle warm and west breeze
over the hills and far away
through the sweet resin haze
the songs remain the same

Around our campfire sitting
Cheyenne lighting up his smoke
please please pass the pipe
and share your totem toke

Peace, love, rock and roll
drift away and float
thru the night on to dawn
I traded whisky for a toke

The Most Respected and Greatest British Public Figure of all Time According to Marc Price

Really this was all Ratty Rathbury's fault

our master of R.E.

well master of one ... himself really

Due to a general lack of interest

in his one weekly period of forty minutes

it was decided unilaterally to hold a debate

"Who was or is the greatest British public figure of all time"

okay the 20th Century would suffice as our knowledge
and enthusiasm for history matched that of R.E.

David Glory ... backed by his barathea brigade

nominated Winston Churchill ... a dead cert to win

fully approved by Ratty his number one fan

After no-one else volunteered to do
or name any other candidate
Marc Price clutching his weekly edition of "Disc"
belted out "*Marc Bolan ... sir*"
to the dismay and disdain of Ratty Rathbury
"*you rabble go away and debate's in one weeks time*"

Friday afternoon thus came around
thirty students gathering ... listening to
the impassioned speech about Winnie
how the war was won
how we wouldn't be here now if it wasn't for ... etc etc
Ratty was most pleased
cheatingly allowing extra time for this plea

After the great applause and hurrah's
mainly from them barathea boys
Marc Price clenching tightly
this weeks new copy of "Disc"
unfolded its large free double page colour poster of
one half of T.Rex sitting in that wildflower meadow

caressing his Les Paul ... the orange one
cool !

then presenting without a word
hitting the large white clunky switch
on my borrowed Hitachi cassette player

“Ride a White Swan” emanated from the front
of Ratty’s desk

brilliant ... nobody could or would complain
it was only two minutes long

Ratty grudgingly gave thanks
for this unconventional performance of a debate
then opened the floor to vote

saying in thwart

I thought
that he was clearly voting for Churchill
adding his to 14 other raised appendages
he was hoping for miscalculated abstentions
but Mr Bolan achieved 15

Ratty was reluctantly about to return a tie
but had seemed to forgotten or ignored my waving
hand
alone but albeit held high sitting on the raised
mezzanine

Glaring red faced at me he shouted
“right laddie you better have thought long and hard and
sensibly ...
this will decide it all ... tell us who”
to which I blurted out “*Telegram Sam sir*”

And so it came to pass that Marc Bolan
is and or was
the greatest most respected British public figure ... ever
according to Marc Price and just maybe my raised hand
in the gallery

Haiku No 11

Where the swings where

Wildflowers blossom and flourish

Colouring summer

The Night Elvis Played Our Town

The real Elvis is coming to the Grand Hotel next week
a secret stopover gig
just like when the Beatles played our Tivoli by the tower
its only a rumour ... a buzz and appears it may be true
as he is due
to pass thru

Friday night and all the guys and girls in white capes
and gold chains
are flapping and rattling and sweating
in the hot Mersey wind
waiting in line

Its crammed inside and the ultra violet lights
make those flares, cloaks and gruns
glow like an atomic explosion

The noise and screams subside as someone important
comes on stage to announce

*“He’s here, he’s arrived, he’s in the building and live on stage
right now”*

the spotlight bounces a beam of the acoustic jumbo
and wham ... the opening strums of
“Watching the Detectives”

The Shadiest Lane in Lucca

I tend to avoid the white glarey squares
in Lucca's merciless midday sun
discovering the shadiest ways always run north to
south
cobblestones worn and smooth
where eastern walls are often damp and cool
with the faint scented aura of earth and oak moss

Still ... a little cafe coffee shop does just fine
on a quiet corner and a breath of breeze
in Piazza San Frediano
or Baluardo San Colombano
in its shadow of garden trees
off the Via Della Rosa ...
a saintly place to rest awhile for something light

I struggle with siestas
thinking I'll always miss the best of the afternoon
but generally by 3.00pm succumb
as shutters roll down
and sleepy yellow cellophane sheets
are placed in haphazard fashion
over old goods in the windows

Later at dusk I spy a mature gentleman
in his glossy blue silk suit
heading to another shady place
navigating narrow lanes
exclusive and elusive
looking for the Coquelicot light in a passage way

The Squeezy Bottle that Landed on The Moon

The summer of 69

a long hot season of rockets

it was all Lizzy Broadbent's idea

best teacher we had at Birkett's

Liverpool was running an Apollo competition

and the best stuff would go on show to the public

everyone got stuck in with the wet gooey newsprint

papermache

balloons and planets

or egg cartons for grey craters

I wanted monsters and flying saucers and a Fireball XL5

but our Miss Broadbent who was really a Mrs

put in her stiletto's and dashed my early ideas

The magic moment came in our scullery

standing solitary on the avocado green window sill tiles

a perfect specimen ... in black, white, yellow and red

the ones that's kind to hands and rich and thick to
lighten the load ... our sqezy bottle spelt with one "e"

Stanley knife plus checkered sticky tape
bit of Gloy and Kellogg's cardboard fins and a cone
piloted by Matt Silver ... no that's the paint
if Miss Broadbent was impressed she wasn't giving
much away

The planet crammed round the telly
trying to watch the suspicious black and white landing
with a lot of tin foil flapping and tripody things
still ... we had a school outing later that week
to Liverpool Museums Outer Space display

Lights down low ... the colour of twilight
in the centre of the gallery a glass dome spotlit
my squeezy bottle standing erect on the moon
better than that rickety contraption
a quarter of a million miles away

This Mythical Land of Legends

As early evening came upon us slowly
and the orange sun made the city golden
we set off on a journey

From a station beneath the stars we set forth
as the fingers on the clock completed a full circle and
then just a little more
to a priory town we travelled
heading for a hamlet we set sail

The castle on the cliffs was drowned by the night
we slept as we rode upon mythical white horses
galloping towards the awakening dawn

At last we saw a new coast
soon shall we be landed in this foreign port
and from floating through the dark night hours
continue to glide on wheels of steel

Deep into the heart of this new continent
following a river .. so long .. so deep .. so blue
to the centre of the world
surrounded by seven mountains
protected by medieval dragons
whose ferocity had been quelled by ages past

A window revealed a spread of enchanted valley
where grapes on the vine grow in a thousand rows
and when the sun went down
we watched the tiny lights in the distance
flicker and fade into the moonlight

On quiet days we would walk amid pine forests
pierced with silken rays of light
and as the mists came upon us the world swirled
in clouds of mercury silvered rain

To the cities adventure of bridges and spires
mastered to perfection over centuries gone by
a breeze whispers through our locks and curls
and jet black hair
and a golden barge bathes stealthy and the creatures
gather and stare and chirp

This land conquered by love as dreamers love
water that flows .. twisting .. sparkling as diamonds
those last embers of the twilight sundown rubies
like the jewels you shall wear on your finger forever

This Mythical Land of Legends was a lost poem from 1979/80 recently rediscovered in a very old box of envelopes and was published in the 2021 autobiography "I Saw Her Standing There"

Twin Sisters

At Meadowside number nine
behind our fence and vines
throughout the 1960s
our neighbours were rarities
twin sisters
twin spinsters
Agnes fat and scary
Ethel thin and wary

Both past teachers retired
in their garden united
lovely roses with prizes
immaculate and tidy
but woe betide if my ball in their realm resided

Their bulldog Winnie
white and honey
wrinkled and ugly
face pushed through the garden gate
walking by I really used to hate
slobbery face thrust and howl
or a grumpy angry growl
enough to loosen my nervous bowel

Still ... one day Aggie and Ethel
invited us round (I thought to tell me off politely)
about putting my balls in their flowerbeds
but no ... instead
best china tea cups with cakes, buns and scones

When they disappeared into the scullery
I inquisitively spied a trinkety thing
catching the bright sun's rays
and was drawn to a small silver framed faded
photograph
on display in their parlour

I guiltily grabbed the glinting gilt edge
and was stealing a look
when the twins returned
and I knocked it over
trying to manoeuvre it back on the mantelpiece

Skinny Ethel asked me to retrieve it
and bring it to her
she started to cry
and this was all my fault ... again!
Agnes speaking softly explained ...
that was Raymond, Ethel's betrothed
taken a couple of days before he set sail
in 1912 on the Titanic

I then noticed the bottom left hand corner of the frame
was rusty
from fifty five years of salty tear drops
and I placed the fiancé among our fancies on the table

I promised them

there and then ... to keep my balls under control

they were not so scary after all

and all that Winnie needed was a good pat

Vanished

From 1895 to 1915 Nancy my Nan's mum had four
sisters and four brothers
to swell, swill and sweep the mills of cotton town

In truth I only knew Harry who was really a Henry
but he was the closest ... chubbiest and liked a corona
... cream soda

Harry rocked Rommel at Al Alamein
racing them desert tanks
in sweltering blistering Egyptian heat
the intrepid bravery of one flurry earned him the Silver
Oak Leaf
a commendation from the King
till life returned to normal switching from tanks
to buses hurtling round Preston
with his clippie hanging on to the rails for dear life
between the ping pings of the string bell

Lawrence was lost in the Great War
a weak wispy cripple without warrant or need
sent to fight for a different Kings Shilling
the pain putting Nancy into an early grave

Annie what a rebel ...

what a girl
after giving birth to an illicit affair

left behind the baby ... my sort of uncle George
and skimming down the drainpipe
disappeared into the dark night
never to be seen again ... ever!

Nan and Harry searched in vain for years between the
wars

Harry was convinced to his dying day

“Our Annie were murdered by her unknown lover”
and if they ever drained Preston Dock
“She’d be there silted away”
among the barnacles

my best guess
or hope
is that she sailed away from Liverpool
to the Argentine or Montevideo or took a room
just behind the boardwalk on Coney Island

Waterfront at Liverpool Part II

The neap tide rises
beneath a new moon
waiting the days last ferry
with late commuters
returning to Woodside

Across the waterfront Canning Dock
the sounds of the city
facing the deep obsidian water
for an instant
call me
to their heart
as the lights across the river
shimmer silently
on waves of dreams

When Lybro Ruled The World

On Lybro Way today
you'll find a city bungalow or two
and town houses popping up as new

For on them lanes and rows
stood the factory
that turned Liverpool blue
where Lybro reined before Levi's grew

Industrial garments ... clothes for the tropics
overalls and denim with stud rivet pockets

Staff in the fifties and sixties
taking a break or a lunchtime pint or two
at the Bears Paw in refrain
across the road from All Saints
and then all at once again
fab fame came

Nordi John ... black amber and pale sunlight
contrasting cuffs

Ringo slims ... jean scene and mean
in ice blue mega 4" turn up buffs
flamenco George splayed and tapered
pampas Paul snappy tooth check sharp as a razor
all when Lybro ruled the world

Today all that remains
on these new streets with the same old names
are the memories of those
who worked and played
and drank at Cains
Mike and his overweight Frenchie Mo
walking round the block in a figure of eight
twice a day

Norma nearly ninety
keeping her patch tidy
shunting out her purple wheelie bin fortnightly
every other Wednesday

Wild Hearts and Tempests

Teenagers pelted with stones
teenagers on patrol
distant yet so close to home
to die in a doorway all alone
all amid the terrible beauty
strikingly drawn on walls
and shown to be
martyrs of wild hearts and tempests

You Sure You're Eighteen

Do you remember your first time ...

when you went to the movies

Our next door neighbour was a lonely old man

Uncle Sam

he was a Bond fan

everyone who was old and knew our mum and dad
was called uncle

took me to see Dr. No

and that one about Russian love

at the Essoldo Birkenhead

it wouldn't be allowed today

some old fella taking a kiddy to the flix

with the promise of crisps

and an interval choc ice

cold and nice

he was just sad 'cos he had just lost his wife

A day trip to Morecambe it just poured and poured
so to the proms picture palace Arcadia we explored
Nan's excuse to see that Sound of Music one more time!

The ABC Liscard was screening "Barbarella"
a swift enquiry to the ticket seller
"You're about 8 years too young laddie"
studying the film poster in the foyer

I made a mental note to fall in love with Jane Fonda
and for my love of films I must learn to lie about my age
... in the future

Seeing Double A's at the ABC
introduced in 1970 (I think)
was easy for our gang "Smidge" "Drako" and "Stonk"
apart from "Tixie"
who looked like a sparrow on lolly ice sticks
still we got our value for a threepenny bit
smuggling him into see spies in "The Mackintosh Man"
Paul Newman and Dominique Sanda

“You sure you’re eighteen”

“Yes”

once you’d cracked that first underage “X”
casually looking cool ... confident swagger
well 15 was nearly 18

“Enter the Dragon”

fibs became second nature

re-runs of “Easy Rider”

super new releases of “Dirty Harry”

and French Connections

or “Emmanuelle” as a wet afternoon matinee

Granny stopped going to the Gaumont

when it became a Unit 4 multiplex

“*Better off watching my cowboy films in my front parlour at home*” she would say

but with those having a desire and screen appetite

four times a week was just about right

when support films could be a surprise delight

or just too long but not the case with “Straw Dogs”

I made another mental note
to fall in love with Susan George

At 15 you can pass for 18 with a touch of fluff above
ones lips

then there was my special arrangement with Trish on
the tills

a dead ringer for a young Buffy Sainte Marie
“*You sure you’re eighteen*”

“*Yes*”

then you can buy half a pint of Heineken
and give me one ... later ... after the show
I wasn’t quite sure who was exploiting who
but the system worked

and going to the pictures seemed a lot more exciting
I think she got just as much enjoyment
of letting me come in
that was Trish on the tills

Between photo shoots

I had nothing to do

what else is there to do on a damp afternoon

but "Alien" at the Odeon next door to the Empire

there was just me and this girl sitting on her own in the

far corner

within minutes it was scary ... in space no one can hear

you scream

and to my surprise

she dashed through all those empty rows

to sit next to me

to cling on to me

cinemas are strange places for meeting strangers

and doing strange things in the dark

on a very rainy afternoon

and I really was eighteen

There are two basic things ... I learned
never drink two pints of Old Peculiar just before seeing
“The Deer Hunter”
at the Futurist in Lime Street and sit in the centre
you will have to clamber over sober patrons well before
the interval
it was 185 minutes long
oh ... and sitting on the front row at the ABC
Shaftesbury Avenue
“Apocalypse Now” was better than any other three
hour trip I had ever been on
dizzy for days after ... just dizzy ... so maybe that's
three things then!

Hanging out in Leicester Square on a stuffy spring
evening
crowds gathering punks and skins awaiting The Clash
“Rude Boy” world premiering at the Prince Charles
taking refuge up a dark alley a lone rear fire door
propped open

to let in some fresh air
just a peek maybe and a corridor
leading to the bogs for a leak
man ... I was in for free ... lucky boy
confidently cool entering the dense packed smoky
melee
squeezing into a back corner seat
ready for a revolution rock
police and thieves and London burning ... we all did in
that auditorium of heat
the night we all fought the law

Just for a while I lived a few minutes walk from the Art
Deco Rio
in Hackney's Kingsland Road
well known
for all nighters and euro art screenings
a good bit of Bertolucci "Novo Cento" Parts I & II
the midnight interval (it was five hours long that film)

our lovely box office girl had the kettle on for instant
with baked trays of cakes ... you know the homemade
ones wink and a nudge
and a pound slipped into a plastic cup
cannabis never tasted so good

Today its the Silver Screen Club for those of a certain
age

Liverpool One

Odeon

BOGOF admissions ... free Costa and bottomless
bickie's

Whilst queuing for "Downton" behind a lad in front
seeking something more mature
after all them years I heard those words

"You sure you're eighteen"

"Yes"

then standing at the payment booth
with red and purple streaked long grey hair
under the ceiling spotlight

a dead ringer for an ageing Buffy Sainte Marie
pinned to her breast pocket a name badge bright silver
on black
sparkly reflecting a “Trish”
as I resisted the temptation
to order half a pint of Heineken
and see her for something special after the show

Zephyrs

Going forth are the 83rd and 20th
rolling out the wires from the sodden soggy drum
the sulphuric fog hangs over barren wastelands
undulating mud and mush of Polygon Wood
and distant sound of guns
the cruel heart of the Passchendaele slaughter

Arriving by train at Ypres
we felt forlorn over those fallen
and lost souls
bleach white tombstones
like bones left in the sun
dazzle us in their descent of rows

Sappers built tracks and laid traps
to blast and kill the forward foe
to clear mine paths and lay down some more death
as both sides caught
tangled and torn targets

on barbed wire gallowed poles
hanging over shell ... hell holes
a hiding place safe no more
the fear frozen face of the corpse
cradled in the crater at Cambrai
still clutching the impaled broken bayonet blade
exposed and twisted
blood drained from the gaping open chest

So many names so many graves
as the town hall clock chimes three
in remembrance of another sweeter place
another country
and hallowed green pleasant meadows by the Cam

One final push to Mons
but the night ignites to a thunderflash and crash
the corral was hit
and its a dirty job to clear and bury the equine dead
in an old trench to kill the stench of death
haunted drawn fizzogs face the dawn

the finality of war is in sight just one more month ...
maybe

there sitting in the branches of the sole charcoaled oak
the devil cackles surveying his odorous hades domain
pointing with sharp dark wizened finger claws
claiming this as his land
where once a lush green forest stood
abandoned to a burnt landscape of dirt, disease, smoke
and drained men

A child runs up to us with a tin box
of his treasures and bits found
in a recent fallowed furrowed field
“spent detonators” he tells us
as he allows me to make a rummage
brass shrapnel ... melted ... deformed ... abstract
a khaki pocket of sorts
holding what looks like a part of fossilised leather glove
it was a charred phalanx ... a human relic of a trigger
finger

It's mid summer and the sun is still high above the
glistening clouds
and the buglers sound the Last Post from within the
Menin Gate
eerily resonating off the names resurrected each day to
eternal remembrance
in foreign fields
the men who fought and fell for peace

The dusk tide zephyrs
cause me to stir and turn
into the sunsetting afterglow
and facing the remains of the day
take the next departing train away

Zig Zag Road

I thought I could live in Zig Zag Road
I thought I might fall in love
with the girl on the bus
then find a flat off Zig Zag Road

But then there was Cherry
my muse and model always ready
to share her sweet white wine
it was nineteen seventy nine
to make bohemian love
in her bohemian boudoir
just around the corner
from Zig Zag Road

I still saw Julie on the bus
most days
and we got close
very close
for a while anyways

These days
I take the occasional walk
down Zig Zag Road
with memories
of being in love

Epilogue

*Have you ever had one of those days
When nothing goes the way you planned it?
Fate takes you down a different road
When you look in the mirror
It's another face that looks out at you
You forget everything you've been told
I frighten myself when I see what's inside of me
The parallel lives leave me mystified
Did I ask the right questions?
Did I get the right the right answers?
Am I living the right life inside?
Like living out part of a dream
When you never really know for certain
What is real and what is not
And no matter how much you believe
That the day you end is the day you started
You can never be sure of what you've got*

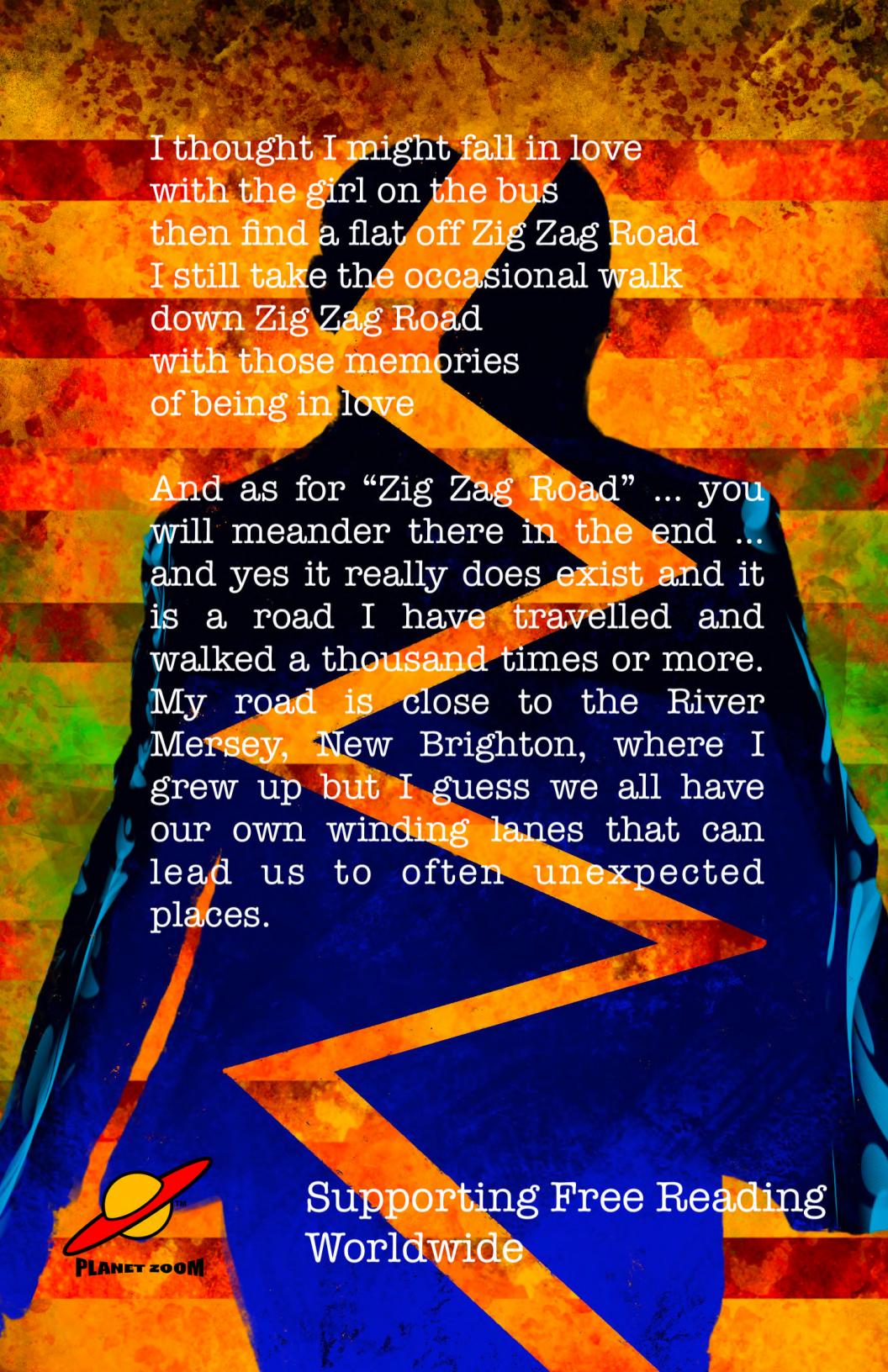
(Judie Tzuke: "Parallel Lives")

About The Cover Design

Jan Kalinski's studio is in Kent's leafy lanes. In 1992 Jan was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS) resulting in permanent numbness of his fingers. He can no longer hold a fine pencil or write his own name but will not let go of a paintbrush.

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I thought I might fall in love
with the girl on the bus
then find a flat off Zig Zag Road
I still take the occasional walk
down Zig Zag Road
with those memories
of being in love

And as for “Zig Zag Road” ... you will meander there in the end ... and yes it really does exist and it is a road I have travelled and walked a thousand times or more. My road is close to the River Mersey, New Brighton, where I grew up but I guess we all have our own winding lanes that can lead us to often unexpected places.

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